

A STUDY OF PREACHING FOR RESPONSE
IN THE CONTEXT OF SUNDAY MORNING WORSHIP
AT BETHEL BAPTIST CHURCH IN GETZVILLE, NEW YORK

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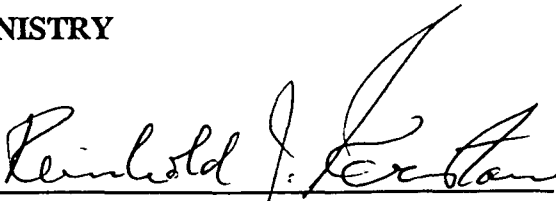
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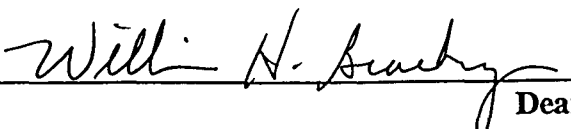
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Abstract: During a twelve-week test period the writer researched the problem of how to enhance the responsiveness of the worshiping congregation to God's presence in the preached word on Sunday mornings. A five-member support team in the local church assisted the writer in the development of four tools for measuring the congregation's responsiveness to God's presence in the preached word on Sunday mornings. The four measuring tools were: 1. Two Video Cameras, 2. A Response Form, 3. A Weekly Discussion Group, and 4. Personal Interviews. The development of these tools was aided by feedback from the congregation.

From the research the writer gleaned these five principles of preaching for response called, *Apples of Gold*: 1. Seeing God's Pictures, 2. The Anointing of God, 3. Touching Real Needs, 4. Listening to the Listeners, and 5. Focusing on God's Calling. It was observed that these *Apples of Gold* were enriched by three special relationships: 1. The Spirit of Generosity, 2. The Spirit of Expectation, and 3. The Transcendent Spirit of God.

The writer includes a 37-page, selected bibliography under four disciplines: 1. Contemporary Environment, 2. Worship Setting, 3. Preaching Focus, and 4. Hermeneutical Necessity including journal articles from both *Leadership* and *Preaching* plus a few videos.

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"Every good gift and every perfect giving is from above" (James 1:17). For life, health, and ability I thank God. I believe everything is a gift from God.

I thank my parents for all they gave me. I thank them for the attitude of taking responsibility for one's life and making the best of the resources available.

I thank Jake and Elsie Schlafmann for becoming my spiritual parents in the Lord. They introduced me to my savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. They encouraged me to dream the impossible, because through Christ, God makes all things possible.

I thank Bethel Baptist Church of Getzville, New York, for loving me enough to grant a continuing education allowance, to authorize my Doctor of Ministry studies with McMaster Divinity College, and to wholeheartedly support my thesis project. From the official boards to the unseen friend I received one gift of encouragement after another for which I am deeply grateful.

Two people deserve special mention: my wife, Jean, and my academic mentor, Dr. Reinhold Kerstan, whose support, from beginning to end, have been essential. The candidate's spouse is often the unnoticed servant who is nearly forgotten in the scheduled pressure of the urgent project. Dr. Kerstan has been my Gabriel keeping me in line with the requirements from on high and forever filling me with the hope that I would not only graduate, but also, learn something worth living.

David Eugene Ewing
Getzville, New York

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CHAPTER 1

THE PROBLEM AND ITS CONTEXT

Introduction

Before accepting God's call of service as the preaching pastor of Bethel Baptist Church in Getzville, New York, I planted a church in Kansas City, Missouri (1974-1981), and pastored a four-year-old church in Bismarck, North Dakota (1981-1988). In both settings people were responsive to God's presence through the preached word on Sunday mornings with a few individuals coming to the altar almost every Sunday. Then, as preaching pastor and worship leader of Bethel in Getzville, I praised God throughout my first four years for the responsiveness of the worshiping congregation on Sunday mornings. Individuals were personally accepting Christ as savior, being baptized, uniting with Bethel in membership, enjoying the fellowship, and growing in service. Corporately, Bethel responded to the challenge of victoriously overcoming a \$200,000 embezzlement and achieving a debt-free status while paying cash for a \$303,000 building project. During those same four years Bethel grew in attendance, added an early worship service, matured through the Navigator's 2.7 discipleship ministry, and expanded the staff by calling a youth pastor who began his ministry at Bethel in September 1993.

However, by the winter of 1994 I observed that the worshiping congregation

was less responsive to God's presence in the preached word on Sunday mornings. Although I will never know with confidence what caused this cooling of response, here are some possibilities. It may have been the changing cultural environment of our community. One of our neighboring churches, The Eastern Hills Wesleyan Church, virtually exploded from three dozen people to fourteen hundred in worship from 1987 through 1995. We suffered an overwhelming rush of unexpected deaths and out-of-state relocations of several leading families. On six different occasions I was absent for two weeks while attending classes at McMaster Divinity College in the first year of my Doctor of Ministry program. An expanded staff may have dulled our focus or produced confusion in the congregation. There was continual warring between several Bethel families. Regardless of what caused the cooling of response by the worshipping congregation, it needed attention.

A church survey could reveal some areas of concern that might be corrected quickly. My McMaster ministry base team and I recommended, and the Bethel deacons approved, a deployment of the McMaster Divinity College church survey that was required in my level-one field experience course. In February 1994, the congregation completed the survey during a Sunday morning service uncovering some items of concern in the worship area.

The tabulated responses revealed that 18% were dissatisfied with the sense of congregational community, 13% were dissatisfied with the music, 12% were dissatisfied with the challenge for response, and 6% were dissatisfied with the sense of God's presence in the preaching. The deacons dealt with the 18% dissatisfaction

concerning a sense of congregational community. Several months of research resulted in the February 12, 1995, adoption of our new vision theme *We will glorify God in all our relationships, with God, with other Christians, and with nonbelievers.* Talk and action concerning items of community like "friendship development" and "tabling" began almost immediately. The worship ministry team dealt with the 13% dissatisfaction concerning the music by making a few key adjustments which resulted in several vocal expressions of appreciation by former complainers.

The Problem

This left the two "preaching" concerns: the 12% dissatisfaction with the challenge for response and the 6% dissatisfaction with the sense of God's presence in the preaching which became the focus of my thesis project research. **The ministry problem that I researched is how to enhance the responsiveness of Bethel's worshipping congregation to God's presence in the preached Word on Sunday mornings.** This problem was not a philosophical abstraction required in partial fulfillment towards a Doctor of Ministry degree. This problem came out of the everyday issues of my ministry base.

For the first time in my twenty-two years in ministry I began to identify with Isaiah's situation of preaching to an unresponsive audience. "And he said to me, 'Go, and tell this people to keep on hearing, but not understand; to keep on seeing, but not perceive. Make the heart of this people dull, and their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart'" (Isaiah 6:9-10). Were the people's hearts dull, their ears heavy,

and their eyes shut because Isaiah's preaching was so poor or because they chose to be indifferent?

Although he disagrees, John Stott reports that some say preaching itself is a dead art form in our media age. Stott makes this claim in his book, *Between Two Worlds: The Art of Preaching in the Twentieth Century*:

The prophets of doom in today's Church are confidently predicting that the day of preaching is over. It is a dying art, they say, an outmoded form of communication, 'an echo from an abandoned past'. Not only have modern media superseded it, but it is incompatible with the modern mood. Consequently, the sermon no longer enjoys the honor which used to be accorded to it. In some churches the sermon is reduced to an apologetic five minutes; in others it has been replaced by either a 'dialogue' or a 'happening'. According to Dr. Howard Williams' verdict, 'the sermon is out.'¹

This opinion is reflected in Joel L. Swerdlow's article, "Information Revolution," in the October 1995 *National Geographic*:

In Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*---which was written in the early 1950s, just after televisions and computers first appeared---people relate most intimately with electronic screens and don't like to read. They are happy when firemen burn books. Cram people 'full of noncombustible data,' the fire captain explains. 'Chock them so full of *facts* they feel stuffed, but absolutely *brilliant* with information. Then they'll feel they're thinking, they'll get a sense of motion without moving.' Although no one can predict the full effect of the current information revolution, we can see changes in our daily lives. Look in any classroom. Today's teachers know they have to make lessons fast-moving and entertaining for children raised on television and computer games. Rick Wormeli, an award-winning middle-school teacher in Fairfax County, Virginia, tries to capture the attention of his students by sometimes dressing in yellow shorts, a cape, and red tights and calling himself 'Adverb Man.' Once, he

¹John R. W. Stott, *Between Two Worlds: The Art of Preaching in the Twentieth Century* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1982), 50.

appeared in scuba gear and drenched himself in water. 'I try to be as vivid as I can, combining style with substance,' he says.²

In the book, *Changing Lives through Preaching and Worship*, Kevin Miller defends the place and power of preaching as reflected in his own life:

As I look back over my Christian life, one fact juts up like a mountain crag: most of the moments when God has changed me deeply have come during worship. I remember hearing Stuart Briscoe preach a sermon almost fifteen years ago. He expounded the apostle Paul's words, 'Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!' In Stuart's careful treatment, those words from 1 Corinthians 9:16 hit me with force. I saw---suddenly, startlingly---that I, too, was a person under orders, an enlisted man. God had conscripted me for his assignments, and I could not selfishly determine my life's work. Since I have been irrevocably altered through preaching and worship, I love and believe in them and God's ability to work through them.³

I share Miller's belief about preaching for it is God's powerful call upon my life too. At the age of seven I attended conferences in Anderson, Indiana, with my mother, where I listened to preached sermons from morning till night and at the age of fifteen I invited the resurrected Christ into my life as savior and lord. The following year I was baptized in obedience to Christ's lordship and by the age of seventeen I knew Christ was calling me into the preaching ministry.

What I knew in my heart then was later expressed by Marshall Shelley, the executive editor of *Leadership: A Practical Journal for Church Leaders*. In Shelley's editorial column of the Spring 1992 issue in reference to witnessing two separate

²Joel L. Swerdlow, "Information Revolution," *National Geographic* 188 (Washington: October 1995), 5.

³Kevin A. Miller, "Introduction," Marshall Shelley, ed. *Changing Lives Through Preaching and Worship* (Nashville: Moorings, 1995), xi.

and different preaching experiences on the same day in New York City, one at West Point by Chaplain Richard Camp and the other in Central Park by Evangelist Billy Graham, Shelley had this to say:

As I walked away from that event in Central Park, I couldn't help but contrast the polished reverence I'd experienced in the morning with this gospel amid the chaos I'd seen in the afternoon. Two more different settings would be hard to imagine. Yet in each, there came a moment when it was time to pull together all that was happening, to connect the external setting with the interior of the soul, to give the public event meaning for private individuals. And at the climactic moment of each event, it was not music or drama or group therapy or video we wanted. The situation called for a word, the spoken word, the time-tested word, simply articulated by one person. In short, the common element was good preaching. I walked away convinced anew that the power of preaching is unsurpassed for applying God's truth to our deepest needs.⁴

I preach in the context of Bethel Baptist Church which has known God's touch through the preaching of his Word for one hundred years. Through the preaching of the pastors Bethel has grown in ways that are humanly measurable and in other ways that only God can measure. I share but a small portion from Bethel's *1995 Centennial Celebration Booklet*:

In January 1967 Reverend William Christensen began his ministry at Bethel with his wife, Joy. On Palm Sunday, March 19, 1967, ground breaking was held on the Dodge Road site. The cornerstone laying was held on October 8, 1967, and the first worship service in the new building took place on December 10, that year. With thankful hearts to God, a week of dedicatory events was observed March 3-10, 1968, and the first baptismal service celebrated in the new sanctuary was on September 15, 1968, with twenty-one believers baptized. After seventy-five years of service, Bethel celebrated the diamond jubilee with thanksgiving. Bethel extended a call to Pastor

⁴Marshall Shelley, "Editorial Page," *Leadership: A Practical Journal for Church Leaders XIII* (Carol Stream: Christianity Today, Inc., Spring 1992), 3.

David Ewing and his wife, Jean, for the senior pastor ministry which began on August 16, 1989. The next year a *Vision for Outreach* was begun by constructing a new addition at a total cost of \$303,000. To encourage the growth that was taking place, Bethel added an early worship service to the Sunday schedule in the spring of 1992. In December of that same year Bethel celebrated her debt-free status by the burning of the parsonage mortgage.⁵

Subproblems

A prerequisite to researching any of the subproblems was to enlist the congregation's partnership in the research. Without their blessing or permission I would not have had the right to observe them in worship nor to measure their response to God's presence in the preached word. This was a prerequisite.

My first subproblem was to develop a variety of tools for measuring the congregation's responsiveness to God's presence in the preached word on Sunday mornings with the intention of having at least three, and hopefully four, different kinds of measuring tools.

My second subproblem was to identify what the congregation considered to be valid evidence of God's presence in the preached word on Sunday mornings. I needed to know what they valued as evidence if I was to have any hope of initiating measurable response from them.

My third subproblem was how to make the congregation aware of the hindrance to response that physical and psychological noises might cause for the listeners during the preached word in the Sunday morning worship service.

⁵Betty Lou Kroecker, "A Brief History: Bethel Baptist Church of Getzville," *Centennial Celebration* (Getzville: Bethel Baptist Church, 1995), 7.

Definition of Terms

1. God's Presence: In this research *God's presence* means his spiritual presence. "God the Father is spirit, and those who worship him must worship him in spirit and truth" (John 4:21-24). Although God the Son took the form of human likeness in Jesus Christ and, in a select number of cases he appeared to Old Testament persons as the angel of the LORD (Genesis 18:1-33), God's presence is usually a spiritual presence which cannot be measured by the five human senses. Although God the Holy Spirit appeared as a dove at Jesus' baptism (Matthew 3:13-17) and as tongues of fire on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-3), in this research *God's presence* means his spiritual presence.

2. The Preached Word: For this study the *preached word* refers to the Sunday morning sermon delivered by Pastor Dave Ewing at Bethel Baptist Church. Jesus the Christ was God's living Word on earth for approximately thirty-three years, and the Bible is God's written Word available for his purposes. The preached word should come out of the written Word through the power of the Holy Spirit by means of a human speaker to bring the listener to a personal faith in Christ and a maturing into Christ's likeness.

3. The Worshiping Congregation: This refers to the human beings who are in attendance at the Sunday morning worship services of Bethel Baptist Church of Getzville, New York. Some are members of Bethel Baptist Church while others are not. The congregation consists of those who are physically present during the Sunday morning worship service at Bethel Baptist Church.

4. **The Altar:** This refers to the place where the worshiper comes to make a sacrifice to God. In Bethel Baptist Church this is the space in front of the congregation as close to the communion table and the pulpit as possible. The preacher usually speaks from the pulpit, or on the steps leading up to the pulpit, or near the communion table, or in the open space in front of the communion table. When the preacher invites the listener to "come to the altar" the idea is that a responsive person comes to this place designated by God where individuals are to offer some form of sacrifice or gift to God, such as a humble heart or a willingness to do whatever God is asking at the moment.

5. **Responsive Action:** This is any action taken by individuals of the worshiping congregation by their own volitional effort. The responsive action might be a feeling expressed on a written form or in a physical action like crying, laughing, applauding. The responsive action might be a commitment expressed by saying *amen*, walking to the altar, praying, telling the preacher or others about the sermon. The responsive action might be the willingness to volunteer for some service to God.

Assumptions

1. **God is:** My first assumption is that God is. This is an item of faith. "He who comes to God must *believe* that he is, and that he is a rewarder of those who diligently seek him" (Hebrews 11:6). This cannot be proven to the five senses of the human body nor to the human intellect. God's existence must be believed as an act of faith. Abraham believed, and God considered Abraham righteous.

2. God's Word is effective: My second assumption is that God's Word is effective. "So shall my Word be that goes forth from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty; it shall accomplish what I please, and prosper in the thing for which I send it" (Isaiah 55:11). "For the Word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart" (Hebrews 4:12). The preached word differs from God's Word in that it comes through a human being who may or may not be fully under God's control at the time of preaching. When the preacher is totally under God's control as an instrument in God's hand, then the preached word and God's Word are virtually synonymous. When the preacher is selfishly or sinfully out of God's control then the preached word is far from being God's Word and, in fact, may even be in opposition to God's Word.

3. God will be there: My third assumption is that God will be present in any worship service attended by at least two believers. "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, I am there in the midst of them" (Matthew 18:20). God is free and cannot be controlled or manipulated by humans. However, God has promised to be in our midst whenever we gather in his name for the purpose of worship. God inhabits us and our praises. A worship service should contain our praises before, after, and during the preaching of his Word. In such a setting of continual praise God is surely present as he has promised. Although Amos may have preached without a worship context, I prefer to preach in a worship context.

4. God will make his presence known: My fourth assumption is that God will make himself known to those who seek him. "Draw near to God and he will draw near to you" (James 4:8). "As for you, my son Solomon, know the God of your father, and serve him with a loyal heart and with a willing mind; for the LORD searches all hearts and understands all the intent of the thoughts. If you seek him, he will be found by you; but if you forsake him, he will cast you off forever" (1 Chronicles 28:9). "Hear me, Asa, and all Judah and Benjamin. The LORD is with you while you are with him. If you seek him, he will be found by you; but if you forsake him, he will forsake you" (2 Chronicles 15:2). In his book, *Word and Worship*, Scott G. Bauer maintains that God will reveal himself:

Pentecostals and charismatics expect God to 'show up' as they worship (Matt. 18:20). They seek his presence, not out of an unfounded hope but because he has promised in his Word to reveal himself as they worship (Ps. 22:3).⁶

5. God causes the listener to want to respond to his presence: My fifth assumption is that God causes those present in the worship service at Bethel to want to respond to his presence in the preached word during the Sunday morning worship services. Lloyd Elder supports this assumption in his book, *Blueprints*:

God calls his people to seek his face (2 Chronicles 7:14 If my people . . . seek my face . . .) The expression *the face of God* and related expressions are used a number of times in the Old Testament. Natural man left to his own devices would never seek *the face of God*. There is something in natural man that is averse to the living God. Even among his people, there is a fear of seeing *the face of*

⁶Scott G. Bauer, "Pentecostal and Charismatic Worship," James D. Berkley, ed. *Word & Worship: Leadership Handbooks of Practical Theology 1* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1992), 152.

God. Whenever people seek God, it is God's doing for only he can make it safe for a human being to *see his face* and live.⁷

6. The preacher has first responsibility: My sixth assumption is that the preacher bears the first and primary responsibility to understand and communicate in a language and style that the listeners can understand and appreciate. If a congregation cannot respond to God's presence in the preached word unless it is delivered with a Southern accent, then the preacher should learn to use a Southern accent.

Theory of Ministry

Helping seekers and believers respond to the preached Word of God is part of the mandate and ministry of Christ who said, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to everyone. Those who believe and are baptized will be saved; but those who do not believe will be condemned" (Mark 16:15-16). "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:19-20).

According to David M. Greenhaw the basic two-part expectation for preaching is to bring the seeker to faith in Christ and to edify or build up the believer. Greenhaw explains this at length in his article, "The Theology of Preaching," found in William H. Willimon's and Richard Lischer's book, *Concise Encyclopedia of Preaching*:

⁷Lloyd Elder, *Blueprints* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1984), 86.

Biblical texts play a prominent role as the principal source of Christian teaching and witness, and for much of the history of Christian preaching, up to the present day, preaching has instructed persons of faith on the Christian life and exhorted them to live accordingly. Preaching for sanctification aims at leading the Christian person and community toward a more fitting Christian life.

A decisive element of the Reformation was the assertion that the Word of God was efficacious for justification. With this assertion, the reformers elevated the status of preaching from an edifying discourse to a revealing word of grace. God, through the Holy Spirit, effects the salvation of Christ for the hearer of the Word. If the Word of God has such power, and if the Word of God can be uttered by human preachers, then the preacher's voice can be God's voice. The connection between the biblical texts and the preacher's words becomes a central focus in theologies of preaching.⁸

I believe the apostle Paul patterned the Reformation theology of preaching as his letters to the Romans and the Corinthians reveal: "Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength. Whoever calls upon the name of the LORD shall be saved. But how shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace" (Romans 10:13-17 and 1 Corinthians 1:18-25).

⁸David M. Greenhaw, "Theology of Preaching," William H. Willimon and Richard Lischer, eds. *Concise Encyclopedia of Preaching* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), 478.

In my theory of ministry I am not ignorant of the overwhelming nature of modern American life in the 1990s. I believe in God ordained preaching for every age, including this present age. I believe God can break through, can penetrate the numbing bombardment of today's electronic overload. Kenneth J. Gergen has the feel of *virtual reality* for the modern preacher's competition and the compassion required to care enough to preach Christ well for the sake of the everyday "self under siege" as seen in his book, *The Saturated Self: Dilemmas of Identity in Contemporary Life*:

The signs of global immersion are everywhere:

- A call to a Philadelphia lawyer is answered by a message recorded in three languages.
- A business acquaintance complains that his weekly tennis group expanded several years ago from four to six persons because everyone in the group was so often traveling. This year they are adding a seventh.
- I gave a short speech at a birthday party in Heidelberg last year. When I returned to the United States three days later, a friend on the opposite coast called to tell me about the guest's reactions to the talk. He had gotten the gossip two days earlier via electronic mail.
- A newsstand near me offers no less than twenty-five different magazines on computers, word processing, and desktop publishing.
- Over 20 million vacationers from around the globe now visit Disney World each year. (London's *Independent* predicts that by the year 2000 tourism will be the world's largest industry.)
- A *USA Today* headline, 'If you wonder where in the world to eat . . .', is followed by detailed descriptions of top restaurants in seven countries from Europe to Asia.
- Lest we forget, not one of these observations could have been made even ten years ago.⁹

⁹Kenneth J. Gergen, "The Self Under Siege," *The Saturated Self: Dilemmas of Identity in Contemporary Life* (U.S.A.: Basic Books, 1991), 1.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

Introduction

I discovered an immense and rapidly expanding literary knowledge available on the subject of preaching. My bibliography lists dozens of dissertation abstracts, hundreds of journal articles, and hundreds of books plus a few videos.

The Abstracts on Preaching

A dissertation abstract is a one page summary presenting the main points of the fuller thesis in skeletal form. I have "down loaded" the one thousand two hundred and thirty-four Mills Library dissertation abstracts on preaching, scanned them all, and perused the seventy-one listed in the bibliography. Their main contribution to my research was their repeated reference to lay involvement in sermon preparation and response through small groups or response forms. Had I not reviewed these abstracts, I would not have insisted on the discussion group of lay people. The discussion group enriched my understanding of how and why the listeners were responding to God's presence in my preaching during the twelve weeks of the project. This review of the abstracts also alerted me to the use of response forms and shaped the direction of my research.

Articles in the Periodic Journals

I explored the vast range and depth of insights on the subject of preaching that are available in two of today's leading journals for ministers: *Leadership: A Practical Journal for Church Leaders* and *Preaching: The Professional Journal for Preachers*. In the 1985 July-August inaugural issue of *Preaching*, Editor Michael Duduit included the following statement of purpose:

Preaching is an evangelical, interdenominational periodical dedicated to enriching the ministries of those who are called to proclaim the Word of God. Certain basic theological precepts form the editorial foundation of this publication. ●A commitment to the Lordship of Jesus Christ and to the inspiration and authority of Scripture as the Word of God. ●A commitment to evangelism, made necessary by man's sin and resulting separation from God, through bringing men and women into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ. The call to salvation is a call to repentance, faith, and commitment to Christ as Lord of one's life. ●A commitment to the centrality of the local church in the ongoing work of the Kingdom of God in history. ●A commitment to preaching as a revelatory act in which God, through His Holy Spirit and His revealed Word, declares His Word through human messengers. The purpose of preaching is to draw all persons to Christ and to aid in developing believers as functioning members of the Body of Christ. The final result of preaching should be changed lives and the furtherance of the Kingdom of God.¹⁰

The Fall 1995 issue of *Leadership* was devoted solely to biblical preaching. In this issue the editor, Marshall Shelley, answered some questions from the readers which helped me see its scope and value in my project of preaching for response:

Normally, a journalist asks the questions. Turnabout being fair play, I'd like to answer the questions you ask. ●How many people read *Leadership*? Currently, about 75,000 subscribers, which makes it the

¹⁰Michael Duduit, "Back Page Pulpit: Putting First Things First," *Preaching: The Professional Journal for Preachers* (Louisville: Preaching Resources, July-August 1985), 64.

largest paid-circulation periodical for clergy. ●Why do you have so much advertising? Advertising is limited to 21 percent of the total pages which is astonishingly low compared to most publications. ●Why aren't you more theological? Peter Drucker has identified three aspects of church ministry: the eternal; the cultural; and the tools. Most seminaries do a fine job covering the unchanging first category, the eternal verities, so there's not as much need for our journal to address it. And since the last two categories---the culture and tools for ministry---are constantly changing, they befit a periodical. ●How many people work on *Leadership*? Dozens. But in the sense most people ask this, about seven.¹¹

I mention twelve special issues of *Leadership* that were assigned to decisive topics related to my thesis project: Spring 1983, "The Sermon;" Fall 1985, "Persuasion;" Spring 1986, "Worship;" Fall 1988, "Spiritual Vitality;" Spring 1990, "The Preacher;" Summer 1991, "The Supernatural;" Spring 1992, "The Message;" Spring 1993, "Culture Wars;" Winter 1994, "Preaching;" Spring 1994, "Worship;" Fall 1994, "Intimacy with God;" Fall 1995, "Biblical Preaching." I culled 66 articles from *Leadership* written by a broad range of leading preachers and professionals in their respective fields including Rick McKinniss, Fred Craddock, Bill Hybels, Haddon Robinson, Stuart Briscoe, Calvin Miller, John Killinger, Warren Wiersbe, Dan Baty, William Willimon, Henri Nouwen, and Cinda Gorman.

Cinda Gorman's article, "Preaching for the Senses," in the Spring 1990 issue of *Leadership* alerted me to the need to help my listeners see, hear, and feel my sermons:

We preach to visual, auditory, and kinesthetic souls. I was first

¹¹Marshall Shelley, "Editorial Page: The Culture and Tools for Ministry Are Constantly Changing," *Leadership: A Practical Journal for Church Leaders* (Carol Stream: Christianity Today, Fall 1995), 3.

introduced to this idea, called neurolinguistic programming (NLP) in a D.Min. class at Fuller Seminary. The professor explained the various ways people learn, and each of us tried to figure out which learning channel was predominant for us. We discovered our primary representational system matched our behavior. Some people see what you mean; others need to hear or feel it.¹²

Ben Patterson helped me realize that I am one of the worshipping listeners too. In fact I am the individual who was interviewed for my response to God's presence in the preached word of the sermon on Sunday, September 24, 1995. I would never have thought of myself as a participant worthy of consideration without Paterson's article, "Can Worship Leaders Worship?" in the Spring 1986 issue of *Leadership*:

Pastors have an extraordinarily difficult job, one filled with great spiritual peril. We are player-coaches. We must both tell others how to be Christians and be Christians ourselves. The difficulty is that there is often a tension between these two. The great pastoral peril is to succumb to the temptation of being just a coach. Nowhere is this problem more apparent to me than in the Sunday worship service. I can get so preoccupied with trying to get the congregation to worship that I don't worship.¹³

Dan Baty was profoundly instructive on how to affect response. I was informed by the heart-sharing insight in his article, "Heart to Heart Preaching: How to Tap Authentic Emotions, Both Yours and the Listeners'," in the Spring 1993 issue of *Leadership*:

Over the past fourteen years, I've been fascinated with how a spoken

¹²Cinda Gorman, "Preaching for the Senses," *Leadership: A Practical Journal for Church Leaders* (Carol Stream: Christianity Today, Spring 1990), 112.

¹³Ben Patterson, "Can Worship Leaders Worship?" *Leadership: A Practical Journal for Church Leaders* (Carol Stream: Christianity Today, Spring 1986), 34.

message touches a listener's heart and, as a result, changes lives. I've often wondered "How can one message stir the listeners' souls while another leaves them stirring restlessly in their seats?" Lives change only when hearts have been affected, and hearts are most deeply affected when the speaker exposes his own heart. In other words, what people want and need most from a communicator is heart exposure. I need to reveal not only my thought and theology, but my heart and soul as well. I must dare to tell how the truth of the text has touched my heart and life by sharing stories from my own life that describe with sensory detail, and explain what it means.¹⁴

One of the deacons at Bethel hinted that my sermons were a bit like milk toast. He urged me to hit him directly in the face but I wanted to be a gentleman. Lynn P. Clayton confirmed my deacon's opinion with his article, "View from the Pew: Come On, Preacher, Stand Up and Preach," in the 1985 November-December issue of *Preaching*:

Come on, preacher, preach! Don't coddle me, don't just stoke me beyond credibility, don't insult me by thinking I'm stupid. Don't try to pass off as the message from on high cheap, unprepared remarks. Don't try to impress me with your intellect. Preach! Proclaim person-to-person what my relationship with Christ should mean, what it demands, how it can help me in the struggle to survive, what I must do for others. Warn me of the dangers of this present age.¹⁵

My Bethel listeners also want to know that I have been with Jesus in a face-to-face relationship, and according to John Killinger's sermon, "Intimacy With God," on page 2 of the 1990 November-December issue of *Preaching* it is possible:

When I saw Jeffrey Archer's play *Beyond Reasonable Doubt* on the

¹⁴Dan S. Baty, "Heart to Heart Preaching," *Leadership: A Practical Journal for Church Leaders* (Carol Stream: Christianity Today, Spring 1993), 61.

¹⁵Lynn P. Clayton, "View From the Pew: Come On, Preacher, Stand Up and Preach," *Preaching: The Professional Journal for Preachers* (Louisville: Preaching Resources, November-December 1985), 51.

London stage, I surprised myself by weeping. It was the amazing intimacy, I think, that caused me to weep. I could not bear to think of one human being experiencing intimacy with another and then being deprived of it. Francine Klagsbrun, in her book *Married People*, discusses the nature of intimacy and enumerates several key factors present in it. First, intimacy requires a complete acceptance of the other person just as he or she is, so that each person is unafraid to be open and honest with the other. Second, it implies that each person feels important to the other. Third, it means the creation of an environment in which secrets can be shared with complete confidence. Fourth, it accepts the fact that there will be periods of distancing as well as closeness, and that the distancing will not destroy the relationship. Finally, intimacy means truly communicating, listening, with sensitivity, and assuring the other that he or she is safe in the exchange. Every human being longs to have intimacy with someone else---to be open and loving and safe and together. What about with God? Is it possible to be intimate with God as well, to have this open, sensitive, creative relationship with the eternal One who presides over our destinies? The Bible suggests that it is. The psalms often breathe an air of intimacy. The prophet Hosea glories in it. And Jesus obviously experienced it.¹⁶

During the response time on September 24, 1995, God's Spirit took me right out of myself. I was relieved by Charles Swindoll's insights in his interview with Michael Duduit entitled, "Fanning the Flame: Preaching and the Holy Spirit," in the 1993 November-December issue of *Preaching*:

Your most recent book, *Flying Closer to the Flame*, deals with the work of the Holy Spirit. How do you understand the relationship of the Spirit's work to the ministry of preaching? The Spirit of God is doing many things he never gets credit for. To start with he prompts ideas and prepares the soil of the soul for certain subjects. There were some things that we'd gone through in some growing feelings---churnings within. We all have what I call a 'churning place.' The Holy Spirit churns us---he prompts us---and in that process I believe he begins to build the steam in our areas of motivation like growing a sense of passion. In this growing sense of

¹⁶John Killinger, "Intimacy With God," *Preaching: The Professional Journal for Preaching* (Louisville: Preaching Resources, November-December 1990), 2.

passion we get direction for how we want to build a sermon or series of sermons. And then, of course, in the actual putting together of the message I will look back some time and say that only the Spirit of God could have directed me. I'm able to look back at the end of the week and think, 'Why, it's obviously the work of the Spirit.' Then there is the actual delivery. You've preached enough, Mike, to know there are times---I don't want this to sound spooky---but there are times I feel almost outside myself. You have that experience where you say, 'I could not have arranged these thoughts this well.' I think his prompting, his motivational work---falls under the umbrella of his anointing. So that when you've finished---and I really mean this sincerely---you feel like you don't deserve credit for it.¹⁷

PUBLISHED BOOKS

The vast array of available books on preaching is far beyond my reading time and budget. From my books on preaching, over one hundred, I want to share a few snapshots of how their insights assisted me in my research. Baby boomers sometimes intimidate me because I find it difficult to attract and hold their attention. Comprising a third of our population, baby boomers, born between 1946 and 1964, are the leaders of today, influencing the entire landscape of American values. What do they believe? This is the group that was spiritually shaken by the 1960s, felt the aftershocks of the 1970s, and, by their numbers alone, became a battering ram for social change. Yet, Wade Clark Roof gave me hope when he made this statement in his book, *A Generation of Seekers*:

They are deeply enmeshed in the narrative tradition. And at heart

¹⁷Charles Swindoll, "Fanning the Flame: Preaching and the Holy Spirit," *Preaching: The Professional Journal for Preachers* (Louisville: Preaching Resources, November-December 1985), 51.

they are storytellers, and like all storytellers, they know that life is an open-ended plot. They have a narrative perspective on commitment, which locates its meaning in their unfolding lives. Struggle will continue to be a big part of this narrative, but as a theme it can easily mislead. For beneath all the rhetoric of distrust and distance rests another, far quieter rhetoric, that of the soul. In their innermost beings, the children of the sixties know that religion, for all its institutional limitations, holds a vision of life's unity and meaningfulness, and for that reason will continue to have a place in their narrative.¹⁸

Robert E. Webber believes that worshipping churches, sensitive to a dramatically changing world view, must seek to develop a worship open to the supernatural, aware of mystery, and committed to participation. His personal testimony about a crisis in worship and preaching opened my eyes to the need to stay current in my faith-walk with God. Here is his example from the second chapter, "Worship and a Changing World View," of his book, *The Worship Phenomenon: A Dynamic New Awakening in Worship in Reviving the Body of Christ*:

November 1969 was a turning point in my life. I had been asked by the chaplain to speak in chapel. I knew my intellectual answers lacked integrity because I myself could not connect my experience with my belief. As I prepared my sermon, a sense of God's absence kept running through my mind and was validated by my own experience. During this time, the Spirit gifted me with a willingness to experience the silence of God---and it was a deafening silence, a real absence of such intensity that I cried out with the fullness of my being for God to become present in my life, 'God,' I said, 'I don't want more information about you. I want you!' God was moving me from a purely intellectual understanding based on propositions to a realized experience of him in worship.¹⁹

¹⁸Wade Clark Roof, "Conclusion: The End of All Our Exploring," *A Generation of Seekers* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1993), 261.

¹⁹Robert E. Webber, "Worship and a Changing World View," *Worship Phenomenon* (Nashville: Star Song Publishing Group, 1994), 14.

Fred B. Craddock reviewed the four basic elements of preaching in his 1985 book, *Preaching*:

The Preacher. The person of the preacher is a vital element in effective preaching. The minister works within an unusual network of trust that makes the separation of character from performance impossible. All preaching is self-disclosure by the preacher.

The Listeners. Listeners are active participants in preaching. Appropriate sermons require a thorough knowledge of, a great deal of listening to, the congregation. In other words, the listeners participate in the sermon before it is born. The listeners speak to the preacher before the preacher speaks to them. Otherwise, the sermon is without a point of contact.

The Scripture. Preaching brings the Scriptures forward as a living voice in the congregation. Does the sermon say and do what the biblical text says and does? It is possible that a sermon that buries itself in the text, moves through it phrase by phrase, and never comes up for air may prove to be 'unbiblical' in the sense that it fails to achieve what the text achieves.

The Holy Spirit. The church is forever warned by the attempt of Simon the magician to purchase the power of the Spirit in Acts 8:9-13 that 'The wind blows where it wills,' (John 3:8). The Spirit is *of God* and not contingent upon our willing or doing. The truth is, and by this the church sometimes feels embarrassed, there is no agreement among Christians as to the canons for ascertaining the Spirit's absence or presence at the time of an event.²⁰

I am forever trying to be true to the original meaning of the text, and in this area of hermeneutical necessity I refer to John J. Pilch and Bruce J. Malina's book, *Biblical Social Values and Their Meaning*:

Every culture colors the way its members perceive and interpret reality. Though reality is always the same, cultural interpretations of it differ. What is considered important in Mediterranean culture

²⁰Fred B. Craddock, "Introduction: Fundamental Convictions About Preaching," *Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1985), 22.

may be considered quite unimportant in the prevailing culture of the United States. Even when both cultures use the same word to describe something important, like hospitality, the understanding of that item is very different. The purpose of this handbook is to describe some of the values prominent in the New Testament and frequently referred to in the Bible in general. Each New Testament value will be contrasted with the understanding commonly held by United States citizens.²¹

Videos, Miscellaneous, etc.

I resonate with Reinhold J. Kerstan's article, "Divine Word in Human Vessels: A Reflection on the Need for Relevant Preaching," in the Spring 1993 *McMaster Journal of Theology* and with John Piper's article, "Preaching as Worship: Meditations on Expository Exultation," from the Spring 1995, *Trinity Journal*, of Wheaton, Illinois. I found good counsel in Marion L. Soard's article, "Pulling the Wagon Out of the Ditch," from the 1989 *Journal of Theology* by United theological Seminary in Dayton, Ohio and in David A. DeSilva's article, "The Feast in the Text: Lancelot Andrewes on the Task and Art of Preaching," in the Winter 1994 *Anglican Theological Review* published in Evanston, Illinois. I have viewed and reviewed my personal copy of the March 1995 Peter Jennings' video report on worship in America entitled, "In the Name of God." This was aired on ABC television as a Thursday night special one hour presentation. The video shows differing responses of worshipers from the reflective Presbyterian to the laughing Vineyard participant. The Willow Creek worship style and some New Age thinking were

²¹John J. Pilch and Bruce J. Malina, "Introduction: How to Use This Reference Work," *Biblical Social Values and Their Meaning: A Handbook* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1993), xxxviii.

covered in this account. I have the December 6, 1995, issue of *Christianity Today* with an article by Edward Gilbreath entitled, "Manhood's Great Awakening: Promise Keepers' Ambitious Agenda for Transforming Christian Men." I attended the "Promise Keepers" conference for men in Pontiac, Michigan, in April 1995, and the first national "Promise Keepers" conference for pastors and ministers in Atlanta, Georgia, February 13-15, 1996.

The internalization of my review of the literature is evident in the sermon, "Fanning the Flame," with its right brain picture of emotional color and in the exploding sound of the breaking vase in the sermon "But You Would Not." It is evident in the kind of listening to the listeners reflected in the August 6, 1995, sermon "The Power of a Promise" that brought eleven men and fifteen women to the altar in tearful prayer seeking God's call upon the men of Bethel to be spiritually responsible at church and at home.

Truly, I have only begun to absorb the collective wisdom of my literature review. There is so much more yet to be explored.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Congregational Partnership

The prerequisite to researching the subproblems was to enlist the congregation's partnership and cooperation in this research. I experienced full support in every aspect and at every point from Bethel's individuals, groups, and governing bodies. Bethel bathed me in prayer, covered me for fifty percent of the expenses, granted me whatever time away was necessary, and cooperated graciously in every detail. I praise God and thank him for Bethel Baptist Church. In 1991 Bethel Baptist Church opened a continuing education line item in the annual budget for me. In 1992 the congregation granted permission for me to pursue a Doctor of Ministry degree. In 1993 the Bethel deacons approved McMaster Divinity College as the educational institution for my Doctor of Ministry studies. Three of the deacons served on my McMaster ministry base team to assist me in my Doctor of Ministry work.

In February 1994 the McMaster ministry base team and the Bethel deacons administered the McMaster Divinity College diagnostic analysis church survey during a Sunday morning worship service. In his letter of September 1, 1994, Dr. Ken Bellous acknowledged the successful completion of the diagnostic analysis. Through the spring, summer, and fall of 1994 Bethel worked with me in developing

a strategic plan which resulted in Bethel's new vision theme, "We will glorify God in all our relationships, with God, with other Christians, and with nonbelievers," that was adopted on February 12, 1995. In his letter of July 1, 1995, Dr. Ken Bellous acknowledged the successful completion of the strategic plan.

When it came to enlisting the congregation's participation for my thesis project itself, I was confident of their cooperation in principle; but I was apprehensive concerning two aspects of the project. My first concern was that very few people like to have their responsiveness observed, measured, and analyzed. My second concern was that Bethel would be too threatened by the video cameras. Even if the congregation would grant permission for my project to do research in the sanctuary, would they allow video cameras to observe them in prayer or in slumber?

I took my thesis project proposal to the McMaster ministry base team meeting on Tuesday, May 30, 1995, where it was approved for recommendation to the deacons. Then I took it to the Bethel deacons' meeting on Thursday evening, June 1, 1995, where it was reshaped by sharpening the problem statement and then approved for recommendation to the Council of Elders. After revising the proposal I took it to the Council of Elders meeting on Saturday morning, June 3, 1995, where it was approved for recommendation to the membership. After writing a letter on June 6, 1995, to the membership asking them for their cooperation and support in this project, I took the proposal to the congregational meeting on Sunday, June 11, 1995. Everyone present received a copy of the complete proposal,

and we read through it from cover to cover. After a good season of discussion with questions and answers, the Bethel Baptist Church membership voted unanimously to authorize my Doctor of Ministry thesis project, *You Have Touched Me, I Have Grown*, as proposed.

Measuring the Congregation's Responsiveness:

The first subproblem was to develop ways of measuring the congregation's responsiveness to God's presence in the preached word on Sunday mornings. I thought it would be best to have more than one tool for measuring the congregation's responsiveness. We developed four different tools of measurement: 1. A paper response form; 2. Two video cameras; 3. A discussion group; and 4. Personal interviews. The worshipping congregation and the Pastor would soon find themselves being closely observed in their preaching-responding worship experiences. I had to re-examine myself and ask my Father in heaven to strengthen me in Christ for this kind of feedback exposure. I identified with John Vawter, preaching pastor of Wayzata Evangelical Free Church in Minneapolis, Minnesota, in his article, "The Agony & Ecstasy of Feedback," in which he quoted Scott Peck in, *The Road Less Traveled*:

A life of total dedication to the truth also means a life of willingness to be personally challenged. The only way that we can be certain that our map of reality is valid is to expose it to the criticism and challenge of the other map-makers. Otherwise, we live in a closed system, rebreathing our own fetid air, more subject to delusion.²²

²²John Vawter, "The Agony & Ecstasy of Feedback," *Leadership: A Practical Journal for Church Leaders* (Carol Stream: Christianity Today, Summer 1987), 25.

The Response Form

In the Summer 1987 issue of *Leadership* Virginia Vagt, director of research and planning for *Christianity Today, Inc.*, made some observations and offered some suggested procedures which helped me in the initial formulation of a response form to be used by the worshiping congregation at Bethel during the months of August and September 1995. Here are some of her thoughts:

Surveys provide not only comments on where to improve but also two uplifting results: what your people gained from your sermons, and representative feedback. Representative comments---from a cross-section of church people---help keep you from placing undue weight on the scathing individual comment that comes to every pastor from time to time. To get started, I recommend a written, one-page, anonymous survey focused on a specific sermon. It is easiest for people to respond to something concrete, such as this morning's sermon. And you will gain specific feedback.

Regardless of the size of your church, fewer than twenty returns may not be enough feedback, and more than fifty per Sunday is not necessary to get representative opinions. You won't get every survey back. It's possible that a few people may not be honest or fair, so I recommend surveying a cross section of church members on at least three or four Sundays. Use a blank copy of the survey to record your tabulations and analysis. Throughout the tabulation, pay attention to the repeated comments. These represent the typical response to your sermons. Don't place lots of weight on the single complaint. Perhaps you can't help taking such comments to heart, but remember, they represent only one person's view, not the church's as a whole. The results may make intuitive sense to you.²³

Seymour Sudman and Norman M. Bradburn share a humorous account in their book, *Asking Questions*:

The central thesis of this book is that question wording is a crucial

²³Virginia Vagt, "Tips for Effective Surveys," *Leadership: A Practical Journal for Church Leaders* (Carol Stream: Christianity Today, Summer 1987), 26.

element in maximizing the validity of survey data obtained by a question-asking process. The importance of the precise wording of questions can be illustrated by a well-known example. Two priests, a Dominican and a Jesuit, are discussing whether it is a sin to smoke and pray at the same time. After failing to reach a conclusion, each goes off to consult his respective superior. The next week they meet again. The Dominican says "Well, what did your superior say?" The Jesuit responds "He said it was all right." "That's funny," the Dominican replies, "My superior said it was a sin." Jesuit: "What did you ask him?" Reply: "I asked him if it was all right to smoke while praying." "Oh," says the Jesuit, "I asked my superior if it was all right to pray while smoking."²⁴

I began to ask individuals at random to articulate how they might express their responsiveness to God's presence in the preached word. On June 13, 1995, in a group session with the McMaster ministry base team, we developed a first-draft response form to be used by the worshiping congregation during the response Sundays in August and September 1995. I also worked on a first-draft form for potential worshipers to use in helping me know what evidences persuade them that God is present in any sermon. I began to develop a third form as well, known as the noise form, concerning any physical, psychological, or spiritual items that might hinder their response to God's presence in the sermon. By focusing on the topic of noise I helped the listeners increase awareness of the negative impact of noise items. Then on July 6, 1995, I tested and refined the three sample forms: the response form, the noise form, and the God's presence in the sermon form. So I decided to begin the preaching for response project on July 16, 1995, using the last three Sundays of July as practice by asking the worshiping congregation to respond

²⁴Seymour Sudman and Norman M. Bradburn, "The Social Context of Asking Questions," *Asking Questions* (San Francisco: Jossey Publishers, 1982), 1.

to the God's presence in the sermon form on July 16, 1995, the noise form on July 23, 1995, and a sample response form on July 30, 1995.

By August 6, 1995, we had a fully developed tool for measuring the response of the listeners to God's presence in the preached word of the sermon. It was called, *My Response Form*. Each Sunday from August 6, 1995, through October 1, 1995, we used a fresh, *My Response Form*. Each week the date, Scripture text, and sermon title were updated for that particular Sunday. Space was provided for hand written comments under each of the four sections: emotional response, intellectual response, physical response, and attitude response. The reverse side had blank lines for individuals to write at length. The form was the half-page size of a church bulletin insert which is 8.5 inches by 5.5 inches. A final feature, the *corner fold downs*, was begun on Sunday, August 27, 1995, and brought tremendous response. The form was a different color each week. See appendix two for copies of the basic response forms.

The Video Cameras

I made arrangements to have the Sunday morning worship services video recorded. Dr. Joel Okoli, who is a member of the McMaster ministry base team and a surgeon at Roswell Cancer Institute in Buffalo, offered to provide his home video camera for the twelve weeks of the project and to surrender the pleasure of sitting with wife and family in worship so as to operate the camera in the back of the sanctuary that was focused on the preacher. Dr. Joel's assignment was to capture on video tape for later study what the preacher was actually saying and

doing in the pulpit area. Barny Lister also offered to provide his home video camera for the project period and operated the camera located in the front which was focused on the congregation. Barny's assignment was to capture on video tape for later study as many visible responses of the congregation as possible. The cameras made some of the people nervous, brought out the "ham" in at least one individual, and caused two members to boycott the worship services during the project period. It seemed to me that a few of the people made more use of their summer activity excuses to miss Bethel's worship services than they had in previous summers. But most came to ignore and sometimes even forget the presence of the cameras.

The Discussion Group

I had some difficulty arranging a discussion group to meet for input on the congregation's responsiveness to God's presence in the preached word. I realized that some people would never use a paper response form and some would repeatedly sit directly behind one of the taller or wider worshipers so as to go unobserved. Some of these people might just attend a small group for discussion. After several ideas for a discussion group failed to generate a group, at last it became acceptable for me to use the 9:00 A.M. Sunday morning time with the faithful adult members of my regular Sunday school class as the base group. The other adult Sunday school class was invited to join us, as were all adult members of the Bethel Baptist Church congregation. At first, the other adult Sunday school class declined my invitation; but it reconsidered and joined with us beginning

August 06, 1995.

The pressures of the normal Sunday school program prevented me from using July 16, 1995, and October 01, 1995. The mid-week children's ministry team had scheduled an adult orientation work-shop with the Word of Life representative, John Tice, during the Sunday school time on August 20, 1995. Thus, we were able to meet for only nine of the twelve weeks. We started on July 23, 1995, and finished on September 24, 1995. Our average attendance was 17.5 throughout the summer weeks.

The Personal Interviews

From the very beginning in the August 1993 research methods course I knew that personal interviews would be a fundamental part of the research for my thesis project. In my mind, finding individuals who truly responded to a particular sermon and then securing their willingness to give an interview was an awesome challenge. This would require wisdom and persuasion. I spent time in prayer with God because this was beyond me. The Spirit of God amazed me! I did not have to search and beg. Each week some individual or couple was so responsive to God's presence in the sermon that it was easy for me to ask, "Would you be willing to tell me about your response to Sunday's sermon in an interview." Only two individuals decline the offer. Some weeks I didn't even have to ask anyone; the Spirit of God brought them to me. In fact, twice I ended up with two interviews for one week.

My greatest struggle was for the week of September 24, 1995, when the sermon was based on Isaiah, chapter 30, about refusing to look to God in our every

day needs. The sermon was entitled *But You Would Not* and I shattered a beautiful vase by lifting it up and bringing it down hard on a rock on the sanctuary platform. The sermon was so powerful it scared me. It seemed to me that the people left the church that day in a reflective mood. The following Sunday of October 1, 1995, there was no discussion group because the Sunday school classes resumed their regular schedule. I had no idea whom I should ask to do an interview. Finally, I felt that I should be the one interviewed for the week of September 24, 1995. In total fourteen people were interviewed during the project period of July 16, 1995, through October 1, 1995. Except for Dr. Joel Okoli and myself the names of everyone interviewed have been changed for their protection.

Evidence of God's Presence

The second subproblem was to identify what Bethel's worshipping congregation considers as evidence of God's presence in the preaching of his word. By chance meeting I asked individuals to identify their personal evidences of God's presence in the preaching of his word. Then in a group session with the McMaster ministry base team on June 13, 1995, I developed a first-draft written form, which the Bethel deacons refined and the Bethel congregation responded to during the July 16, 1995, Sunday morning worship service. In this way I helped the congregation articulate their particular evidences of God's presence in the preaching of his Word on Sunday mornings. This was helpful to me too. See appendix two for copies of the basic response forms.

Physical and Psychological Noise

The third subproblem was to help the listeners be more aware of the physical, psychological, and spiritual noise involved in the preaching exchange on Sunday mornings at Bethel Baptist Church. In books like Chester Pennington's, *God Has a Communication Problem*,²⁵ the message sender's encoding, the message receiver's decoding, the message medium, barriers, and offenses such as images and feelings are explained. Noises can be as subtle as having an argument on the way to church, the preacher's rate of speech or vocabulary choices. They may be as simple as sanctuary lighting or audio equipment. With the help of the McMaster local ministry base team, the Bethel deacons, and others I developed a feedback form for the worshipping congregation to use in making known as many such noises as it could. The burned out spot lights for the sanctuary platform were replaced, new pencils were placed in the pews so that everyone could use the written response forms, and some of the sound system components were replaced.

²⁵Chester Pennington, *God Has a Communication Problem* (New York: Hawthorn Books, 1976), 50.

CHAPTER 4

THE RESEARCH DATA

Introduction

I now present the actual research data of my doctor of ministry thesis project which I have grouped into four separate files: 1. The Video Summations; 2. The Response Forms; 3. The Discussion Group; 4. The Personal Interviews. The data gathering took place during the six months of my thesis project which ran from June 11, 1995, through October 15, 1995, in the ministry setting of Bethel Baptist Church of Getzville, New York.

I have preserved the raw data of the original 8MM video tapes of the worship services, the cassette audio tapes of the personal interviews, the response forms, and my notes of the discussion group sessions. The discussion group would not let me audio or video record the sessions or even take notes during the sessions. They wanted safety and freedom. This made it more difficult for me because I was unable to write up my notes until later due to a nonstop schedule. Yet, I believe the discussion group made a valuable contribution to me and to my project. The discussion group helped me listen to the listeners and stay in touch with the people's view of life.

The Video Summations

During a sermon the listeners are responding. In Baptist Churches their responses are usually nonverbal, body language, expressions. The video camera is ideal for capturing some of this kind of response, and I am grateful that Bethel Baptist Church granted permission for two video cameras in the sanctuary during my Doctor of Ministry project on *Preaching for Response*, during the Sunday morning worship services from July 16, '95, through October 01, '95. Very little of what they recorded can be conveyed here on printed pages with words. I have prepared video summaries for each of the twelve weeks with twenty minutes of video footage for each Sunday totaling four hours of video footage. Each summary of twenty minutes consists of four minutes of music, eight minutes of preaching time, and eight minutes of response time with some variations. What is revealed in these video summations is evidence that Bethel's people were indeed responsive to God through the medium of preaching during the project period. I will briefly highlight here some of what is recorded on the video tapes.

Crossing the Rubicon on July 16, 1995

The front of the sanctuary was colorfully decorated with a vacation Bible school backdrop of painted street scenes eight feet tall stretching the full width of the sanctuary platform. I preached on the apostle Paul's thank you note to Philemon thanking him for refreshing the hearts of the saints and asking him to move his Christian practice up to the level of accepting his runaway slave, Onesimus, back as a brother in Christ. Caesar's crossing of the Rubicon River in

northern Italy in spite of Pompeii's threats served as a powerful picture when I said the Rubicon was flowing up and down the aisles of Bethel Baptist Church. I asked the worshipers of Bethel to do as Paul had done. Eighty people walked the aisle to pick up an unused thank you card from the communion table, and I later heard many stories from those who wrote notes to others and from some of those who received these notes. What a sight to see as these eighty people responded! Keven Under and Saen Haven also crossed their "Rubicon" as they came to the altar requesting baptism.

Broken in the Right Places on July 23, 1995

I preached on God's breaking in Jacob's life and Jacob's response of the tithe using the powerful picture of being swept over a waterfall or dam and feeling the urge to use all available strength to swim away from the downward pull of the water at the base of the dam rather than going with it so as to be surfaced a few yards down stream. Everyone received two quarters and one nickel. I asked them to respond to God's breaking in their lives by putting the nickel on a plate as they left the sanctuary. Watching the listener's "amens" or "nods" of understanding was a special instructive for me.

Nothing But the Truth on July 30, 1995

The sanctuary furniture was restored, and I preached on King Ahab's charge to the prophet Micaiah Ben Imlah, "How many times shall I make you swear that you tell me nothing but the truth in the name of the Lord?" I urged the worshipers

to hunger to hear God's truth from their preachers even if it isn't popular. When I asked the people to respond by placing one hand on a Bible and saying, "I swear to seek God's truth, his whole truth, and nothing but his truth, so help me God," twelve people outwardly did what I had asked of them. Others later told me that they too had responded but they didn't have a Bible with them. Others told me they were saying "Amen" to the truth behind the truth but that they were not able to "swear" on anything about anything. Brad Wager came to the altar requesting baptism. Joseph and Sarah Paltiel came to the altar to praise God for helping them through a breaking experience during the week.

The Power of a Promise on August 06, 1995

I preached on promises and the power of a promise kept. I went back to God himself who keeps all his promises because of his own integrity. I used the powerful picture of the "Promise Keepers" movement to challenge Bethel's men to come to the altar with the commitment that they would take up the spiritual responsibility of obeying God in their private lives and family living as spiritual leaders in their environment. Eleven men came to the altar in response to God through the sermon. Fifteen women also came to the altar to show prayerful support of God's call upon these men and their responses to God's call. Even the video was not able to fully capture the reality of God's powerful presence in our midst with tears of joy flowing freely and faces lighting up with smiles. The emotion that was in the air caught me my surprise as it had on July 16th. Bethel was beginning to sense a new hope.

Entering His Rest on August 13, 1995

I preached on Jesus' promise of Matthew 11:28 where he assured his listeners that those who come to him, even those heavy laden with labor, would find rest. I used the powerful picture of the yoke which is an instrument of labor not rest. I brought a yoke into the sanctuary from one of the neighboring farms and explained how, as a carpenter of his day, Jesus probably made "Yokes to fit." Jesus said, "Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." I compared laboring and heavy laden Christians to a heavy-laden woman entering the labor and delivery hospital. I compared Christ to the labor and delivery nurse who invites the laboring woman to enter her "yoke" instead of trying to do it on her own. The video camera recorded eleven people coming to the altar and dropping a metal key into one of the buckets as a symbol that they were releasing some specific issue into Jesus' control "yoke." Ninety-six people dropped their key into one of the buckets that the ushers passed in front of them as a symbol that they were releasing control of their lives in general to Christ. One person kept the key and six dropped their key in the bucket by the piano as a symbol of refusing to release control to Christ. The keys made a loud "thud" as they dropped into the buckets in witness to spiritual response to Jesus' invitation. Bonnie Jo Snelling came to the altar and Sarahi came with her to pray for Bonnie Jo to release her son, Charles, to the control of Christ. The video cameras graphically recorded the baptismal immersion of Keven Under, Saen Haven, and

Brad Wager.

Giving Glory to God on August 20, 1995

I preached about praising God rather than criticizing God and used the powerful picture of Abraham's example in Romans 4:20-21 where he refused to waver in unbelief, but rather, gave glory to God because he was convinced that God is a promise keeper. Even the video could not fully portray the powerful emotion of the twelve individuals who praised God by use of the traveling microphone and the impact of Dean Winter's confession at the altar or of Dan and Mary Bright's request at the altar asking us to pray for them in their lunch meeting with their estranged daughter after church. They praised God in faith for the good things he was going to do during that luncheon. At the evening service they shared how wonderfully God did bless that meeting.

Beseeching God on August 27, 1995

I preached about Jesus' promise that those who ask, seek, and knock actually receive, find, and have doors opened unto them. For the American context I used the powerful imagery of the Susan B. Anthony silver dollar. Her life of asking for the women's right to vote is attractive to most Americans. The video did a nice job of showing the people taking silver dollars out of the offering plates instead of putting money in as usual. In active color the video showed boys, girls, young people, and adults coming to the altar asking "May I have that \$20 bill, that \$50 bill, that \$100 bill" and receiving. The video reveals the men in the congregation sending money up to me to help meet the overwhelming requests of

the children. This was one of those "never to be forgotten" days with God in the sanctuary and the video revealed why---people were responding to God's presence in the sermon at Bethel.

Profiting in His Trust on September 03, 1995

I preached of Jesus' praise of those who turn his gifts to them into a profit and of his expanded trust in them to handle more of his gifts as well as their expanded privilege to enter his joy. I used the powerful picture of Nehemiah building the wall around Jerusalem saying "Hand Me Another Brick." Without the video footage I could never truly convey to someone not present the overwhelming response of virtually everyone present as they brought a plastic building block to the altar where I was constructing a red cross on a yellow raft in the blue water surrounded by the green grass. For days and weeks people commented about the impact of the unanimous response and the power of the promise that it revealed. Truly, God was speaking and with observable unity his people were responding. The video footage showed this.

Meeting All Our Need on September 10, 1995

I preached of the apostle Paul's promise to the believers at Philippi that his God would meet all their need through Christ Jesus. The problem of pride that keeps us from admitting a need and from humbling ourselves to meet the needs of others was confronted through Jesus' powerful picture of washing the disciples feet. The video beautifully captured the people responding as they held the towels in

their hands saying, "I will wash their feet," and "I will let them wash my feet." I was overwhelmed with the tenderness of God's Spirit as I washed the feet of Garold Millner, when he responded to the invitation to come to the altar for a foot washing. Again, I thank God and the members of Bethel Baptist Church who granted permission to use the video cameras.

Following Jesus on September 17, 1995

I preached of Jesus' promise to make fishers of men out of those who follow him based on his call to the twelve, especially the four fishermen of Mark 1:17. Too many of us focus our attention and efforts on our own profits and pleasures rather than follow Jesus in his example of loving the lost sheep and seeking to bring them to the Father. Jesus keeps his promises which means that if we will but follow him and copy his ways then we will become fishers of men. It was "Youth Sunday" and the video saved it all as the youth, Kevin Wrapper, and Pastor Marcus were all dedicated in Christ's service at the altar. The people responded in accepting brightly colored tickets to give to others as an invitation to participate in the musical drama of the Jeremiah People who would be appearing at Bethel Baptist Church on October 12, '95. Twenty people responded by accepting copies of Billy Graham's booklet, "Steps to Peace with God," to be used with the people whose names they had written on their response form. The video cameras caught Bud O'Clary, Dr. Joel Okoli, and Jean Chef coming to the altar to accept the name and picture of one of the inner city youth to pray for during the next one year period. Thirteen out of the fifteen names assigned to Bethel have been taken.

But You Would Not on September 24, 1995

I preached of God's warning to Jerusalem that they would be broken unless they returned to him for rest and confidence. As Isaiah did, I used the powerful picture of the broken vase, so broken that all the pieces were too small to dip water or to scoop up a fire and relocate it. Only a video could gather it all in as that beautiful \$90 vase exploded when I struck it on the rock that was at the altar. The fear of the Lord gripped our hearts beyond what the cameras could preserve. I kept breaking, actually, the Spirit caused me to keep breaking the chards or pieces until they were all too small to dip water or relocate a fire. Virtually everyone took home one of the chard pieces as a powerful reminder that God can break any one who refuses to look to him for rest and confidence in all things.

Fanning the Flame on October 01, 1995

I preached of fanning the flame of God's spiritual presence in the lives of his believers much like the bellows of the old century blacksmith. Aquila and Priscilla were the powerful picture that I used from God's Word where it is recorded of how they fanned the spiritual flame in the apostle Paul, in Apollos, and in Onesiphorus. The video camera etched the moment when Aquila and Priscilla Foster came to the altar requesting membership with Bethel Baptist Church to fan the flame of God's Spirit in Bethel.

As a tool of measuring response by the worshipers of Bethel Baptist Church to God's presence in the sermon, the video camera was uniquely effective.

The Response Forms

The response form was but one of the four tools I used to measure the response of the Bethel Baptist Church worshipers to God's presence in the sermon in the Sunday morning worship service during the twelve week response period of July 16 through October 1, 1995. Many people responded by coming to the altar or by taking the action that I outlined during the response time, yet did not indicate it on a response form. For example, on Sunday, July 16, 1995, eighty people came to the altar to take an unused thank you card which they then used to thank or challenge someone else; on Sunday, August 06, 1995, twenty-six people came to the altar with tears in prayer concerning our need for men to be spiritually responsible; on Sunday, September 03, 1995, seventy-eight people brought a plastic building block to the altar to help me build the cross of Christ in a demonstration of how everyone profits when individuals put God's gifts to profitable use. I also used two video cameras. One camera was focused on me, the preacher, and the other camera was focused on the people to record their response. A third tool was a discussion group that met at 9:00 A.M. on Sunday mornings to share and discuss their responses to God's presence in the sermon on the previous Sunday and throughout the week. A fourth tool was personal interviews with couples and individuals who had evidenced response at the Sunday service or during the week.

The response form evolved from an idea into its final form. During the weeks from June 11, 1995, when the membership voted its approval of my project, through July 30, 1995, I worked with the McMaster ministry base team, the

Deacons, and the congregation in the development of the response form. I proposed, and the McMaster ministry base team revised. I proposed, and the Deacons revised. I proposed, and the congregation revised. I asked them to articulate how they recognized God's presence in any preached sermon. I asked them to articulate how they usually respond when they recognize God's presence in any preached sermon and in what additional ways they would like to respond. I asked them to articulate the various *noise items* that make it more difficult for them to recognize God's presence in any preached sermon. On Sunday, August 6, 1995, we used the response form in its final form. Then on Sunday, August 27, 1995, we used the response form with a special *corner-fold-down-feature* which continued on through October 1, 1995.

Crossing the Rubicon on July 16, 1995

On this Sunday I spoke about the apostle Paul's thank you note to Philemon in which Paul thanked Philemon for refreshing the hearts of the saints and challenged him to cross his Rubicon by accepting Onesimus back in full forgiveness as a brother not just as a slave. The response I sought was a willing spirit to thank other believers and to accept God's invitation to make bold commitments. **On July 16, 1995, we had a 15.15% response by means of the response form (15 of 99).** The response song was, "The Lord Bless You," by Michael Card based on Numbers 6:24-26. We had 127 present, with 21 in children's ministry and 7 worship leaders including cameramen, leaving 99 available respondents with 15 written response forms submitted. This was the last opportunity for the attenders of the worship

service to give written feed-back on *God's Presence in the Sermon*. By means of a blue form they articulated what evidences persuaded them that God is present in any sermon. Here are the results of the 15 response forms submitted in the four categories:

- **In the Sanctuary:** symbols-5, colors-1, music-14, space for comments
- **In Other People:** attitudes-8, reverence-7, responsiveness-14, space for comments
- **In the Preacher:** anointed-7, clearly focused-8, personal conviction-6, challenging-6, space for comments
- **In Yourself:** spiritually hungry-10, focused-11, rested-4, Bible open-6, space for comments.

Concerning evidence of God's presence in the preacher, one person wrote, "I see God's presence in the preacher's emotional intensity --- does he seem to believe what he says; does God's Word and a relationship with God excite him?" Concerning God's presence in ourselves, one person wrote, "Feed us! We are all hungry whether we know it or not!" Concerning God's presence in other people fourteen of the fifteen respondents indicated the responsiveness of others. Concerning God's presence in the sanctuary fourteen of the fifteen respondents indicated that music was an evidence of God's presence to them. I had experimented with response songs by various recording artists for the response time in late June and early July. To me this research confirmed that people do sense God's presence through music so I found a response song to fit the message theme for each of the nine Sundays beginning with August 6th. In general people told me, "Pastor, I have already answered these questions at the McMaster ministry base team meeting, or the Deacon meeting, or on a previous Sunday." Keven Under and Saen Haven came to the altar requesting

baptism. Although no one marked it on the response form, 80 people came to the altar to take an unused thank you card from the altar table with the intention of writing to someone who had refreshed the saints in the way the apostle Paul had written to Philemon or to challenge them to make a bold commitment to God. (Personal interview - Saen Haven)

Broken in the Right Places on July 23, 1995

On this Sunday I spoke about the way God shapes us for good, even breaks us in the right places, as he did Jacob. The response I sought was that of a willing spirit to say, "Lord, I will trust you to break me for your good as well as for my own good. And, Lord, I will not be bitter about it." On July 23, 1995, we had a 10.25% response by means of the response form (8 of 78). The response song was, "I'd Rather Have Jesus." We had 89 present, with 7 in children's ministry and 4 worship leaders, leaving 78 available respondents with 8 written response forms submitted. This was the last opportunity for the attenders of the worship service to give written feed-back on *Noise Items*. By means of a pink form they were to articulate anything that distracts them from sensing God's presence in the sermon. Here are the results of the 8 response forms submitted in the three categories: ●**Physical noise items:** can't see-0, can't hear-2, other people-1, I'm sick-0, I'm exhausted-0, service length-5, space for comments ●**Psychological noise items:** stress-3, health concerns-2, hurt feelings-0, world disasters-0, the economy-1, the Bills game-1, space for comments ●**Spiritual noise items:** disobedience-0, bitterness-0, no fellowship-0, no

devotions-1, lack of love-1, not witnessing-0, space for comments. Various items were mentioned such as, "The cologne that others have on gives me a headache;" "The video cameras distract me;" "I have stress and health concerns;" "The chorus time has too many songs;" "The raising of hands by some people bothers me;" One person wrote, "Pastor Dave's positive outlook always is appreciated. Pastor Dave is able to help me forget the *noise* and be glad to be in the house of our Lord." Other comments were: "Children in the worship service bother me, and Pastor Dave has us turn to too many Bible references. By the time I find the passage, he is moving on to another one." (Personal interview - Joseph and Sarah Paltiel)

Nothing But the Truth on July 30, 1995

On this Sunday I spoke about God's requirement that a prophet is to speak nothing but the truth in the name of the Lord (1 Kings 22:16). The response I sought was that each believer present would place one hand on a Bible and say, "I will seek God's truth, his whole truth, and nothing but his truth, so help me God," and that each believer would encourage the pastor/prophet to boldly speak God's truth regardless of the consequences. **On July 30, 1995, we had a 14.28% response by means of the response form (13 of 91).** The response song was, "Have Thine Own Way, Lord." We had 113 present, with 16 in children's ministry and 6 worship leaders, leaving 91 available respondents with 13 written response forms submitted. This was the last opportunity for attenders in the worship service to give written feed-back on the design of the *Response Form*. By means of a yellow form they were to articulate any final design changes they would like to see in the shape of

the response form to be used each Sunday in August and September. Here are the results of the 13 response forms submitted in the five categories: ●**Emotionally I respond with:** conviction-8, joy-7, fear-0, space for comments ●**Intellectually I respond with:** a question-2, a defense-0, a promise-8, space for comments ●**Physically I respond by:** coming to the altar-1, saying *amen* etc-6, space for comments ●**I respond in my attitude by:** embracing a new vision or outlook on life-7, enlarging my concept of friend or neighbor-3, space for comments ●**Additional Comments with:** Share any thoughts you have on how Pastor Dave might design this response form to be more user friendly --- plus thirteen blank, double-spaced lines. Here are some of the comments: "Make sure there are enough sharpened pencils in the pews for us to use;" "Keep the blank lines available --- this gives room for individual responses which is what this is all about;" "My response to the sermon will be different every week depending on what the text is calling me to do. As long as there are some blank lines on the form I will be able to share my response;" "Sometimes God speaks in different ways so my response is different. Sometimes I feel moved to tears while other times I am convicted to do something like write a letter or visit someone as a service. I feel blessed by learning something new from God's Word;" "My response often goes beyond Sunday. When I make a decision, I subsequently carry it out. At times it is a clarification of my thoughts or understanding of doctrine or scripture. Finally, my attitudes and daily choices in life change." "Be sure to include a box for confusion." Brad Wager came to the altar with a commitment for baptism. Joseph and Sarah Paltiel came to the altar

to thank God for being with them in a breaking experience. Twelve people placed their hand on the Bible and said, "I will seek God's truth, his whole truth, and nothing but his truth." (Personal interview - Ken Steward)

The Power of a Promise on August 06, 1995

On this Sunday I spoke about promises and God's search for believers, especially men, who would be promise keepers in Jesus' name with the courage to lead their homes and the church by making and keeping their promises to God and others. The response I sought was for men to come to the altar with a commitment to attend the September 8-9 "Promise Keepers" seminar on men's groups in local churches or with a commitment to the development of a men's group at Bethel Baptist Church or with a commitment to pray for a men's group at Bethel. On August 06, 1995, we had a 12.22% response by means of the response form (11 of 90). The response form was green, and the response song was, "We Pledge to Live as Godly Men." We had 110 present, with 14 in children's ministry and 6 worship leaders, leaving 90 available respondents with 11 response forms submitted and 4 of them had additional comments. This was the first Sunday with the finalized response form. Here are the results of the 11 response forms submitted in the five categories: ●**Emotionally I respond with:** conviction-3, repentance-3, joy-5, thankfulness-7, fear-0, anger-0, space for comments ●**Intellectually I respond with:** a question-2, a plan-1, a defense-0, a decision-5, a promise-5, confusion-2, space for comments ●**Physically I respond by:** coming to the altar-3, tears of joy-4, saying

"amen" etc-5, taking action as outlined-0, ●**I Respond in my attitude by:** embracing a new vision or outlook on life-5, enlarging my concept of friend or neighbor-2, clarification of my doctrine or theology-6, space for comments ●**Additional Comments:** "I appreciate the modern day stories or meanings that go along with the scriptures;" "I will be following through upon my promises and commitments made to God, family, church, self, and friends;" "I have no real response to this particular sermon; but I expect to be responding to specific promises in the weeks ahead." Eleven men came to the altar in response to the invitation for men to come to the altar to pray for the development of a men's ministry at Bethel or to support such a ministry when it does begin or to commit to attend the September 8-9 Promise Keepers seminar to be held in Buffalo on how to begin a men's ministry --- seven men actually attended the seminar. Fifteen women came to the altar in response to the invitation for women to pray for the men in God's call for them to begin a men's ministry at Bethel and to spiritual responsibility. There were tears of joy on faces throughout the entire congregation. (Personal interview - Kent and Leah Wrapper)

Entering His Rest on August 13, 1995

On this Sunday I spoke about surrendering control of our lives to Jesus who promised rest to those who would come unto him and take his yoke upon themselves. The response I sought was for individuals to physically drop a metal key into a bucket, to spiritually surrender control of their lives and specific issues to Christ, and/or to accept Christ as savior and demonstrate it through baptism. On

August 13, 1995, we had a 19.79% response by means of the response form (19 of 108). The response form was gray, and the response song was, "We Want to Enter Your Rest." We had 131 present, with 17 in children's ministry and 6 worship leaders, leaving 108 available respondents with 19 written response forms submitted and 10 of them had additional comments. Here are the results of the 19 response forms submitted in the five categories: ●**Emotionally I respond with:** conviction-6, repentance-5, joy-5, thankfulness-14, fear-0, anger-0, space for comments ●**Intellectually I respond with:** a question-3, a plan-7, a defense-0, a decision-10, a promise-6, confusion-1, space for comments ●**Physically I respond by:** coming to the altar-3, tears of joy-3, saying "amen" etc-9, taking action as outlined-5, ●**I Respond in my attitude by:** embracing a new vision or outlook on life-13, enlarging my concept of friend or neighbor-1, clarification of my doctrine or theology-6, space for comments ●**Additional Comments:** One of the respondents wrote, "I am pleased that the sermons have returned to the original way I remember Pastor Dave speaking. Upon Pastor's arrival at Bethel, his services were *larger than life* and very dynamic. They made me think and react more. In the past year or two I have sensed a change in the sermons and the congregation. I enjoyed Sundays, but Pastor almost seemed stifled or held back. Since these response reports I have seen a definite return to the old style of speaking and communicating. I enjoy the service more. I like the direct style and the way the Pastor makes a point. I liked the use of the keys too." Some other comments were: "I liked the visual aid of the yoke;" "He is in control of my life;" "I am

trusting God to ease the burdens in my life and help me take his *yoke*;" "I will be more accountable to Christ --- I will seek other men to share my walk;" "A couple months of questionable health has produced a brokenness in me which has led me to a new understanding of God's promises, leading and rest along with his faithfulness;" "I feel conviction to follow God's tugging at my heart and renewed encouragement to follow God's design for my life. Also, I thought that having the sermon earlier in the order of service was beneficial. It was easier to concentrate and listen to the sermon." Each individual was given a metal key when entering the sanctuary. During the response time, if they were willing to let God have full control of their lives, they were asked to drop the key into one of the Kentucky Fried Chicken buckets being dispersed by the ushers. If they were willing to release control of a specific situation or issue, they were asked to bring their key to the altar and drop it in one of the buckets on the table. If they were interested in accepting Christ, or in being baptized, or in joining the membership of Bethel Baptist Church, they were asked to hand their key to me. If they were determined to maintain control of their own lives, they were asked to take the key home with them. Only one person took the key home or lost it; no one personally handed a key to me; 11 people came to the altar and dropped their key in one of the buckets; and the remaining 96 dropped their key in one of the buckets as it passed in front of them. Keven Under, Saen Haven, and Brad Wager were baptized during the morning service, and there was genuine rejoicing at Bethel. (Personal interview - Dan and Mary Bright)

Giving Glory to God on August 20, 1995

On this Sunday I spoke about Abraham's faith in God's promise which caused him not to waver in unbelief but rather to give glory to God because he was convinced that God was able to perform his promise. The response I sought was a visible expression of thankfulness and confidence in God and his promises. **On August 20, 1995, we had a 13.18% response by means of the response form (12 of 91).** The response form was golden rod, and the response song was, "We Give You Praise!" We had 111 present, with 14 in children's ministry and 6 worship leaders, leaving 91 available respondents with 12 written response forms submitted and 7 of them had additional comments. Here are the results of the 12 response forms submitted in the five categories: **●Emotionally I respond with:** conviction-4, repentance-6, joy-6, thankfulness-7, fear-0, anger-0, space for comments **●Intellectually I respond with:** a question-0, a plan-3, a defense-0, a decision-1, a promise-6, confusion-1, space for comments **●Physically I respond by:** coming to the altar-1, tears of joy-4, saying "amen" etc-8, taking action as outlined-2, **●I Respond in my attitude by:** embracing a new vision or outlook on life-6, enlarging my concept of friend or neighbor-3, clarification of my doctrine or theology-5, space for comments **●Additional Comments:** "Today's sermon was down to earth teaching with understandable examples from the Bible regarding messages of God for our benefit. It was a heart warming revelation for clearing up a simple discretion;" "I am doing just as you ask, dear Lord---being gentle, not being so critical---using more self-control---being thankful in all things;" "I am encouraged that God can

give life to the dead. Nothing is impossible with God. I will send a card to Dean to thank him for his testimony at the altar today and to encourage him;" "I feel comforted by God's commitment to me and love for me despite my lack of worth;" "I praise God with joy for his caring and provision for all my needs plus many blessings I don't deserve. He loves me in spite of my inadequacies. Help me to cease from complaining and thank you, Lord." During the response time I used a traveling microphone while individuals poured out praise and glory to God. It was an emotionally powerful experience with unbelievable joy and many tears. Mr. and Mrs. Dan and Mary Bright came to the altar to publicly praise God for his leading in a situation with their daughter; and Dean Winter came to the altar to ask God and Bethel to forgive him for continually complaining. He pledged that he would take up his ministry gift. (Personal testimony - Dean Winter)

Beseeching God on August 27, 1995

On this Sunday I spoke about Jesus who promised that the one who asks will receive, the one who seeks will find, and the one who knocks will have the door opened within the framework of seeking first the kingdom of God and his righteousness. The response I sought was for each respondent to take a Susan B. Anthony silver dollar from the offering plate as a meaningful symbol of turning to God with needs and wants. I also asked for a few volunteers to come to the altar and ask me for some money (\$10, or \$20, or \$50, or \$100) as a demonstration that Christ will keep his promise. **On August 27, 1995, we had a 64.28% response by means of the response form (63 of 98).** The response form for this Sunday was

salmon, and the response song was, "God Will Make a Way." We had 122 present, with 19 in children's ministry and 5 worship leaders, leaving 98 available respondents with 63 written response forms submitted and 11 of them had additional comments. This was the first Sunday the response form had the *corner fold-down feature* with these four corner choices: asking, seeking, knocking, other. *Asking* was folded down on 20 forms. *Seeking* was folded down on 27 forms. *Knocking* was folded down on 10 forms. *Other* was folded down on 5 forms. Here are the results of the 63 response forms submitted in the five categories:

- **Emotionally I respond with:** conviction-16, repentance-5, joy-10, thankfulness-23, fear-0, anger-0, space for comments
- **Intellectually I respond with:** a question-9, a plan-14, a defense-0, a decision-22, a promise-9, confusion-2, space for comments
- **Physically I respond by:** coming to the altar-2, tears of joy-7, saying "amen" etc-25, taking action as outlined-15,
- **I Respond in my attitude by:** embracing a new vision or outlook on life-29, enlarging my concept of friend or neighbor-12, clarification of my doctrine or theology-6, space for comments
- **Additional Comments:** "Good;" "Asking God correctly;" "We need to ask God and seek him;" "I really enjoy the message early in the service --- my mind isn't cluttered with other thoughts;" "This brings back God's answers in the past and even yesterday. God is good and faithful. I am going to trust him more;" "Sometimes I just expect God to know my needs, so I forget my responsibility to ask him to meet my needs." I gave a reverse offering on this Sunday. I bought 134 Susan B. Anthony silver dollars and had the ushers pass the offering plates with the silver dollars in them

during the response time. All each person had to do was ask for one of the silver dollars by putting a response form in the offering plate and taking out a Susan B. Of the 98 people, 63 asked God and received. I also had 4 children below the seventh grade in school walk to the altar and ask me for a \$10 bill which I gave to each one. Then 8 youth in grades seven through nine walked to the altar and asked me for a \$20 bill which I gave to each one. (This was possible only because some \$20 bills were passed to the front by various men.) In the next age group I limited the response to the first one to walk to the altar and ask me for \$50. Erin McNary was that first one. I promised a \$100 bill to the first adult who would come to the altar and ask me for it; Tom did. During the singing of the closing hymn Bonnie Jo Snelling came to the altar with Sarah Paltiel, one of the Deaconesses. (Personal interview - Erin McNary and Bonnie Jo Snelling)

Profiting in His Trust on September 03, 1995

On this Sunday I spoke about Jesus' parable of the talents with the focus on his praise of the ones who realize a profit from that which has been entrusted to them and how he offers them even greater opportunities in the future plus the privilege to enter into the joy of the Lord. The response I sought was for each respondent to see God as the giver of good gifts and to demonstrate it by bringing a plastic building block to the altar where I would build a red cross on a yellow boat in the blue water surrounded by green grass. I also had the ushers distribute flyers to each respondent that they could use to invite others to the Jeremiah People on September 12th at Bethel Baptist Church. On September 03, 1995, we had a

12.50% response by means of the response form (11 of 88). The response form for this Sunday was ivory with two corner fold-down choices: "I won't bury God's trust," or better still, "I will multiply God's trust." We had 108 present, with 15 in children's ministry and 5 worship leaders, leaving 88 available respondents with 11 response forms submitted, and 8 of them had additional comments. The *I won't bury God's trust* corner was folded down by 3 people. The *I will multiply God's trust* corner was folded down by 4 people. Here are the results of the 11 response forms submitted:

- Emotionally I respond with:** conviction-4, repentance-1, joy-7, thankfulness-6, fear-0, anger-0, space for comments
- Intellectually I respond with:** a question-1, a plan-3, a defense-0, a decision-4, a promise-7, confusion-1, space for comments
- Physically I respond by:** coming to the altar-2, tears of joy-3, saying "amen" etc-5, taking action as outlined-3,
- I Respond in my attitude by:** embracing a new vision or outlook on life-5, enlarging my concept of friend or neighbor-3, clarification of my doctrine or theology-5, space for comments
- Additional Comments:** "I will respond by accepting a task where I can use my spiritual gift;" "This sermon was a confirmation and reminder of God's truth;" "I am glad I had a red block so that I was a part of the cross itself in the project. The cross means so much to me;" "I was overwhelmed because it seemed like everyone brought a block to the altar;" "I will faithfully pray for Bethel to work together in building God's church;" "I will make better use of the talent God has given me;" "I will challenge others to discover their spiritual gifts and use them in Christ's service;" "I am so thankful I have learned enough to trust. My mother was called

the richest woman in the world, but had barely enough to exist. I will try to be like her;" "I responded with both conviction and affirmation. I am applying this in my new assignment at work and am beginning to be joyful, hopeful, and fruitful again at work. I know there are other areas in my life where I need to diligently apply this truth." Upon entering the sanctuary everyone was given a plastic block. During the response time I invited everyone to give back to God the block he had given to them in the following order: green, blue, yellow, red. As they came to the altar with their block and handed it to me, I constructed a red cross on a yellow raft in a blue sea with green grass all around it. There was a powerful sense of oneness and unity. People were buzzing with the corporate oneness that became a reality through the giving back to God of each separate part. I failed to allow sufficient response time for completing the response forms before I began to call for the plastic blocks. Thus only a few people had an opportunity to fill out a written response form. (Personal interview - Caren Karr)

Meeting All Our Need on September 10, 1995

On this Sunday I spoke about the unbelievable promise of God through the apostle Paul as recorded in Philippians 4:19 in that God shall supply all our need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus. Yet, virtually all Christians tell their trusted friends of unmet needs. Why is this? When he was on earth Jesus met both physical and spiritual needs, and before he ascended into glory he charged the church to be his body on earth and to meet needs. I believe that Jesus saw pride as a powerful reason why needs were not being met and that he addressed that

pride in his example of washing the disciples' feet in the upper room. In the sermon on this Sunday I addressed the issue of pride, the pride that refuses to admit having a need as well as the pride that refuses to meet the need of another, in fulfilling God's promise to meet all our need in Christ Jesus. I also addressed the difference between needs and wants. I noted the difference between what we consider our needs to be and what God considers our needs to be. In helping the respondents focus on the issue of pride I used Jesus' example of washing the disciples' feet. I had the ushers distribute one new towel to each pew of people. I asked each person to accept the towel, hold it for a few seconds and say, "I will wash their feet," before passing the towel to the next person. When the towels reached the end of the pew, I asked each person to accept the towel on the way back, hold it for a few seconds and say, "I will let them wash my feet," before passing the towel to the next person. Then I had the people use the response forms by folding down one of the two fold-down corners: either "I will wash your feet," or "Please wash my feet." Then I challenged any man who felt led of the Lord to come to the altar and let me actually wash his feet. My realistic mind-set told me that in a Baptist church no man would come to the altar and let the pastor wash his feet. Yet, God is always ahead of me. Mr. Garold Millner removed his shoes and socks and came to the altar where I washed his feet. The washing of Garold's feet at the altar on Sunday, September 10, 1995, held some of the most tender moments I have ever experienced at God's altar in any church I have been in throughout my life time. On September 10, 1995, we had a 31.68% response by means of the

response form (32 of 101). The response form was white with two corner fold-down choices: "I will wash your feet," and "Please wash my feet." Twenty-two people folded down the "I will wash your feet" corner and sixteen folded down the "Please wash my feet" corner. Actually, nine folded down both corners. We had 122 present, with 15 in children's ministry and 6 worship leaders leaving, 101 available respondents with 32 response forms submitted and 24 of them had additional comments.

- Emotionally I respond with:** conviction-9, repentance-2, joy-3, thankfulness-15, fear-0, anger-0, space for comments
- Intellectually I respond with:** a question-1, a plan-3, a defense-0, a decision-10, a promise-11, confusion-2, space for comments
- Physically I respond by:** coming to the altar-1, tears of joy-3, saying "amen" etc-11, taking action as outlined-7,
- I Respond in my attitude by:** embracing a new vision or outlook on life-9, enlarging my concept of friend or neighbor-11, clarification of my doctrine or theology-3, space for comments
- Additional Comments:** I also noticed that of the 32 response forms submitted, 24 of the forms had hand-written personal notes under the heading "additional comments." That is 75%. Some of the responses were: "The Lord has supplied all my needs above all that I could ask or think;" "I am worn out emotionally and physically from caring for my mother who is old, weak, and lonely;" "I want to help two friends I have who need me and who need to know Christ better. My need is for my husband to be more active in his faith;" "I will visit the shut-ins, and I need help in getting back into a full-time schedule at work;" "Lord let me always be aware of the needs of my daughter-in-law who just lost her mother. She's now

looking to me to fill that void. Help me to meet her needs even though we're miles apart;" "I am going to serve my husband by putting his needs before my own;" "I need close relationships with other Christians. I will help with Olympian Clubs;" "This is my first time back after six weeks of illness. I needed this beautiful message that God shall supply all my need;" "I am going to encourage my neighbor who is facing severe surgery;" "I am going to offer to watch my neighbors' kids . . . as a means of showing the gospel to them. I need for others to pray for me regarding my physical health;" "I need physical, emotional, and spiritual strength for responsibilities in supporting my wife, nurturing our children, and succeeding in graduate school. I can help in a men's ministry at Bethel;" "Pastor Dave, I cannot remember a time in my life when the scriptures have been more meaningful to me or have been so powerfully presented as a channel of God's Word. My heart is filled with joy!" (Personal interview - Garold Millner)

Following Jesus on September 17, 1995

On this Sunday I spoke about Jesus' promise to make us become fishers of men if we will follow him in his way of seeking those who are lost with an emphasis on the fact that Jesus always keeps his promises. I focused on the reality that most of us most of the time are not the good, productive soil, but rather, the soil that spends its efforts on personal profits and personal pleasures. The reason that most of us are not becoming fishers of men is that instead of following Jesus we are following our own personal interests. The response that I sought was that the respondents would re-evaluate their life in relationship to drawing others to

God through Christ. On September 17, 1995, we had a 25% response by means of the response form (27 of 108). The response form was magenta with two corner fold-down choices: "I will follow Jesus," and "Love one thru me." A line of the response song was, "Lord, lay some soul upon my heart, and love that soul through me. And may I humbly do my part to bring that soul to thee." We had 131 present, with 17 in children's ministry and 6 worship leaders, leaving 108 available respondents with 27 response forms submitted, and 8 of them had additional comments. Also, 24 respondents folded down the "I will follow Jesus" corner and 20 folded down the "Love one thru me" corner. Those who folded down the "Love one thru me" corner also wrote the first name of the person God was laying on their heart to love in Jesus' name. Actually 17 of the fold-downs had both corners folded down.

- Emotionally I respond with: conviction-15, repentance-5, joy-4, thankfulness-12, fear-0, anger-0, space for comments
- Intellectually I respond with: a question-0, a plan-8, a defense-0, a decision-14, a promise-8, confusion-0, space for comments
- Physically I respond by: coming to the altar-4, tears of joy-1, saying "amen" etc-12, taking action as outlined-9,
- I respond in my attitude by: embracing a new vision or outlook on life-7, enlarging my concept of friend or neighbor-14, clarification of my doctrine or theology-5, space for comments
- Additional Comments: There were additional comments written on 8 of the forms: "I will follow Jesus in simple faith;" "I want to follow Jesus more precisely and more faithfully;" "Jesus wants me to be a fisher of men---an encourager, a care giver, to let my life be an example in what I have;" "I am praying for one person

to whom the Lord will lead me to witness - AS HE LEADS;" "Today's sermon is a clear reminder that souls cannot be won for Christ unless we are FIRST following Jesus. My commitment is to follow more closely and let Christ direct my life;" "There is much to be done in the way of sharing the good news with others in our neighborhood, in our extended family, etc. I will be available and faithful to share God's love with others as Christ opens the doors;" "There has been a struggle for control in my life --- it has been a big problem. God has shown me that I need to let go --- but I am not sure how. I want to come and follow. I pray I will become less while Christ becomes more. I pray that my fears, which I have allowed to restrict me, will be overcome;" "I guess I feel I have a lot to learn and that is a good sign. I don't feel any pressure to put notches in my belt. God saves souls, not me. I do feel the need to deepen my relationship with other people which will help to open opportunities for Christ. I am amazed at Christ's capacity to love everyone and walk with them. It hurts me to see people not walk with Christ when they could be walking in his circle of love-growth, love-acceptance, love-guidance, love-hope, etc." During the response time I distributed Billy Graham's *Steps to Peace with God* to the 20 who had folded down the corner of "love one thru me." This was "Youth Sunday" with the dedication of our youth pastor, Marcus Thieme, his team of youth workers, and all the junior and senior high youth at the altar. Various individuals who are a part of the twenty-five percent of the listeners who became the response form users expressed the appreciation for the availability of these forms. (Personal interview - Marcus Thieme and Dr. Joel Okoli)

But You Would Not on September 24, 1995

On this Sunday I spoke from Isaiah 30:1-15 about looking to other people and to ourselves instead of looking to God in our needs. Isaiah warned Jerusalem and Judah that ignoring God would result in a breaking like the breaking of the potter's vase that leaves no shard or piece big enough to dip water or to scoop up a fire and relocate it. I applied this truth to Bethel and to each one of us individually. The response that I sought was for each respondent to actually feel or experience the breaking of God when God is left out of one's life. On September 24, 1995, we had a 34.06% response by means of the response form (31 of 91). The response form was buff with two corner fold-down choices: "I would not look to God," or "I would look to God." The response song was "The Battle Belongs to the Lord." We had 127 present, with 17 in a youth function, 14 in children's ministry and 5 worship leaders, leaving 91 available respondents with 31 response forms submitted, and 11 had additional comments. Also, 28 respondents folded down the "I would look to God" corner and 3 folded down the "I would not look to God" corner. ●**Emotionally I respond with:** conviction-19, repentance-7, joy-3, thankfulness-10, fear-0, anger-0, space for comments ●**Intellectually I respond with:** a question-1, a plan-7, a defense-0, a decision-10, a promise-12, confusion-0, space for comments ●**Physically I respond by:** coming to the altar-1, tears of joy-1, saying "amen" etc-14, taking action as outlined-9, ●**I respond in my attitude by:** embracing a new vision or outlook on life-21, enlarging my concept of friend or neighbor-3, clarification of my doctrine or theology-5, space for comments

●**Additional Comments:** There were additional comments written on 16 of the forms: "I will seek God's guidance;" "I am returning and resting in God;" "I will turn to the Lord first;" "I will be going to God first - trusting Him to provide opportunities to witness to the unsaved and the grace to do it;" "I will look to God for patience with Elizabeth not to myself;" "Lord, Lord, Lord, in everything I am praying for clarity of vision;" "I will seek God's guidance;" "I will make looking to God a daily commitment from start to finish;" "I want to be looking to Jesus for everything I do;" "I pray that in all things I will ask God to work in my life's decisions, problems and joys;" "I am reaffirming my trust in Him, as I daily (moment-by-moment) thank Him, call upon Him, and know He is my everything! Praise the Lord;" "I am turning to God for every detail of my life. I will be trusting God to hear and answer every prayer. I will not be afraid to hear and respond to God's answers;" "I will trust more-and-more that He is able and willing to be victorious in my everyday life. I need to be uncompromisingly and totally committed;" "In my own strength, I continue to fail. I am now turning my problems, worries, and concerns over to Him. Instead of trying to fix things myself, I want to pray and turn them over to Him who will take care of it all. I want to be able to put my trust in Him;" "I have not been in Sunday school during the six years I have been coming to Bethel, and God has been speaking to me about this. I will begin attending Sunday school in the *Right from Wrong* class. I am taking a step forward in turning to the Lord for help to grant me more guidance and knowledge;" "It was shocking to witness the breaking of the vase, but that is exactly

what is happening to our lives because we are not putting Jesus first. These are the words that seem to be the trouble with my life---if only I would trust God completely with my life---He has given me everything I need, but I still have so many wants and fears because I am trying to do it my way, and it's not working! What will wake me up before my life is wasted?" "I was touched by the story of the man who visited you in the hospital after your head was crushed by an oncoming car and grateful that his prayers were answered. I was amused that I am not the only one who prays for green lights. I am grateful that we can call out to our Lord in all things great or small. I am trying to be patient in waiting on God and trusting Him to fulfill the desires of my heart or change the desires of my heart---I am confused concerning how to pray about this. I am hoping that our church will not be broken or become legalistic. I am grateful for these sermons that speak to each one of us individually. They have caused me to think during the week. I will pray for our church and for each member so that our vase remains intact." (Personal interview - Pastor Dave Ewing)

Fanning the Flame on October 01, 1995

On this Sunday I spoke about Aquila and Priscilla who were used of God to fan the flame of Christ in the lives of the apostle Paul, Apollos and Onesiphorus (2 Timothy 1:16 & 4:19) and by extension in all the churches of the Gentiles (Romans 16:3-4). They chose to be helpful and instructive rather than critical or holier-than-thou (Isaiah 65:5). **On October 01, 1995, we had an 18.89% response by means of the response form (24 of 127).** The response form for this Sunday was

bright blue with two corner fold-down choices: "I will fan the flame," or "I'll douse the flame." The response song was "Wonderful Words of Life." We had 147 present, with 14 in children's ministry and 6 worship leaders, leaving 127 available respondents with 24 response forms submitted, and 7 of them had additional comments. All 24 respondents folded down the "I will fan the flame" corner and 7 wrote additional comments.

- Emotionally I respond with:** conviction-14, repentance-7, joy-5, thankfulness-5, fear-0, anger-0, space for comments
- Intellectually I respond with:** a question-1, a plan-8, a defense-0, a decision-9, a promise-10, confusion-0, space for comments
- Physically I respond by:** coming to the altar-2, tears of joy-2, saying "amen" etc-11, taking action as outlined-7,
- I respond in my attitude by:** embracing a new vision or outlook on life-12, enlarging my concept of friend or neighbor-8, clarification of my doctrine or theology-7, space for comments
- Additional Comments:** "Although I feel sadness about the past, intellectually, I am willing to fan the flame in the future;" "This sermon gives me confirmation of what God has been saying to me this week;" "I hope to help Bethel become a more active church, especially in the surrounding communities;" "In my relationship with my children and husband I will make every effort to fan the flame and not quench the spirit by speaking words that build up and affirm;" "I have a habit of bringing up the past failures of others. Today I was thinking about how love does not keep account of a wrong suffered. I know that for me to speak words of life it will be necessary to speak only of that which brings life, not that which tears down. This is my prayer;" "I want my words to bring life especially to those

living with me in my home, namely, my husband and children. I am surrendering this area of my life to the Holy Spirit asking him to prompt me and help me speak only words of love and encouragement. I have failed miserably in this area and have brought death to others in my family. I pray and ask the Lord to change this area of my life. Help me, O Lord, to change one day at a time;" "I plan to be aware of using positive statements that will build up and praying for protection from negative comments that may come to mind and to shake them off. Small or indirect words of discouragement given consistently may be more harmful than one big bucket emptied all at once. I hope that Bethel will grow in love and not become holier-than-thou. I pray for courage and guidance in using loving words directly when disagreeing rather than resorting to gossip." (Personal interview - Aquila and Priscilla Foster)

The next page is a summary table tabulating in raw numbers the responses recorded on the response forms received from July 16, 1995, through October 01, 1995. Three items are deleted from the response form. These three items had no indicated response by anyone. These items were: "fear" and "anger" in the area of emotional response plus "a defense" in the area of intellectual response. I am surprised that no one marked these three items. I am delighted that about one third of the listening congregation continued their use of the response form on a regular basis. On February 11, 1996, thirty-one response forms were written on, corners folded down, and over \$2,500 worth of special giving commitments were made through the use of the pink response form.

CATEGORY/DATE	Jul 16	Jul 23	Jul 30	Aug 06	Aug 13	Aug 20	Aug 27	Sep 03	Sep 10	Sep 17	Sep 24	Oct 01
RESPONSE FORM TITLE AND TEXT	Rubicon Philimon	Broken Gen 23:10	Truth 1 Kings 22	Promise 1 Peter 1:3	Rest Mat 11:28	Praising Rom 4:50	Asking Mat 7:7-11	Profiting Mat 15:21	Needs Phil 4:19	Follow Mark 1:17	But You 11:30:1-15	Fanning Acts 18:26
% OF RESPONSE	16.2%	10.3%	14.3%	12.2%	10.8%	13.2%	64.3%	12.5%	31.7%	25.0%	34.1%	18.9%
FOLD DOWNS	Form Dev.	Form Dev.	Form Dev.	Not Yet	Not Yet	Not Yet	63	7	38	44	31	24
EMOTIONAL	"	"	"	(18)	(30)	(23)	(54)	(18)	(29)	(36)	(39)	(31)
Conviction	"	"	"	3	6	4	16	4	9	15	19	14
Repentance	"	"	"	3	5	6	5	1	2	5	7	7
Joy	"	"	"	5	5	6	10	7	3	4	3	5
Thankfulness	"	"	"	7	14	7	23	6	15	12	10	5
INTELLECTUAL	"	"	"	(15)	(28)	(11)	(56)	(16)	(27)	(30)	(30)	(28)
A Question	"	"	"	2	3	0	9	1	1	0	1	1
A Plan	"	"	"	1	7	3	14	3	3	8	7	8
A Decision	"	"	"	5	10	1	22	4	10	14	10	9
A Promise	"	"	"	5	6	6	9	7	11	8	12	10
Confusion	"	"	"	2	2	1	2	1	2	0	0	0
PHYSICAL	"	"	"	(12)	(20)	(15)	(49)	(13)	(22)	(26)	(24)	(20)
Came to the Altar	"	"	"	3	3	1	2	2	1	4	1	2
Tears of Joy	"	"	"	4	3	4	7	3	3	1	1	2
Saying "Amen" Etc.	"	"	"	5	9	8	25	5	11	12	14	11
Action as Outlined	"	"	"	0	5	2	15	3	7	9	9	7
ATTITUDE	"	"	"	(13)	(20)	(14)	(47)	(13)	(23)	(26)	(29)	(27)
New Vision/Outlook	"	"	"	5	13	6	29	5	9	7	21	12
Enlarging Concept	"	"	"	2	1	3	12	3	11	14	3	8
Clarifying Doctrine	"	"	"	6	6	5	6	5	3	5	5	7
COMMENTS	"	"	"	(4)	(10)	(7)	(11)	(8)	(24)	(8)	(11)	(7)

Discussion Groups

This discussion group is the third method of measuring response to God's presence in the Sunday morning sermons I delivered at Bethel Baptist Church in Getzville, NY, July 16, '95 through October 01, '95. The first method was the video summations; the second method was the response forms; the third method was the discussion group responses; and the fourth method was the personal interviews. I wanted my McMaster ministry base team, known as the Mac Five, to serve as the weekly discussion group, but the five were not able to commit to twelve weeks of meetings during the summer, vacation season. It was finally acceptable for me to use the 9:00 A.M. Sunday school time-slot with the faithful adult members of my regular Sunday school class as the base group. The other adult Sunday school class was invited to join us as were all adult members of the Bethel Baptist Church congregation. At first, the other adult Sunday school class declined my invitation; but after it reconsidered, it joined with us beginning August 06, 1995. The pressures of the normal Sunday school program prevented me from using Sunday, July 16, 1995, and Sunday, October 01, 1995. The mid-week children's ministry had scheduled an adult orientation work-shop with the Word of Life representative, Jack Rice, during the Sunday school hour on Sunday, August 20, 1995. Thus, we were able to meet for only nine of the twelve weeks. We started on Sunday, July 23, 1995, skipped Sunday, August 20, 1995, and finished on Sunday, September 24, 1995. Our average attendance was 17.5 throughout the summer weeks.

Broken in the Right Places on July 23, 1995

During the forty-five minutes of this first week of the response group format, Sarah Paltiel and Annie Shepherd role-played Jacob and Esau from Genesis 25:27-34, where Jacob took Esau's birthright in exchange for a serving of stew. One of the key lines by Jacob was, "There's no free lunch, brother." One of the main ideas discussed was, "You should have cared more about the precious things such as your birthright than you did for a serving of stew." Because it was the first week, we did not respond to the message from the previous week; rather, we prepared for the message we would hear that day. We chose the role play method although Bonnie Jo Snelling was uncomfortable with it. Attendance = 10.

Nothing But the Truth on July 30, 1995

During the forty-five minutes of this second week of the response group format, we had some personal sharing of our response to God's Word in last week's message. The most moving account was given by Joseph and Sarah Paltiel about the lost of her job at Mercy Hospital on Wednesday, when her entire department was liquidated. They shared how God had given them his words of comfort, "Broken in the Right Places," just three days before their emotional survival depended on it. They emphasized the importance of the word picture illustration of going over the waterfall or dam and trying to swim away from the current rather than going with it and resurfacing a few yards down stream. They said, "Pastor, we need the powerful pictures." Then we again used the role-play avenue of expression for the message we would hear that day. The class felt positive about the role-pay

format. They expressed it this way, "Preparing beforehand helped us to better hear God speak in last week's sermon. Let's do it again." In role-playing the text, Joseph Paltiel was King Ahab, Dean Winter was King Jehoshaphat, Annie Shepherd was Micaiah Ben Imlah, Sarah Paltiel was Zedekiah, and the others played the part of the false prophets. Everyone participated with enthusiasm and said they were looking forward to the sermon to follow. Attendance = 11.

The Power of a Promise on August 06, 1995

We were joyously surprised by the other adult Sunday school class entering our room by a last minute change of mind. These folks were more traditional and older in age than the original group, and it was decided to not use the role-play method. It was encouraging to have them join with us and to have a large class. We discussed our various responses to last week's challenge during the response time which was to place one hand on a Bible and say, "I promise to seek God's truth, his whole truth, and nothing but his truth, so help me God!" Some said it happened too fast for them to have a chance to respond because they thought at first I was being rhetorical. This taught me to be explicitly clear about the expected response. Some said they didn't have their Bible with them. Some said they were taught to never take an oath and did not feel right about taking an oath at church. This taught me to realize that the response that sometime seems like a lack of response comes from well grounded teaching in the past. Some questioned, "If we find it so difficult to stand up for Christ at church in the midst of other Christians, how will we ever stand up for Christ out in the world?" Then some shared that

they had responded positively on the inside although their personalities prevented them from responding outwardly. The discussion was so lively and participated in by so many that we had no time left to look at the text for that day on God's precious promises.

Attendance = 23.

Entering His Rest

The well attended group was truly enthused by last week's response at the altar, when eleven men and fifteen women came forward in response to God's Word during the sermon. The men had come forward to promise to be servant leaders in their homes and church, to pray and work for a men's group to develop at Bethel, or to sign-up to attend the September 8-9 "Promise Keepers" seminar on how to develop a men's group in a local church. The women had come forward to promise either to pray for the men of Bethel or to confirm a personal promise with the Lord. Others said that they had also responded inwardly but found it too difficult to respond outwardly. Some said they were confused by the complexity of the invitation that was first for men and then also for women with various aspects to the invitation. This taught me to keep the response request as simple as possible so as not to confuse anyone. Jon Runner said that he was not ready to make a public commitment to the "Promise Keepers" movement because he had some unanswered questions about "Promise Keepers". I clarified that the invitation was not to join "Promise Keepers"---that I had just used "Promise Keepers" as an illustration and a training resource. Others said they too were afraid to respond

due to the "Promise Keepers" association. This taught me that although some people want to respond, they might not due to assumed fears about associated relationships. We had a lengthy discussion on the essence of the "Promise Keepers" movement, and I promised Jon Runner that I would supply him with several sources of information about the "Promise Keepers" which I did that week. Wanda Runner shared with us about a single, female visitor (Debbie) who had sat next to her in last week's worship service. Debbie had expressed her concern about male dominance in the "Promise Keepers" and maybe in Bethel. Wanda was challenged; and yet, felt that she had responded to Debbie in a positive way as did several other ladies. Again we ran out of time to consider the text for that day. Attendance = 22.

Giving Glory to God on August 20, 1995

This was the mid-week children's ministry team's adult orientation with Jack Rice from the Word of Life's Olympian Clubs. The Bethel Board of Christian Education wanted to help inform at least some of the parents of the children before committing to the Word of Life Ministry Group. Attendance 23.

Beseeking God on August 27, 1995

During the response time in the worship service on August 20, 1995, I used a traveling microphone to provide people with an opportunity to give glory to God. There had been a joyous and sometimes tearful response from several individuals. It had been an uplifting experience. The praise time had gone into a prayer time,

when Dan and Mary Bright came to the altar requesting prayer for the meeting with their estranged daughter to take place that afternoon, August 20, 1995, and Dean Winter had come forward to confess to the congregation and to God that he had failed to give glory to God in his own personal life, his family life, and his church life. He asked the congregation to forgive him for being critical of Bethel Baptist Church, for failing to be active in the evangelism ministry team of which he is the coordinator, and for aggressively seeking to enrich his life in all areas except the spiritual area. After a time of general sharing about last week's unbelievable responses, I led in a discussion time on the text for that day, August 27, '95. There was consideration of how to differentiate between asking, seeking, and knocking. There was concern for seeking first the kingdom of God and His righteousness with a devotion of belief in the fact that God is able and willing to grant our requests unless our requests violate his Word and his will. What I learned is that people not only enjoy being listened to, as we did last Sunday with the traveling microphone, but also that they respond more fully when they believe they are being heard. In his book, *Right from Wrong*, Josh McDowell says that trying to teach truth without a relationship leads to rebellion not growth. Listening to the listener is a part of relating. Attendance = 18.

Profiting in His Trust on September 03, 1995

We had a lively and jubilant discussion of last week's response time when I gave \$10 bills to four children below seventh grade level who in faith came to the altar and said, "May I have that \$10 bill?" This was repeated for eight children in

grades seven through nine with a \$20 bill. I did not have that many \$20 bills with me, but some men in the congregation instantly sent up the needed amount to give to each young teen who came to the altar and said, "May I have that \$20 bill?" I had limited the senior high teens to the *first* person to respond by coming to the altar and saying in faith, "May I have that \$50 bill?" Then I had offered a \$100 bill to any adult who would come to the altar in faith and say, "May I have that \$100 bill?" Both the \$50 bill and the \$100 had been asked for and received. The discussion centered around God's generosity and unlimited supply and the childlike faith of all the kids . . . they believed my promise and didn't worry about the limited supply. Royce Smith made the comment that he believed that those kids would never forget last Sunday for as long as they lived. Several people noted how beautiful it was when some of the adults stepped out in generous faith with the extra money to help me keep the promise. None of this money came from the church budget. We then discussed the Matthew text for that day on the talents as to what a talent was, why Jesus gave different amounts to the three individuals, and their attitudes toward God. Attendance = 16.

Meeting All Our Needs on September 10, 1995

As the group shared, it became clear to all that the most amazing aspect of last week's response time was the totality or virtually 100% of participation by the congregation in supplying the individual building blocks to build a sample cross. Everyone had personally received a lego type plastic building block upon entering the sanctuary. There were four different colors. During the response time I asked

those who had been entrusted with a block to bring it to the altar by color, beginning with the green grass, then the blue water, then the yellow boat, then the red cross. The overwhelming, full participation of everyone bringing up their lego block, working together, doing their part generated a spirit of enthusiastic revival and joyous praise. Some comments were, "Could you believe that almost everyone actually got up and took a block to the altar?" "Wow! Even some people we would never had expected took a block to the altar!" "Praise God. There is hope for Bethel when we all pitch in together." Then in preparation for the text of the day, Philippians 4:19, some of the following questions were raised, "How do needs and wants differ?" "Who defines *need*, God or man?" The group felt there had to be some qualifiers to this promise of God. One person said, "We may feel we *need* good health, but God's greater purpose to fulfill Romans 8:28-29 may be to allow our illness." Attendance = 20.

Following Jesus on September 17, 1995

The group began by discussing last week's response to God's Word in the sermon with an emphasis on foot washing, because most of them had never seen a footwashing before last week, when Garold Millner had come to the altar to let me wash his feet. Most of the group focused on pride as the hindrance to admitting our needs, so that God can meet them through the church, and as a hindrance to the humble, sacrificial meeting of the needs of others. Joseph and Sarah Paltiel shared how God had humbled them during the Persian Gulf War in Kuwait, when they lost everything and had to depend on God, through Christ's

Church, to meet their needs. This naturally led into the discussion of the Mark 1:17 text for the day, where Jesus asked Peter, Andrew, James, and John to leave absolutely everything, to follow Him in the process of becoming fishers of men. A lively discussion ensued on what level and nature Christ expects us to be fishers of men! Attendance = 21.

But You Would Not on September 24, 1995

The group had a difficult time discussing last week's response time probably due to the topic of following Jesus so as to fish for people's souls. The group was virtually silent. I found it slow going in getting a discussion started. I mentioned that 20 people had turned down the corner of their response form "love one through me" and had written the first name of someone they were going to try to lead to Jesus. Yet, most of the people in the discussion group had not done so and many had difficulty in thinking of someone's first name in their circle of acquaintances who didn't personally know Christ as Savior. Annie Shepherd shared how convicted she was that she couldn't think of a name. Everyone with whom she had shared an invitation flyer to the Charles Colson film by World Wide Pictures was already a Christian. Marsha Lively encouraged Annie with an example in her own life as did Ned Lively. As believers we often get so involved with other believers that we don't even know one nonbeliever on a personal basis. We then talked about the Isaiah text in an effort to understand the contextual background for the sermon of the day. The people of Israel, as recorded in Isaiah 30, were having difficulty trusting God although they found it easy to trust in themselves and

in Egypt to save them? Time ran out as it does every week before we were ready to dismiss. Attendance = 17.

The Personal Interviews

On page thirty-three I explained the methodology related to the personal interviews. Finding individuals who truly responded to God's presence in a particular sermon and then securing their willingness to give an interview was an awesome challenge. I was amazed by the responsiveness and willingness of all the individuals who shared their personal experience. No pressure methods were required; in fact, the reality was just the opposite as the double interviews of August 27, 1995, and September 17, 1995, reveal. I observed and recorded all the names of those who displayed an obvious response such as coming to the altar. During the week I would contact one of the respondents or one of the respondents would contact me. In some cases a third party made the connection. Along with the joy of finding willing respondents came the delight of the interviews themselves.

Crossing the Rubicon on July 16, 1995 with Saen Haven

This interview was recorded on Tuesday evening, August 22, 1995, at Bethel Baptist Church in Getzville, New York. Saen and his wife, Cara, had been attending Bethel's worship services for more than three years. A few years ago Saen and Cara relocated to Buffalo from the Binghamton, New York, area to study at the university. Now Saen was graduating as a physical therapist from New York State University at Buffalo. He and Cara would be relocating to Pennsylvania in

mid October to begin his practice there. Cara is a nurse. We watched a twenty-minute video summation of the sermon, "Crossing the Rubicon," with the congregational response of eighty people coming to the altar to get a "thank you card" to write to someone. Saen walked to the altar in public commitment to be baptized.

Saen, how did you experience God's presence in the sermon on Sunday morning, July 16, 1995?

I saw the Rubicon as an irreversible decision concerning my baptism that I had been looking at for a long time. I had been standing on the banks of my Rubicon long enough. It was our wedding anniversary, the Spirit of God was present, and the issue was clear to me that God wanted me to make this decision to be baptized. It was time for me to be more than a receiver. It was time for me to say "yes" to God and become a giver. Everything was coming together at that moment---my graduation, our anniversary, my entry into the work force as a therapist, our imminent relocation, and God's Spirit saying, "Do it now!"

What did this decision mean to you at that time?

For me it was a declaration of war against the worldly, less desirable part of me. I had long been a Christian. I accepted Christ as savior twenty years ago. It was time to say to Satan, "I'm on Christ's side!" There was a lot of imagery. I figuratively saw a river flowing down the aisle. This was an irreversible decision. This was a "going public" for me. I was declaring to the whole world, that Christ was going to be more than savior for me; Christ was going to be my lord in the

future. I would no longer be underworld "C.I.A." because everyone must know.

Saen, you followed through with your decision to be baptized and were baptized on August 13, 1995, your birthday. Do you think that you will ever forget the sermon "Crossing the Rubicon?"

No, I never will! I have heard a lot of your sermons, but this one is different. I will never forget this one. It was just an overwhelming Spirit presence. I truly felt it. My heart said, "Saen, you have been sitting on the banks too long. Declare war. Go across this river and fight the enemy."

Broken in the Right Places on July 23, 1995
with Joseph and Sarah Palteil

This interview was recorded on Sunday afternoon, August 13, 1995, at Bethel Baptist Church in Getzville, New York. Joseph and Sarah had been attending Bethel's worship services for five years now. I can still see them walking up the sidewalk to Bethel on that fateful, first Sunday of August 1990, when the Persian Gulf War had just broken out. They had been living in Kuwait for fourteen years at that time, were in America on vacation, and had airline tickets to return to Kuwait on August 03, 1990. They were never allowed to return. They lost absolutely everything: their computer business, their jobs, their possessions, and their bank accounts. They were both born in India: Joseph was born in 1933 and Sarah in 1942. Their marriage took place in India on June 07, 1965. They have three children: Lori, Borus, Kirstin. All three live in the United States of America. Over time they united with Bethel Baptist Church as members, where Joseph serves

as mission board chairman and Sarah serves as a deaconess. We watched the twenty-minute summation.

Joseph and Sarah, how did you experience God's presence in the sermon on Sunday, July 23, 1995? How did God connect with you in that sermon?

(Sarah) Pastor, when you talked about "breaking", the concept that caught my attention was, "Breaking in the right places." I was painfully aware of breaking, and your sermon took me back five years to the Persian Gulf War in which we lost everything. What God was saying to me in your sermon was, "Sarah, let me break you in the *right places*." I had never thought of such a thing before. That was a very fascinating part for me. The second concept that caught my attention was that of going over the dam, plunging into the maelstrom, and naturally struggling to get away from its downward pull. The breaking that takes place when we struggle to get away is not God's breaking in the right places. If we will stop resisting and go down with the pull, the current will soon bring us back up to the surface. Pastor, that was a powerful illustration for me. That stuck with me and really came alive for me during the week. Those thoughts spoke to my heart as a beautiful illustration that I might use in the future.

(Joseph) The primary thought coming to me at that time was family. Jacob ran away from his family. God gave me enough time to reflect on that. When he was at a point where he was afraid, God intervened. It taught him a lesson. God could have easily overpowered Jacob in that wrestling match. The insight God gave to Jacob was that God is here. From that point on Jacob knew that his life was not

in his own hands, but in God's. Many thoughts went through my mind during the sermon. I was remembering back a year and a half to my open heart surgery, when I had not finished my will for the family. My concern was for my family and that I may not return from the surgery. I had peace about my relationship with God and I wanted to set my house in order for the family's sake. Your illustration of going over the dam was a very good illustration of life. If only we would rest in God and relax.

Did you continue to respond to God's word in the sermon after Sunday?

(Sarah) On Monday and Tuesday there were rumors at Mercy Hospital where I work. Then on Wednesday I was called to come to the hospital. That is when I phoned you and a few others to stand in prayer for fear that I might lose my job. I was the last one to arrive at the meeting. I was shocked to be told that my entire department was being dismissed in an effort to reduce costs. I was just not ready for this. Two people came to me, hugged me, and told me I was being let go. I burst out crying. I didn't want to. But I burst out crying. The pain was truly beyond anything I could bear. It was really a breaking pain. I rambled on how in Sunday's sermon the pastor preached about being broken in the right places. It was then that God's wisdom came through your illustration of going over the dam, and I began to share with the others how we should rest in God who would see us through the pain. Over and over that week I shared parts of your sermon with many others about being broken in the right places. Today, I am still searching for what are the right places.

(Joseph) As the news of Sarah's job loss spread around I realized that we could possibly be leaving New York in search of work. The passage about the Spirit of the Lord hovering over you came into my mind as though the Lord was protecting us from all sides. This was happening to seventy families. In that situation it was as though God was saying, "I'm with you." This was echoed by many of the people we talked with over the phone. The people reached out to us in love from Bethel Church, Koinonia, and even the hospital administrator, as they shared their love for us in saying, "If you need anything, please tell us." Actual gifts, money, food, clothing etc. were offered. This helped us say, "Yes," to God in letting go of everything. That intense time of testing exhausted us. And yet, especially this particular sermon helped us get through a tough time of testing. It sustained us. God wanted us to take nothing for granted. We found peace and had peace through God's providence in giving us that sermon and that special illustration of going over the dam just before it happened to us.

What are you learning from God in all of this?

(Sarah) We had no idea this sermon was just right for us until eight positions were eliminated at the hospital. Then they offered one position to replace the eight. One by one the hospital offered the one position to various individuals. One lady called me to say that she was declining the offer so that God could give it to me. Then they offered the job to me. I was advised by some to not take this position. In the 1990 Kuwait experience God convinced me that He would provide for us which freed me from materialistic grabbing. In this experience God was

breaking me from listening to other people more than listening to Him. God said, "Hear Me."

(Joseph) I thought that I would have to close down my own company. So I updated all my accounts and took them to the accountant who said to me, "You've got all these problems and yet I see so much peace on your face --- how do you do it?" This gave me an opening to talk to him about what my faith is. No matter what happens, I have God's presence in me and nothing else matters. God is calling me to be a witness to those around me so they might see how God provides for us even as He breaks us in the right places. Your illustration of going over the dam or last week's yoke are powerful. They stay with us.

Nothing But the Truth on July 30, 1995
with Ken Steward

This interview was recorded on Sunday afternoon, August 27, 1995, at Bethel Baptist Church in Getzville, New York. Ken and his wife Betty had been attending Bethel's worship services for more than ten years. Their daughter, Deborah, was in college, and their son, Dan, was a senior in high school. In April 1994 I had the personal joy of being with Ken in the Four Seasons restaurant when he invited Jesus Christ into his heart and life. Ken is a tree trimmer who has the good health to be outside in all kinds of weather. Although Ken has not come to the altar in worship nor has he written on a response form, he does respond to God in the Sunday morning sermons. Ken called me on the evening of August 14, 1995, to tell me that God had made a difference in his life because he had listened to

God speak in one of my Sunday morning sermons. It really made my day. A few days later we set August 27, 1995 to do an interview.

Ken, how did listening to the Sunday morning sermon affect you in your daily life?

The other day my brother and I were cleaning up a job on Cleveland Drive in Cheektowaga where we had trimmed a tree with branches hanging out over a lady's swimming pool. After lunch, two elderly ladies stopped on the other side of the street. One of them got out and came over to us asking directions. They had lost their bearings and were confused. The more I tried to give her directions the more she seemed to be confused. It just wasn't sinking in. I remembered what you had said in your sermon when you spoke about going with somebody who was lost to guide them to where they have to go even if it is not convenient. We had two trucks there and we each had to drive one. They wanted me to get in their car to drive them to where they wanted to go. So we did it. It took about thirty minutes. And then we had to come back for the other truck.

What caused their problem to become your problem? Why couldn't you just walk away from their problem?

I should say it more often than I do that God reminds me of the words in your sermons. This time he reminded me of your words about going out of the way to help someone by conviction even when it is not convenient. I didn't know how my brother was going to react because it was a hot day and he doesn't like hot weather, but I still spoke up and mentioned the words of your sermon. My brother

was happy to go ahead and do it.

Ken, do you have any regrets because you responded to God's word?

No, I don't have any regrets. It actually made both our days. The ladies were ecstatic! It also made my brother glad we did it. Your sermon sure helped.

The Power of a Promise on August 06, 1995
with Kent and Leah Wrapper

This interview was recorded on Friday, August 18, 1995, in the home of Kent and Leah Wrapper in Getzville, New York. We viewed a twenty-minute video of the sermon and response of August 06, 1995. Kent and Leah are in their late twenties with two children: Kent Lyle Jr. and Kathy Lou. Kent is a professional counselor with teenagers and Leah is a school teacher. Leah grew up in Bethel Baptist Church and Kent has been with Bethel since his early teen years. They both know Jesus Christ personally with a deep dedication to the Lord and their local church. During the response time of August 06, 1995, eleven men came to the altar to do one or more of three choices: 1- attend the September 8-9, 1995, "Promise Keepers" seminar on men's ministry for the local church, 2- show commitment to participation in a men's fellowship group at Bethel, 3- pray for the forming of a men's group at Bethel including the men in items 1 and 2. Fifteen ladies came to the altar to show commitment to pray for these eleven men and for the forming of a men's group at Bethel. Both Kent and Leah came to the altar that Sunday morning in response to the message, and Kent attended the "Promise Keepers" seminar with six other men from Bethel.

Kent and Leah, how did you hear God speaking to you in the sermon on Sunday, August 06, 1995?

(Kent) The whole concept of promises spoke to me especially as you tied it into the seven promises of a "Promise Keeper." Last year I read the book, *The Seven Promises of a Promise Keeper*, and the one promise that spoke to me the most was the promise made to the local church in being faithful and following through on commitments. On August 06, 1995, I was called to be a person of commitment as I serve in my local church. I was also being called to attend the seminar with the hope of forming a men's group at Bethel.

(Leah) Primarily I was saying an "Amen" to what God was doing in calling the Bethel men to take up responsibly for servant leadership. The call to pray for these men and all the men of Bethel in the area of servant leadership is what brought me to the altar. I was also dealing with some anger for those people at Bethel who refuse commitment to help or serve or lead at Bethel. In addition I was seeking God's peace about Kent's extensive commitments to God at Bethel.

In what way did God's speaking to you concerning promise keeping go beyond Sunday morning?

(Kent) I have continued to hear God's call to promise keeping during these past two weeks and have especially tried to encourage other Bethel men who tend to hold back from commitment in service at Bethel, men who often complain about things while doing nothing themselves. I have tried to encourage them to rise up to a new and higher level of saying, "Ask not what your church can do for you, but

rather, what you can do for your church."

(Leah) I shared with Aquila and Priscilla Foster, who were absent that morning, what happened at Bethel on Sunday, August 06, 1995, and what Kent and I were doing in response to God's Word. I know that "Promise Keepers" is something that Kent, Aquila, and Pastor Marcus have talked about in the past. (See interview #14 with Aquila and Priscilla Foster who came to the altar for church membership on October 01, 1995.)

In what other ways have you responded to God's Word on August 6, 1995?

(Kent) I talked with Dean Winter at length about this because he has been talking about leaving Bethel Baptist Church. I asked him to consider doing something at Bethel to make it better, rather than running to another church that will have problems of its own. I hope that he will take it to heart. (See interview #6 with Dean Winter who came to the altar on Sunday morning, August 22, 1995, to confess his sin of neglectfulness concerning the things of God and to ask the people of Bethel to forgive him.)

(Leah) Actually, we were out of town camping that weekend, but we came home for Sunday, and I am really thankful we did. I try to share with others my desire for the Bethel men to take responsibility in serving God rather than complaining. I pray about it a lot. Whitney and Annie and I pray about it all the time. This is really on my heart. I am concerned about this more than I like to admit, but it is so essential.

Entering His Rest on August 13, 1995
with Dan and Mary Bright

This interview was recorded on Tuesday, August 29, 1995, at Bethel Baptist Church in Getzville, New York. We viewed the twenty-minute video summation of the August 13, 1995, sermon, "Entering His Rest," and the congregational response which included the baptism of three. Along with ten others Dan and Mary had come forward to place a key on the altar as an act of surrender to God's will in a specific area of their life. One person took the key home and six people dropped their key in a bucket by the exit door as a sign that they did not wish to yield to Christ's control. All the others placed their key in the buckets as the ushers passed by. This indicated that in general they wished to surrender to Christ's control in their life. Dan and Mary have attended Bethel's worship services for more than fourteen years. Dan was baptized here at Bethel nearly twenty years ago. They have two daughters, Josephine and Caroline, who both left home to attend college.

What were you hearing from God and responding to in the sermon on Sunday morning, August 13, 1995?

(Dan) As you know, Pastor, about a year ago we had some problems with our older daughter, Josephine, which wounded our faith. It was very difficult to deal with. We even found it difficult to come to church. This summer we have renewed trials with Josephine of a more serious nature, but this time our faith is deepened. Your illustration of a woman going through child birth with the compassionate yoke of the labor-delivery nurse was so helpful to us. This time we

are letting Christ take it upon himself to help us with the yoke of his counsel. By coming to the altar with the key we symbolically turned over the control of how to deal with and relate to Josephine.

(Mary) I pretty much had the same feeling as Dan did. I have grown in giving this situation over to God. He can watch over her and be with her all the time, and I am just learning to trust that. It has been a time of growth. I do still struggle with God being in control and yet allowing Josephine to have her free will. God keeps saying to me, "Trust Me."

How did God's word to you and your response go into the next week?

(Dan) Well, as you know, we were unable to get together with Josephine as we had hoped following our counseling session with you. Either her work schedule or ours or something else prevented our getting together to talk about these latest problems. However, since we had taken the symbolic key to the altar and turned this situation over to Christ, we had peace about the delay in scheduling with Josephine. And I believe that the Lord's time to meet with Josephine was after we came forward the following week on August 20, 1995, when we asked the congregation to pray for us in our meeting with Josephine that Sunday afternoon of the 20th.

(Mary) That was a very personal experience for both of us. It strengthened us to see how many people cared for us in prayer. It gave us a great deal of help. We felt like singing, "Onward, Christian Soldiers."

(Dan) We got things out in the open, and we kind of understand each other

without war. Josephine has an open invitation that we are willing to discuss any topic with her at any time under any circumstances. She is living in a very dangerous neighborhood, and the Lord has assured me that he is going to protect her from predators.

Do you have the sense that God sometimes speaks through a sermon on Sunday morning at Bethel Baptist Church?

Undoubtedly. The beautiful thing about being a Christian and the totality of God is that he can speak to as many different situations and as many different people as there are ears open to hear---all at the same time. One aspect of his Word can go forth and minister to dozens of people and situations all at once.

How did you decide to come forward to put the key on the altar?

(Mary) Actually, I think Dan decided and he turned to me and said, "Should we go up and put our keys in?"

(Dan) In our whole relationship we have worked with one another. Usually we have been behind something together and went forward with it. If one of us goes off in the wrong direction, the other picks up the slack in helping us stay on course. The two illustrations you used --- #1 If we reject the advice of the labor-delivery nurse we will suffer, and #2 The apparent incongruous statement of "Take My yoke and have your burden lightened" were very helpful.

Did you share anything about this message, what it meant to you, and your response with someone outside of Sunday worship?

(Mary) I have a good friend at work who is a Christian. We pray for each

other at work. She came to me and asked, "Mary, how are things going?" I turned to her and said, "Everything is now in God's hands." I didn't mean that I have no other choice. It is the best place in the world for this situation to be---in God's hands.

(Dan) The more we mature in Christ, the more we learn and the more we realize we need to be teachable. I do not think I shared anything about this other than with you and one or two others because of the nature of the problem itself.

Giving Glory to God on August 20, 1995
with Dean Winter

This interview was recorded on Tuesday, August 22, 1995, in the home of Dean Winter at 296 Londonderry Lane, Getzville, New York. Dean and Joyce Winter, who have been with Bethel Baptist Church two years, are in their thirty's, and have one teenage daughter, Tanja, and one pre-teen, Tara. They immigrated to the United States from Jamaica eighteen years ago. Joyce is now a pathologist at Roswell Park Cancer Institute and Dean is systems manager for the School of Medicine at State University of New York-Buffalo. They both came to know Jesus Christ as their personal savior, growing up in Baptist churches in Jamaica where they were baptized. All four of the Winters are exceptionally healthy, intelligent, good looking, achievers in a wide range of areas. Dean had been talking and acting out to his Bethel friends his dissatisfactions with Bethel Baptist Church and his possible intentions of leaving Bethel. However, on Sunday morning, August 20, 1995, during the worship service that was centered around Abraham's unwavering

praise of God with the theme of "Giving Glory to God," Dean came to the altar to confess to God and to the Bethel congregation. He asked to be forgiven for failing to give glory to God at all times, for complaining, and for failing to develop his spiritual life within himself, his family, and his church. He promised to activate the evangelism ministry team of which he is the coordinator.

Dean, will you share with me how you heard and felt God's presence in the sermon on Sunday morning, August 20, 1995?

I am stimulated intellectually. As I listened to how Abraham's faith was tested and how he proved it, I realized that I was not experiencing Abraham's kind of faith in my life. I thought it was a result of fear with a touch of laziness. At Bethel I am in a new environment where I have made an intellectual commitment to the body but not a physical commitment of self to the body. I complain about not getting a warm or reciprocal friendship from the body. Before I talk about my response to God's speaking in Sunday's sermon on August 20, 1995, I want to say that the message, "Crossing the Rubicon" on July 16, 1995, plus this Sunday's role-play in Sunday school about the heart transplant with gossip and blasphemy caused me to be more prepared than usual. Your picturing of Abraham's faith caused me to realize that I was not demonstrating that continuous faith that gives glory to God. My gossiping and complaining about things not being done correctly at Bethel and the lack of new blood coming into Bethel was on my mind. God brought to my mind that verse that says gossiping is like witchcraft. God told me that I have been complaining but not doing. God brought the example of King Saul

and the witch of Endor to my mind. I was getting more from your message than you were preaching. The Spirit was saying, "Dean, you are going down the slippery path." I became very convicted which put me in a quiet zone. I realized that I would have to come to the altar publicly because my complaining was public. How could just a simple message about complaining be so strong and so convicting? It was because that was something I was doing. It was something the Lord wanted to root out of my own life. It struck home to me!

Dean, is there anything else you would like to say about your response to God's speaking in Sunday's sermon.

I tell you! I am really excited about going out and doing evangelism because now I know that it is the Lord who wants me to do it. It is not of self. Also, when we get back from vacation I want to share this testimony with others so they will know how I have been washed by the spirit from complaining, to let them know my vision for myself as a Christian and how I fit into the Church as a missionary of the Church. Actually, this decision was like being baptized, like crossing the Rubicon. This may shock you, but, a greater weight has come off my shoulders than when I got saved. I have been released to talk to anyone in the Church. I committed a great sin for which I am sorry and now I have been cleansed. This is just as exciting as when I got saved. In fact, that was the only other time in my life when I felt this good.

Dean, do you think that you will ever forget the relationship between idolatry, sexual immorality, and criticism?

As a matter-of-fact, no. Never! I sometimes complain even at my present job that we prayed so hard to get. During the sermon God was shouting to me, "Dean, I have provided a job, you complain; I have provided a church, you complain; I have provided a wife, you complain; I have provided a house, you complain. What more can I do!" Yes, I remember the triple demons of idolatry, sexual immorality, and criticism. God has used you to make a difference in my life because this is something that has plagued me for eighteen years. Ever since I have come to this country eighteen years ago, I have done nothing but complain. Every church I came to, I complained. God has said, "Dean, this is a new page!" This is what I want to tell the church. This is going to be the Dean that is going to be an encourager. This is the Dean that is going to talk to you and ask you, "Did you share Jesus with your friend?" This is the Dean that is going to say, "Look, you say that the church is dying. What have you contributed? Have you shared? Do you want to help share? Will you help build the church?" When I hear the complaints I will say, "Look, I have been there and this is what the Lord did to me? This is why I can now tell you that this is not the way to go."

Beseeking God on August 27, 1995
with Erin McNary

This interview was recorded on Thursday afternoon, August 31, 1995, at Bethel Baptist Church in Getzville, New York. Erin is a seventeen year-old high-school student who had been attending the Bethel Baptist Church worship services for six years with her younger sister, Barb, and her parents, Clinton and Sharon.

Erin excels in everything from her private devotions to academics, to her Olympic development soccer team of America's northeast division. During her elementary years Erin attended Christian Central Academy where her father teaches sciences and physical education. She now attends Williamsville South High where her father is the coach of the girls varsity soccer team on which Erin and Barb are both key players. Erin was in the worship service on Sunday morning, August 27, 1995, when I developed Jesus' concepts, "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you--- but seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you." During the sermon I referred to Susan B. Anthony's request that women be given the right to vote. That request was granted on August 26, 1920, several years after Susan's death. During the response time I distributed Susan B. Anthony silver dollars by having the ushers pass the offering plates from which each worshiper could take one as a sign that in faith they were going to be asking God to grant their requests. Those who were not going to be looking to God to meet their needs were instructed to not take a Susan B. Anthony silver dollar. Erin took one of the silver dollars. Then I invited the children younger than seventh grade level to act in faith by coming to the altar to ask me for a ten dollar bill. Hesitantly four children came one-by-one and asked, "May I have that ten dollars?" I had intended to say, "The first one to come in faith," but I mistakenly said, "Anyone who comes." This got me in deeper than I was prepared because I had only three ten dollar bills with me. I gave ten silver dollars to the fourth one. Then I challenged the junior high kids

(grades 7-9) to come in faith and ask me for a twenty dollar bill. Wow! Altogether, I gave out eight twenty dollar bills. I had only two twenty dollar bills with me, so I had to tell some of the kids to see me after the service, when they would each one get a twenty dollar bill. However, men in the congregation kept passing up twenty dollar bills so that each one received a twenty dollar bill at the altar. Then I challenged the senior high youth by saying, "The first young person to come to the altar in faith and ask, 'Pastor Dave, may I have that fifty dollar bill,' will receive it." Like a shot Erin was the first one to the altar. Then I challenged the adults with a one hundred dollar bill and Tom, who has many hospital bills, came to ask for it and received it. All this was a never-to-be forgotten picture.

Erin, as freely as you can, will you share with me what you heard God saying to you and how you responded on Sunday morning, August 27, 1995?

I was responding to the sermon, but the Holy Spirit was clearly working through the sermon to reach me. The verse where it says "ask, seek, knock"---I had never thought of it on three different levels. I never really took time to think about what each of them meant. For me the big thing was that I have to have faith because without faith I am not going to ask, I am not going to seek, I am not going to knock. The thing that hit me the most was asking because I will be going off to college next year. I need to decide which colleges I will apply to, and when I am accepted, which college I will attend. I also need to decide whether I will play soccer and how the scholarships will apply. I pray for all those things daily. I believe it is important to ask God about these things. I also ask God about my

future husband. The seeking applies to which college I'll attend because I'm not sure. Knocking will be getting accepted or not getting accepted as God opens or closes the doors. When you passed the plates with the Susan B. Anthony coins, I responded by folding the *asking corner* on the response form because it convicted me again that I need to be continually praying every day for these things. Later at home I made a list of these things I will be praying for every day including the people I am praying for to open the door of their heart to Christ.

Erin, what are you planning to major in at college?

I have narrowed it down to medicine as a doctor or surgeon. Pharmacy is still an option, but being a doctor or surgeon is first in my mind. I enjoy science and biology and the personal aspects of medicine. I may even be a missionary doctor. Soccer will be a part of it because it will help pay for college. Each college's rate of getting their graduates accepted into medical school is also important.

Erin, can you share about coming to the altar to ask for the fifty dollars?

My first instinct was, he will offer this only for the younger kids. Then you got to the junior high and then to the high school and I went, "Oh!" At that point I went up by instinct. After I sat back down I realized that I had not been able to go on the youth mission trip this past year because we went on family vacation, and I was also in debt to my parents for the mission trips of the past two years. I also wasn't sure about next summer's mission trip because of the time and the money. When you offered the fifty dollars it seemed like God was opening a door in my

mind. I said, "Here is the opportunity, the first fifty dollars towards next summer's mission trip." I do not want to spend the money just on myself because I would feel guilty if I did that. The mission trip touches so many other people's lives too.

Erin, after you left church did this message live on with you and does it still live on with you in such a way that you will always know that you can ask God for things?

Yes! Although I already knew that I could ask God for things, this brought it to my awareness in a more detailed, real-life way. During my devotions the next morning, I began to make a list of the things that are important to start asking God for. In my devotions yesterday, my booklet had a poem about God opening doors for a person who was ignoring them. When he got home, there was a package for him from God, and he opened it thinking there would be some big test to do, but when he opened it, it was empty. So God was really bringing this truth home to me for life.

Beseeching God on August 27, 1996
with Bonnie Jo Snelling

This interview was recorded on Tuesday afternoon, September 12, 1995, at Bethel Baptist Church in Getzville, New York. Russ and Bonnie Jo Snelling have been attending the Sunday morning worship service at Bethel Baptist Church for ten years now and have been members for eight years. Their thirteen-year-old son, Charles, attends with them and is delightfully happy with our junior-high LOGO group. They all know Jesus Christ as their personal savior. Russ, who has served on the Trustee Board and as an usher, is a design engineer and loves photography.

Bonnie Jo is a computer specialist with Carborundum. Bonnie Jo was in the worship service on Sunday morning, August 27, 1995, when I developed the concepts of "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you---but seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you." During the sermon I referred to Susan B. Anthony's request that women be given the right to vote. That request was granted on August 26, 1920, several years after Susan's death. During the response time I distributed Susan B. Anthony silver dollars, by having the ushers pass the offering plates from which each worshiper could take one as a sign that in faith they were going to be asking God to grant their requests. Those who were not going to be looking to God to meet their needs were instructed to not take a Susan B. Anthony silver dollar. Bonnie Jo took one of the silver dollars and later, just before the benediction, came to the altar for prayer with Sarah Paltiel, one of the deaconesses. After greeting the people as they left the sanctuary, I came back to the altar to pray with Sarah and Bonnie Jo. In my office on September 12, 1995, we watched the twenty-minute video summation.

Bonnie Jo, during the sermon on Sunday morning, August 27, 1995, what did you experience with God?

We have been struggling in our relationship with Charles who is trying to become independent at the age of thirteen. Attitude is a big problem. We have been dealing with him as though he is in the wrong by saying, "What's wrong with you, Charles?" But my heart has been telling me it isn't totally Charles' problem.

I remember being that age with all the hormones. Two weeks before your sermon I heard about a book by Valerie Bell, *Getting Out of Your Kids' Faces and Into Their Hearts*. I went to Bender's Christian Supplies and bought their last copy. Then in your sermon, when you told how you prayed for your children throughout the years giving specific examples, I was convicted that we have not been doing that for Charles. The only times we go to God for Charles is when we have a crisis. Your sermon point on "seeking" for God's wisdom and guidance caused me to realize that we have not been asking God for guidance on a regular basis. We have not been seeking his wisdom on "how" to handle Charles during his teenage years. Now, Russ and I need to seek God in this together. Yes, Charles does need to change his attitude. But also, we need to change how we talk to him. Some of the little things just aren't worth the arguing.

Bonnie Jo, were there any other ways in which God's hand was in all these things from the crisis with Charles to the Dobson radio program to the book?

We had been away so much this summer, but God knew that we needed to be in church Sunday, August 27, 1995, for your sermon on asking, seeking, knocking. It amazes me that we were in the sanctuary by ourselves. My parents were not in worship that Sunday, and Charles was outside at the picnic shelter helping the men get the BBQ ready. I would not have come to the altar if my parents or Charles had been sitting with me in worship. (After the worship service, Charles Snelling and Homer Cherry came to me asking about the twenty dollars I had given to all the junior high young people in the worship service who had asked

asked me, "Pastor Dave, may I have that twenty dollars?" After quizzing them on why they were not in the worship service, summarizing the sermon, and hearing them ask, I gave each of them a twenty dollar bill.)

Bonnie Jo, why did you cry throughout the entire service?

That was the first Sunday that I was not conscious of the video cameras. Crying is not new for me. But Russ was concerned because I cried throughout the whole service from the time you shared how you prayed for your children from their early years on up. I just kept crying. I went through the kleenex I had in my purse. I went through the kleenex in Russ' pocket. I went out to the ladies room and got more kleenex. I just kept crying about this. I couldn't control it. That day God was talking to me on an issue I just had to deal with. I had been noticing the video cameras on other Sundays so as not to go to sleep or whisper to Russ. But that Sunday, I just didn't even see the video cameras. All I could think about was how God wanted me to be more understanding of what Charles is going through as an early teenager. Will I be willing to listen to Charles, to hear his viewpoint without forsaking what's right and without crushing Charles?

Profiting in His Trust on September 03, 1995
with Caren Karr

This interview was recorded on Tuesday morning, September 12, 1995, at Bethel Baptist Church in Getzville, New York. Barry Karr grew up in Bethel Baptist Church, and Caren came into the fellowship about fifteen years ago when she was dating Barry. They now have two children, Dawson, age ten, and Becky, age

nine. Barry is a mechanical engineer and Caren is a teacher's aid at Maple Elementary School in the Williamsville School District. Caren is attending night-school with the goal of earning a bachelor's degree. "Fastball Barry" is the pitcher-coach of Bethel's men's softball team and the captain of Bethel's men's bowling team. I am active on both of these teams. Caren also served as church treasurer for Bethel Baptist Church for five years. I can still remember that lovely summer evening six years ago at one of our softball games at Christian Central Academy, when I first asked Caren to consider serving as the Bethel Baptist Church treasurer. Barry has served on the trustee board and with the AWANA ministry. Caren has also served with the AWANA ministry and with the children's ministries during the Sunday morning worship service. On Sunday, September 3, 1995, Caren was in attendance during the worship service and came to the altar with her blue building block in response to the invitation to help build a plastic cross. Each individual had been given a small building block (green, blue, yellow, red) as they entered the sanctuary for worship. The message was on the talents (5, 3, 1) where God entrusted stewards with his gifts. When the stewards acted in faith to increase the talents given to them, the owner's talents were doubled and the stewards were rewarded with more trust and the joy of the Lord. We watched the twenty-minute video summation.

Caren, can you share with me how God spoke to you through the sermon on Sunday morning, September 3, 1995, and how you responded?

In general I take messages more intellectually than emotionally. I was really

interested in the message last Sunday because it was on the talents. That caught my intellectual attention. I liked hearing a different view of what it meant to be trusted with a talent and use it for profit. The building blocks said to me that the whole church has to work together by contributing each little part in order to get the whole job done to build the church. This was not something new to me, and yet, I gave a true response to this fresh way of bringing it all together from that passage. I liked the idea of coming to the altar to give my building block to show in a different way how everyone has to help if the church is to be built. This solidified my theology on how everyone is valuable and important.

Caren, since the message that Sunday morning about ten days ago, has there been anything specific that brought this message back to you or made you think about it?

At the time of the message I was applying it only to the church. Then yesterday, in science class at school, there was a taped interview on video about taking care of our bodies and nutrition. You had talked about God entrusting all kinds of things to us such as our bodies. You told us about the Mickey Mantle story. So, during the seminar on nutrition the idea came back to me that God gave me my body, and I should be taking care of it. The man in the video was seventy-eight years old.

Caren, have you done anything with the Charles Colson flyer for the World Wide Film showing coming up at Bethel Baptist Church?

When I got the flyer on Sunday morning, I said, "Yes, I should do this." I

guess I have been around a lot of over-bearing Christians in my life who have turned off most of my family. I met a lot of people who said to me, "You're a Baptist? But you're normal." So I focus my life on, "Actions speak louder than words." It might not be right or wrong and it may be a copout for me in one respect because I do not have to talk about my faith. And yet, it sometimes works better than words. People who are close to me know my faith. Giving a flyer is not a hard thing to do.

Any last things?

I think a change of attitude can be internal. It may change the way I do things in the future when a situation arises that calls for it. It is there waiting to be used. My sister said, "Who you are at home is who you are." This makes me think about how I behave outside of my home versus how I behave at home. Also, I felt no peer pressure to come to the altar last Sunday. I was doing it because I wanted to do it. I wasn't emotionally touched to come up. I came up more to confirm what I felt intellectually regarding the message.

Meeting All Our Need on September 10, 1995

Garold Millner

This interview was recorded on Thursday afternoon, September 21, 1995, at Bethel Baptist Church in Getzville, New York. Garold and Nellie Millner have attended the Sunday morning worship service at Bethel Baptist Church for the past ten years. In fact, they were baptized here by their dear friend, Pastor Edward Warmer. Their first-born, Nicolle, who lives in Ohio with her husband, is the

mother of two. Their second-born, Paris, who lives at home with Garold, has his degree in computer science and heads up his own company. Nearly three years ago Nellie sat up in bed with a startling, "Wow!" before suffering with a fatal brain aneurysm. Garold's personal faith in Christ, his rich fellowship in KOINONIA of Western New York and Southern Ontario, and his meaningful employment as a high school chemistry teacher have helped him throughout this time. The only way to fully appreciate the richness, the energetic life of Garold Millner, is to spend some time with him. The beauty of Jesus is certainly evident. Garold attended the September 10, 1995, worship service at Bethel Baptist Church when the sermon opened the question of why almost all Christians express unmet needs, while the Bible says in Philippians 4:19 that God will supply all our need. Needs and wants were contrasted. Needs in our eyes were compared to needs in God's eyes. Our personal pride was considered in that it hinders us from admitting that we have needs and also hinders us from humbly helping God meet the needs of others. We focused on Jesus' example of washing the disciples' feet where Peter said, "Not my feet!" and where Jesus took off his outer robe to kneel down and wash their feet even as a slave would do. I supplied one towel for each pew, and as it was passed along, each person was to hold the towel in hand and say, "Yes, I will wash their feet." Then as the towel was passed back from one person to the next, each one was to hold the towel again and say, "I will let them wash my feet." Then I explained that although some groups like the Grace Brethren have actual foot washing services, Baptists do not physically wash each other's feet. Then I asked

if some man, any man, from the congregation would be willing to come to the altar and let me actually wash his feet in a sacred moment. I truly believed that no one would come to the altar; yet, there he came---Garold Millner.

Garold, were you a plant? Had I arranged this with you in advance to come to the altar for the footwashing?

No! Not at all. God got me up there!

Garold, what were you hearing in the sermon on Sunday morning, September 10, 1995, at Bethel Baptist Church and how did you respond?

The two things that struck me were how you talked about the needs that Jesus had. They were not necessarily things to satisfy himself but things he needed to do for other people. I was thinking about a need that I have and that's the loneliness that I have felt for almost three years now since Nellie died. Friends are one thing, but that intimate friendship is gone, that shared companionship. Nellie met a need, and I will never get her back. Yet, it is a need that Jesus eases although he can't replace Nellie. That is what I was thinking about mostly during the sermon. Then when you gave the offer to come to the altar and have my feet washed. I thought, "I'm willing to be vulnerable and let Christ know that I do have this need for intimate companionship."

Garold, in the process of having your feet washed by the Pastor at the altar on Sunday morning, did that in anyway address your need?

Yes, a quiet came. Some of it was the realization that this is always going to hurt and will always be there, but so will he. There was a peace and a quiet

calm that came over me while you were washing my feet. And I felt good.

Garold, what did you do with the response form right after the sermon but before the footwashing?

When you handed out the response form, the first corner I folded down was about my needs---the "I will let someone wash my feet" corner. Later, I was thinking about my son-in-law, Kelly. There is a need there that I can meet. I was thinking of a spiritual need. Then I folded down the other corner---the, "I will wash your feet," corner.

Garold, did God's Word in the sermon go with you into the week?

Well, at the end of that week, Nicolle called to say that they had just spent \$120 on medicine and would I be able to help them out financially. The need I had been thinking of on Sunday was Kelly's spiritual need. But here was an immediately, financial need they had, and I was glad to send them a check and help them out a little. Then at the "Promise Keepers" weekend seminar, the Lord laid it on my heart, that when we have another convention I must get Kelly to attend, and Paris too. Kelly is also being worked on by a man in Cleveland who had separated from his wife but through "Promise Keepers" has been reconciled with his wife.

Garold, did you share with anyone after the service about the sermon?

Yes, I did. Mainly, after the service during the coffee fellowship time people were asking me if having my feet washed was a hard thing to do. And I said, "No, it was not a difficult thing for me." I did feel good about it. I was

responding to God in it. Later I shared some about it with my daughter, Nicolle. Also, on Saturday, I shared it with my KOINONIA brothers. I also shared it with Joseph and Sarah Paltiel when I had dinner with them because they had missed church on September 10, 1995. I will always see you standing there wondering if anyone will ever come up to the altar to have his feet washed. It would never have occurred to me that a foot washing would happen at Bethel Baptist Church. I came to the altar because God called me to come. Now I am praying for everyone at Bethel to have their feet washed. Why not?

Following Jesus on September 17, 1995
with Dr. Joel Okoli

This interview was recorded on Sunday afternoon, October 08, 1995, at Bethel Baptist Church in Getzville, New York. Dr. Joel Okoli has resided in the United States of America for twenty-one years. Dr. Joel and his wife, Obiageli, were born and raised in south central Nigeria, where Christianity is actively followed and Western education is highly honored. Dr. Joel is a graduate of Yale University Medical School and has practiced emergency medicine and surgery for more than eight years and is now in the third year of his cancer surgery fellowship with Roswell Park Cancer Institute of Buffalo, New York. The Okolis have four children: Ngozi, Chidi, Chika, Chioma. Chidi is the only son. I remember Chioma's birth. Dr. Joel and Oby are both vibrant, born-again Christians who love the Lord Jesus, pray with genuine fervor, study the Scriptures diligently, and share their faith openly. Dr. Joel serves on Bethel's Deacon Board as coordinator of the

prayer ministry team and teaches one of the adult Sunday school classes. Without even thinking of it many of us refer to Dr. Okoli as Pastor Joel. Dr. Joel is one of six men, myself included, who have met for six years every Wednesday morning at six o'clock for sharing and prayer. He is also one of the five members of my McMaster ministry base team known as the Mac five team who encourage me in my Doctor of Ministries studies at McMaster Divinity College. Oby, a graduate in biochemistry from a university in Nigeria and mother of four, is a student at State University of New York in Buffalo. This is a delightful family. Dr. Joel was also one of the camera men doing the video work from July 16, 1995, through October 01, 1995, here at Bethel Baptist Church in relationship to my thesis project. He was in attendance on Sunday, September 17, 1995, at the back camera which was focused on me throughout the sermon and response time.

Dr. Joel, will you share with me any dynamic going on between you and the Lord during the sermon and response time on Sunday morning, September 17, 1995?

It actually started with the reading of that passage which I have heard several times and have read several times. I began to dialogue with God and sort of put myself in the place of Andrew, Peter, James, and John who were busy doing their job, their means of livelihood. There were other people with them who were fishermen. And then Jesus just came along and said, "Come, and follow Me." I basically started to wonder what that command means and even more importantly I wondered about their response, the way it was put "They left everything

immediately and followed Him." I was thinking about myself at Roswell if God would say, "Joel, follow Me." I recalled my own acceptance of Jesus Christ as my personal savior about twenty-five years ago. I heard him knocking on the door of my life desiring to enter into my heart if only I would open the door and let him come in. At that time he actually gave me the same command "Come, and follow me." Back then there was a difference. I did not leave everything. I was a student at that time. I did not stop going to school so as to go to a seminary. All these thoughts were racing through my mind and I really began to have tremendous respect for Andrew, Peter, James, and John. They demonstrated a kind of faith and trust that was willing to leave everything with no questions asked. James and John did not say "Well, Dad, listen, I mean, Jesus is asking us to follow Him. Can we think about it before we go to follow Jesus?" They just followed him. Literally, I did not do exactly what they did, but I began to think "How can I apply this same principle? We sing the song 'All to Jesus I Surrender.' How can I apply this same principle to my life?" Jesus wants all of me, not part of me, but all of me, completely, totally. I kept up a dialogue with him even while I was listening to you explain that he may not be asking me to leave whatever I am doing to follow him. I can follow him and allow him to control every aspect of my life which has been my perspective. Even though I rationalize that I am following him, I still have a special element of respect for those disciples who left everything. It is easy for me to say that I am doing the same thing. It is not really the same. So the question I was asking myself was "How can I do better? How can I follow him

totally? How can I arrive at that place where I know that medicine is second in my life, that being a doctor is something secondary not primary---that my primary calling is to follow Jesus. How can I do this? Then I realized that Jesus said, "Come, and follow me and I will make you a fisher of men." It was kind of like a trialogue with three people talking: God and you and me. A trialogue was going on. It was almost like a battle. I was thinking "How can I apply this to my life? (I was hearing you say that Jesus does the making. He will make me a fisher of men if I have the desire, the sincerity, the confidence in him to say, 'Although I do not know what this entails, I want to follow you and I am willing to follow you. I am going to trust you to make me what you want me to be, to transform me. Lord, you know my heart. You know my heart is ready to follow you.'" That is basically what it came down to --- how I resolved the question. There was a change in the orientation in my life when I accepted Christ as my personal savior. Before then I wanted to become a doctor because I excelled in science. That was the purpose. But when I became a Christian I wanted to be a doctor to serve Christ, to follow him, as a way of serving him and doing whatever he wants me to do. And I have seen that happen in my life. He opened the way and made it possible for me to become what I am today. And on September 17, 1995, I said "Lord, I still desire and I still wish to follow you. I know that I am not yet what you would like me to be, and I need you every day more than I have ever needed you before to help me to be what you want me to be. Make me to be a real fisher of men every day. Help me to accomplish this. And help me to know how to do it. I am willing

to let you work in my life and use my circumstances to make me what you want me to be." That is what was happening that day.

Dr. Joel, did you happen to use the response form that Sunday? Did you write down a name of someone you are trying to lead to the Lord?

I didn't use the form, but there are always some people I am praying for and working with that I have in mind. That very week I interacted with one of the doctors at Roswell. Also, I am witnessing to Mr. Theodore Connelly who has terminal cancer.

Following the worship service, did you continue to think of these things? Yes! It continues. On Wednesday morning I verbalized my thoughts on this for the first time. Actually, I am battling with these thoughts now almost every day.

Following Jesus on September 17, 1995
with Pastor Marcus Thieme

This interview was recorded on Monday afternoon, October 02, 1995, at Bethel Baptist Church in Getzville, New York. Pastor Marcus and Whitney Thieme had been attending the Sunday morning worship service at Bethel Baptist Church for two years. Pastor Marcus began his ministry with Bethel as Youth Pastor the first full week of September 1993. He and Whitney candidated with Bethel the weekend of July 08-11, 1993, and accepted the official letter of call in August 1993. Although they had been married for several years, they had been unable to conceive. In fact, they had reconciled themselves to "This is God's will for us in that we will be freer to pursue youth ministry without children." However, the

weekend when they were candidating with Bethel they announced the confirmation of their pregnancy. Their son, Daren, was born on January 20, 1994. Pastor Marcus is a, winsome, athletic young man in his early thirties. He enjoys youth ministry, has a good work ethic, and excels in his ministry. September 17, 1995, was "Youth Sunday," and we anointed Pastor Marcus and his key layman, Kent Wrapper, in their youth ministry. Through prayer we dedicated the youth ministry including all the junior-high and senior-high kids at the altar during response time after the sermon. Although Pastor Marcus did not come to the altar or show any outward response to God's speaking in the sermon, I asked him if he would be interested in being interviewed since it was "Youth Sunday." During the response time twenty-six individuals turned down the "I'll fish for men" corner and wrote the first name of someone they will try to bring to Christ. Thirty-six people took one of the Billy Graham booklets *Steps to Peace with God*.

Pastor Marcus, would you share with me how you heard God speak to you during the sermon and how you responded?

There were a number of things that came to me Sunday with the service itself and as you were talking. Although Solomon said that there is nothing new under the sun, I am always able to learn some things and I always try to be a learner. One of the things that I was reminded of is to be careful about scheduling. I am a scheduled person in a lot of ways; I schedule so as to eliminate the confusion that comes from not having planned. When I plan it gives me opportunity to deal with those things that I can't plan for. So in that respect I ask

God to help in my day to not schedule him out. Even this morning in my prayer time I said "I have my list of things I want to do today, but if there is anything else I don't know about that should be on here, I'll wait to hear about it." I try to maintain a balance between where I do not plan which results in accomplishing nothing and where I over-plan which results in sticking so much to my own schedule that God cannot accomplish his plans in that sense. The other thing that struck me out of the sermon was that over the summer I have been burdened for a number of kids who hang around the church campus shooting hoops, like Jeremy, Joe, Mike, Keith, and Nathan, who are not a part of our church or youth group---I've met a number of them playing ball out on the court, and I have been wondering what can I do to reach them or "fish" for them.

Pastor Marcus, did you dialogue with the response form in any way?

During the response time I put down Joe's name. Here is a kid who had come on campus and was smashing bottles out at the fireplace with some of his friends. The next week after I put in the horse shoe pits, Joe came around by himself wanting to help me. So I put his name on the response form. I was already praying for friends my age like Jim and Trish and my friend Rob over at the Midas shop. But the Lord laid Joe's name on my heart.

Pastor Marcus, did you also take one of the *Steps to Peace with God* booklets and one of the Jeremiah People tickets?

Yes, I set two of the booklets aside to include in my Christmas card to Jeremy and Tory because they think a lot about God at Christmas time. Whitney

and I also make homemade candy which we will give them before Christmas. Just yesterday I was going to give the Jeremiah tickets to Jeremy, but I had left them in my office. I will get them to him soon.

Pastor Marcus, is there anything else that you want to mention related to the sermon and the response time?

Well, there is this whole aspect of being comfortable. Where is the line between comfort where I am just enjoying my life with God doing the things he wants me to do and living like he wants me to live and making progress that way and being out of his will? For the last year and a half I have been cruising along pretty comfortably in my life of ministry with the Lord here at Bethel. I sort of like it; and yet, I do not like it. I am wondering "What is the next level?" I had a good prayer time at camp Sunday morning. I said to God "I do not want to be average, I don't want to be like the average Christian. I want to be somebody who makes a difference, somebody who makes an impact for you. I do not want to be comfortable for the sake of being comfortable. But I am comfortable and I sort of like it, yet I do not."

Pastor Marcus, how do you feel about the forum of preaching?

The call for preaching is clear. The apostle Paul said that God uses the foolishness of preaching to change people. It would be foolish to change that. First, the text needs to be explained so as to engage people to say "What is God saying from this text?" Then it needs to be brought from the ancient setting to our modern setting. Then it needs to be illustrated to bring the major truth home.

Finally, it needs practical application in my life.

But You Would Not on September 24, 1995
with Pastor Dave Ewing

This interview was recorded on Tuesday, November 07, 1995, at Bethel Baptist Church in Getzville, New York. On Sunday, September 24, 1995, the message was centered around God's warning to Jerusalem through the prophet Isaiah that God would break the people of Jerusalem like a pot into pieces so small that any one of the chards would be too small to dip water or scoop a fire from the hearth and relocate it. If God's people would return and rest in him instead of turning to Egypt for assistance and comfort, then God would quiet their hearts and strengthen their confidence. But if they would not, then they would be broken. I had purchased an expensive, refined vase about thirty inches in height. It had a beautiful, burgundy finish. During the response time I struck this vase against a rock, and it exploded into dozens of pieces. I then continued to break the larger pieces until there were no large pieces remaining. Virtually everyone present responded by taking home one of the chards from the broken vase used during the response time. I had no way to know who had responded in a deeper, significant way because no one came to the altar. There was a reverent hush as the people filed out, and there was no discussion group the following Sunday, October 01, 1995, due to the beginning of a new unit in adult Sunday school.

About ten days later I thought that God might want me to be interviewed on this one. I was too overwhelmed with the preparations for and experience of

the 100th anniversary celebration of Bethel Baptist Church, November 3-5, 1995, to actually record the interview with myself before November 07, 1995. In my background readings I came across an article by Ben Patterson, "Can Worship Leaders Worship?" in Marshall Shelley's book for the library of Christian leadership, *Changing Lives Through Preaching and Worship*. I began to realize that my own personal experience of response on Sunday morning, September 24, 1995, was what God wanted me to record towards my Doctor of Ministry thesis project.

Since my childhood I have always attended Sunday morning worship, Sunday evening services, and mid-week Bible study and prayer. I have regularly attended revival meetings, Bible camp meetings, preaching seminars, vacation Bible school, and Sunday school. At the age of fifteen I walked the aisle to the altar where I invited Jesus Christ to make his home in my heart. I was baptized by immersion at the age of sixteen, called to the preaching ministry at the age of seventeen, graduated from the North American Baptist Seminary in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, at the age of thirty, and have served as the senior pastor of Bethel Baptist Church of Getzville, New York, for more than six years. I reviewed the twenty-minute video summation of the sermon and response time of September 24, 1995.

Pastor Dave, in the sermon on September 24, 1995, were you able to hear God speaking, and how did you respond?

I remember that Sunday, sermon and response. I remember the whole week. That week in my devotional reading of Isaiah 30:1-15 God laid the thought of, "But You Would Not," on my heart to preach for Sunday, September 24, 1995.

In the passage it said, "You would tell the seers to not see and the prophets to not prophecy." I remember struggling with this passage and its meaning during the week. I thought, "Ah, this makes sense. This will make a good point that people need to turn to God and follow God in their times of need." I remember trying to find a vase to use during the response time. I finally found a beautiful, burgundy vase about thirty inches tall for \$90. In preparing the response form I put up in the top, left-hand corner, "I Would Not Look to God," for those who would look to the lawyer, banker, doctor, self and networking friends. On the top, right-hand corner, I put, "I Would Look to God." I thought I had a good message that people could see, hear, and respond to. I thought I had a good message for the people from God. It was really on my heart. So I preached it.

Most of the time when I preach I really do not feel like a worshiper sitting in the pew listening to God. Most of the time God speaks to me during the week as I study and prepare. He really convicts me. His speaking to me usually happens before Sunday morning, sometime during the week in the preparation of it. That is when I listen and respond and try to do what he says. This one caught me by surprise because I thought that I had heard his message and understood what it said and that I had already responded to it. But on Sunday, September 24, 1995, it was different. Occasionally, such as July 16, 1995, when I preached the sermon, "Crossing the Rubicon," God actually takes me out of myself right during the worship service and I feel like an observing, worshiping, parishioner---not a performing worship leader. And that happened to me on Sunday, September 24,

1995. I walked over to the vase and picked it up saying "See the picture God has for you. Here is how beautiful he wants to make you, but if you will not come to God, here is what will happen to you." I remember lifting the vase above my head and bringing it down on the rock that was on the platform. The sound and the force of that beautiful vase exploding on the rock took me out of myself. In my own power I lifted the vase and brought it down upon the rock. At that very instant, at that point, I was removed from the role of the worship leader-doer. I was taken out of myself and became a listener, observer. Someone else took control of my body. I believe it was the Spirit of God. The continual breaking that went on for another two or three minutes where the larger pieces were broken again and again until they were too small to dip water or scoop up a fire from the heart and relocate it was being done by the Spirit of God, not me.

With each one of the additional breakings and crushings I was worshipping and hearing God say to me, "If you come to me, if you will return to me, if you will rest in me, you will be saved. If you will find your quiet and confidence in me, you will be strengthened. But if you will not, I will break you." It was very personal; it was very real. And I was at the altar of God saying "O Lord, please don't break me like this." It was terrible the way that beautiful vase was being broken into so many little pieces. I could feel it; I was responding to it; I was saying "Lord, I want to come to you." And yet I was resisting. I was holding back. I was saying "I still want some control of my life." Then another breaking would take place, and I said it again "O Lord, please don't break me like this. I will yield

to You. I will yield to You." It was an awesome, worshipful, responding that took place at the altar even though I was the worship leader. For three or four minutes I was the worshiper, taken out of my body so that the Spirit of God could use my own body to speak even to me; it was powerful. I still have this chard. It is one of the pieces that has a section of the upper, smooth rim of the vase. I wrote on the broken, white edge, "But You Would Not," the title of the message, and dated it, 09-24-1995. I have this shard on my desk as a constant reminder of God saying either return to me, trust in me, find your confidence and quiet in me. If you will not, this is what will happen to you. You will be crushed; you will be broken into little pieces. I heard God speak to me very clearly. I responded on that Sunday with a desire to not be broken, with a desire to do things God's way. Yet my response was not complete because I wanted to keep some control of my life.

Pastor Dave, how did you use the response form on that Sunday?

Actually, I had difficulty dealing with the response form on that Sunday. I knew that in the bottom of my heart I did not want to make a total, complete, unreserved surrender of my life to God. I wanted to keep some control of my life. I did not turn down the corner to look to God in everything or to look to myself. I do look to God in most everything. Yet, there was that hesitance to be 100% about it. So I did not fill out the form. I boycotted it that Sunday.

Pastor Dave, did your response continue after the service? Does this message live on in your life? It is now November 07, 1995. Does the chard on your desk continue to speak by bringing you back to Isaiah 30:1-15? In your mind

do you hear God saying this over, and over again, "But You Would Not?"

I will never forget that sermon. All my life I will remember that sermon on the broken chard, "But You Would Not." Many sermons that I preach I cannot remember by Wednesday or Thursday. But, not this one. This one will be with me all my life. It was so powerful to me, so real and so clear. That word picture was so gripping to me. I heard God speak to me and say, "Dave Ewing, I will break you if you will not yield to me." I keep hearing that message every day, realizing that I have yet to make that 100% surrender and that God will break and keep breaking me until I do. That invitation and struggle is still going on even now in my life. In fact that is what I want to do right now. I am at the point where I no longer want to keep back a percentage of control for my self. I want to say, "Lord, ok, I will come to you, I will turn to you. I will seek my quietness and confidence in you and in you only." I will do it now.

"Dear Heavenly Father, in the precious name of Jesus, I reflect back to September 24th when I withheld absolute surrender, complete surrender to you. I wanted to have the last word instead of you. I remember how you reminded me of your power to break me if I refuse to surrender completely. At this point I now surrender and ask you to take complete control of my life. Help me turn to you in quietness and confidence and let you heal me and strengthen me. Have your own way in my life. Lord, I surrender to you completely. In Jesus' precious name, Amen."

Fanning the Flame on October 01, 1995
with Aquila and Priscilla Foster

This interview was recorded on Tuesday evening, October 03, 1995, in the home of Aquila and Priscilla Foster with their baby daughter, Corey, in Tonawanda, New York. Aquila and Priscilla had been attending the Sunday morning worship service at Bethel Baptist Church for fourteen months and were in attendance on Sunday morning, October 01, 1995. This was a young couple in their twenty's. Aquila played on Bethel's softball team this summer and on our bowling team this fall. I am on both these teams too. Aquila is a M.I.S. director for a C.P.A. firm and Priscilla is a dental assistant with one of the dental offices in the area. They both grew up in Baptist homes and heard the good news of Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord at an early age. Aquila's mother helped him invite Christ into his heart and life at home. Priscilla's father helped her make a decision for Christ at home. Riverside Baptist Church at 346 Ontario Street in Buffalo, New York, is the only church Priscilla has ever united with in membership, and Aquila became a member there six years ago. Over the years, Riverside Baptist Church has aged to such a point that Aquila and Priscilla are the only couple left under the age of forty. It has been difficult for them to go "church shopping," and yet, they felt they must. In their search they visited Bethel Baptist Church because of their friendship with Kent and Leah Wrapper and because of Priscilla's contact with Bethel's singing group, "Promise," back in the eighty's. I had visited with them in their home many months ago as a get-acquainted experience. Aquila and Priscilla had also been attending my adult Sunday school classes for married couples and parents. We

reviewed the twenty-minute video of Sunday morning's worship service, "Fanning the Flame," that highlighted the encouraging of the Apostle Paul, Apollos, and Onesiphorus by Aquila and Priscilla, who were tent makers by trade. Although they were ejected from Rome, settled in Corinth, then in Ephesus, and finally back in Rome, Aquila and Priscilla made it their life-style to fan the flames of other Christians by having a local church meet in their private home or by "risking their own necks". We reviewed the response time when Aquila and Priscilla came to the altar to commit to God and declare their response to God's call upon their lives to unite with Bethel Baptist Church in membership as their new church home.

Aquila, would you share as best you can, what was happening in your life during the sermon on Sunday morning at Bethel Baptist Church when God was speaking through the preached word and how you were responding?

As I was listening to the reading of God's Word and the sermon, I was getting the feeling that we cannot do a lot of things on our own, so it is nice to have others behind us backing us up. I took special note of the fact that Jesus is always there supporting me and encouraging me. I can always talk to Jesus about things. I also have a loving wife who supports me and encourages me. In the world of our day it is essential to have someone fanning the flames for us. It is good to not be alone.

Priscilla, are you able to share what you were hearing and how you were responding to God's speaking through the sermon last Sunday morning?

Obedience came to mind, obedience to fan the flame. I need to go out and

be that person that the Lord wants me to be---a witness and an encouragement to someone else throughout the week---to share my faith with somebody else.

Aquila, did you dialogue with the response form or turn down a corner?

Yes, I did. Even as I felt thankful for the people who are encouraging me, I was convicted that I should be encouraging others. I folded down the corner "I will fan the flame." I made a commitment that I will go out and fan the flame of those who are doing the work of the Lord. That is one of the reasons why Priscilla and I went forward to join the church; we felt that this is the right thing to do. We believe that it was God's will to bring us here. We want to help build up the church, to fan the flame of Bethel Baptist Church by helping with the decisions in any department we can and by encouraging both you and Pastor Marcus more than we have. We respect all the pressures you guys are under and realize that we can help you by expressing our understanding of your work load and our appreciation of your good messages that are so meaningful to us.

Aquila, did you come to church last Sunday morning asking each other, "Should we go forward today to unite with Bethel in membership?"

No, we did not. Although we had been talking about it in recent weeks, it wasn't until the response time that I leaned over to Priscilla and asked, "Would you like to go forward today and make a commitment to this church, to decide that this is where we are going to stay?" She said, "Yes." Then we went up to the altar. It was a genuine response to God last Sunday. No, the decision had not been made in advance. A lot of people came up to us after the service, welcomed us, and were

and were excited to have us.. We were fanning Bethel's flame.

Priscilla, did you dialogue with the response form or turn down a corner?

I did pretty much the same thing. I turned down the corner "I will fan the flame." I was convicted. I knew that I have to fan the flame at work too. The boss knows that I am a Christian and respects me, although he is not a Christian. One of the girls at work has a friend who is dying of cancer and she does not know how to deal with it. She has been coming to me with questions. I am going to help fan the flame for her and even for her friend who is dying with cancer. In fact, I put some tracts in an envelope and mailed them to her. I do not know what her faith is but I do know that she is nervous about dying. When Aquila asked me about going forward to the altar, I said, "Yes I am ready." It was not till later that someone pointed out that the video cameras were still there. We had not even noticed them because they had been in the sanctuary for such a long time.

Aquila and Priscilla, did you tell anyone about your experience after church?

(Priscilla) Yes, my mother was over for lunch, and we told her about the sermon and our going to the altar to join Bethel. She is very happy for us in what we are doing.

CHAPTER 5

RESEARCH ANALYSIS

In this chapter I endeavor to understand and share with others what actually happened in the ministry base during the months of my thesis project. To analyze is to study or determine the nature and relationship of the parts by analysis such as to discover a traffic pattern. The analysis is the separation of a whole into its component parts or the examination of the complex whole, its elements, and their relationships. My analytic task is that of interpreting and making sense out of the collected materials or data. In their book, *Qualitative Research for Education: An Introduction to Theory and Methods*, Robert C. Bogdan and Sari Knopp Biklen explain what I want to accomplish in this chapter:

Data analysis is the process of systematically searching and arranging the interview transcripts, fieldnotes, and other materials that you accumulate to increase your own understanding of them and to enable you to present what you have discovered to others. Analysis involves working with data, organizing them, breaking them into manageable units, synthesizing them, searching for patterns, discovering what is important and what is to be learned, and deciding what you will tell others. Data analysis moves you from the rambling pages of description to the end products which are books, papers, presentations, or plans for action.²⁶

Penetration is the ability to discern deeply and acutely. I want to penetrate

²⁶Robert Bogdan and Sari Biklen, *Qualitative Research for Education: An Introduction to Theory and Methods*. 2d ed. (Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 1992), 153.

beyond the surface of the recorded data that document the responsiveness of Bethel's worshipping congregation to God's presence in the preached word during the summer months of 1995. I will try to account for the enhanced responsiveness that was observed and measured. Why were the worshipers responsive? And what principles did I learn about preaching for response? Will others be able to understand what I present here? Will they be able to apply these findings in their ministries so as to enhance responsiveness to God's presence in the preached word during their worship experiences? In my analysis I will focus first on the component parts of the research; then I will highlight the principles or *apples of gold* that I learned; finally I will try to expose the involved relationships to an extent that will enable others to enhance their own preaching ministry.

The problem that I researched in my ministry base is how to enhance the responsiveness of Bethel's worshipping congregation to God's presence in the preached word on Sunday mornings. The research data bears witness to the reality of an enhanced responsiveness of the worshipers to an extended, cooperative, preaching-for-response effort at Bethel Baptist Church in Getzville, New York, involving Pastor Dave Ewing and Bethel's worshipping congregation during the summer months of June, July, August, and September, 1995. The decision making process that activated the project involved the McMaster ministry base team, the Bethel deacons, the Council of Elders, and the unanimous vote of the membership on June 11, 1995. The willing involvement of seventeen adults in a weekly discussion group, the fourteen adults including one teenager who enthusiastically

shared their responses in a personal interview, the two cameramen and their support team who worked dozens of hours, the twenty-three percent of the worshipers who responded each week on a written response form, the large numbers of people who actually took the physical action called for during the response time, the three men who were baptized, and the young couple that came to the altar to unite in membership with Bethel Baptist Church in membership speak as one voice. What do they say? They say, "Bethel Baptist Church and Pastor Dave Ewing researched a Doctor of Ministry thesis project in the summer of 1995, and yes, there was enhanced response to God's presence in the preached word on Sunday mornings."

The video footage of the worship services is powerful evidence that God's presence in the preached word was responded to in the Sunday morning worship services of Bethel Baptist Church in the summer of 1995. The twenty-minute video summaries of the twelve Sundays, four hours in total viewing time, show the verbal, facial, and body language responses of the worshipers during the preaching of God's Word and the response time that followed the sermon. The videos show Pastor Dave preaching and the people physically responding: eighty came to the altar to pick up a thank-you card, three requested baptism, twenty-six looked to God in prayer at the altar, one hundred and seven dropped a key into a bucket or placed it on the altar table, twelve spontaneously used a microphone to share words of praise to God, seventy-nine took a Susan B. Anthony silver dollar or a paper \$10, \$20, \$50, or \$100 bill, one openly confessed his sin, eighty-three brought a plastic block to the altar so I could build a colorful cross, one hundred held a foot washing

towel and one had his feet washed, ninety-one took home a shard from a broken vase, and two said, "We want to join this church."

The response form was a creation of the whole Bethel team and is still being used by thirty to forty people each Sunday in 1996 to express painful feelings or ecstatic praise in response to God's presence in the preached word. In fact, the sermon on Sunday, January 28, 1996, came out of a question asked on one of the green response forms turned in on Sunday, January 21, 1996. The depth of emotional and spiritual response expressed on these response forms has persuaded me of the people's hunger to respond to God's presence in the preached word. As one worshiper told me "Pastor Dave, thank you for this response form. Please don't take it away. It is one of the great gifts you have given to Bethel Baptist Church because it opens the door of our hearts in response to God."

Many people have thanked me for the corner-fold-down-feature of the response form saying that they didn't use the form before this feature was added because they don't like written responses. The response form chart on page 71 shows that an average of 22.6% of the people used the response form each week during the twelve weeks of the project. A closer look reveals that 14.2% of the people used the response form during the first six weeks while 31.1% used it in the last six weeks of the project. A 119% increase in the use of the response form makes a powerful statement. What caused this significant increase? On the seventh Sunday of the project the response form had a corner-fold-down-feature. The increase would have been even greater had I allowed time for the people to use the response form in the service on Sunday, September 3, 1995. My mistake

was that I rushed into the call for the people to bring their plastic block to the altar. Some have said that the fold-down-corners help them pin-point the focus of the message. I know that the fold-down-corners force me early on to know where the sermon is going because the response form is printed on Friday. The response form gives the worshipers a venue of expression that not only helps make their response measurable but also facilitates the act of responding itself. The corner-fold-down-feature is well received.

The weekly discussion group introduced me to an experience that I had avoided before I experienced it. From my review of the related literature I knew that lay involvement in the formation and evaluation of the sermon was being researched. Although I feared it, I came to embrace it, almost love it. Our discussion group situation was not ideal because it was located in the Sunday school setting which limited it to less than 40 minutes and to only nine Sundays out of twelve. On four of the nine Sundays we discussed the sermon text to be preached in the following hour, and the discussion group directly helped shape the sermon on those four Sundays in ways that God used in leading the people to respond to his voice. I came to appreciate the value of the input being shared with me from the lives of everyday Christians and to feel the joys and sorrows of my friends in the family of God. Another beneficial aspect of the discussion group was its focus on the need for me to be clear in my preaching language, because there were differing views of what I had intended by the use of certain words such as "promise keepers." Did I mean everyday Christians keeping their promises or that male organization known as Promise Keepers?

The personal interviews convinced me that the truth of God's Word in preached sermons lives on beyond the Sunday service and that many times God's intended response in his listening people does not take place until later in the week or month. I will never forget Sarah Paltiel's emotion-filled words on page 85 in this thesis:

I rambled on how in Sunday's sermon the Pastor preached about being broken in the right places. It was then that God's wisdom came through your illustration of going over the dam, and I began to share with the others how we should rest in God who would see us through the pain. Over and over that week I shared parts of your sermon with many others about being broken in the right places.

The memory of these interviews will fortify me for years to come in knowing that responses will be forthcoming even if I don't see any on Sunday morning. I recall the evening of August 14, 1995, when Ken Steward phoned me to share how God's word in one of my sermons drew a response from him during the week. It is recorded like this on page 88 in this thesis:

I should say it more often than I do that God reminds me of the words in your sermons. This time he reminded me of your words about going out of the way to help someone by conviction even when it is not convenient. I didn't know how my brother was going to react because it was a hot day and he doesn't like hot weather, but I still spoke up and mentioned the words of your sermon. My brother was happy to go ahead and do it.

The face-to-face personal interviews are powerfully convincing that God is alive in the preaching of his Word and in the lives of his people. Each time I read these interviews I cry because too often I yield to the tyranny of the urgent which results in reduced preaching preparation. As I review these interviews I hear God saying to me, "David, I am touching you, and you are growing. Be encouraged that

good fruit will come from this research as I touch others through the preached word in the Sunday worship services at Bethel Baptist Church, at times later in the week, and even through other worship services in other churches.

The evidence is in! As I analyze my thesis project data and remember the summer of 1995, I am impressed by two strong arguments that God did indeed touch Bethel Baptist Church through this research. The first argument is that the response form is still being used by thirty to forty worshipers each week in 1996, and the second is that the membership voted to add a new line item of \$2,000 to the 1996 budget called "Pastoral Ministry," so that I can continue to enhance the response to God's presence in the preached word on Sunday mornings through cost items like \$70 worth of thank-you cards, a beautiful \$90 vase, or \$134 worth of Susan B. Anthony silver dollars. The worshipping congregation at Bethel Baptist Church is saying, "God is touching us; we are growing---and we want to keep on growing---so keep on preaching for response!"

I believe that God touched me by his grace, causing me to grow, to learn. What is the distillate from God's purifying, thesis-project-process in my life? The distillate is the wisdom that infuses the preaching of God's Word when it causes the listening heart to respond. Here are five *apples of gold* or principles of preaching for response I gleaned from my research as Proverbs 25:11 records, "A word aptly spoken is like *apples of gold* in pictures of silver."

1. Seeing God's Pictures

The preacher needs to see a picture-message from God that has been

powerfully etched in his mind. If the preacher cannot "see" the message that God wants to share, then certainly the listening worshiper will have difficulty responding to it. I am still amazed at the clarity of the pictures God gave me to preach during the twelve weeks of my thesis project. Before the twelve week project began I tried on several occasions to select and outline twelve Bible texts, but nothing came to me. Every text I considered just faded away. Then one-at-a-time during the twelve weeks God gave me powerful pictures to preach. I felt so privileged to be given these pictures from God. The majority of the Bible texts were texts I had not preached before.

The seer in ancient Israel was someone who saw pictures from God and then showed these pictures to others. When King Saul and his servant wanted a word of guidance from God to help them find their lost donkeys, they asked the women going to draw water, "Is the seer here?" Amaziah the priest of Bethel said to Amos the prophet, "Go, you seer! Flee to the land of Judah and there prophesy." When God sent the prophet Nathan to King David hoping for the response of repentance, God gave Nathan the picture of a poor man with one pet ewe-lamb that was stolen by a rich neighbor and served as dinner to a guest. When Jesus wanted to convict the uncaring heart of a lawyer he gave the picture of the good Samaritan caring more for the victim of crime than a priest or a Levite. These were pictures from God given to a prophet to elicit a positive response in the heart of a living person.

In his recent book *Preaching & Teaching with Imagination: The Quest for*

Biblical Ministry, Warren W. Wiersbe tells the biblical story of Ahithophel and Hushai that is recorded in 2 Samuel 17. Ahithophel and Hushai, advisers to King David who became advisers to David's rebellious son, Absalom, were men of ideas and words. People lived or died based on the response of the listener to their presentations. Wiersbe points out how colorful Hushai's speech is with phrases like, "as fierce as a wild bear robbed of her cubs," and "even the bravest soldier, whose heart is like the heart of a lion, will melt with fear." Wiersbe reasons:

After hearing Hushai's plan, Absalom and the elders changed their minds; *and humanly speaking, this is what saved David's life*. To be sure, it was the Lord who changed Absalom's mind (v. 14; Prov. 21:1). But the same God who ordains *the end* also ordains *the means* to the end. In this case, the means to the end---convincing Absalom not to accept Ahithophel's plan---was the speech that Hushai made.

Read the two speeches again and notice the two different approaches. Apart from the fact that Hushai's speech is three times longer than Ahithophel's (and for a good reason), the contrast between the two approaches is obvious. In modern terms, Ahithophel used a cerebral "left brain" approach and Hushai, a visceral "right brain" approach. Absalom *heard* what Ahithophel was saying, but he *saw* and *felt* what Hushai was saying. Ahithophel's counsel was wise, but it was rejected, and this led to his humiliation and suicide. Hushai's counsel was weak in military strategy, but it was accepted and led to Absalom's defeat. The movers and shakers in history have usually been people like Hushai who can turn people's ears into eyes so that they see and feel the message and respond positively to it.²⁷

In his interview about my sermon, "Crossing the Rubicon," preached on July 16, 1995, Saen Haven told of how that day the aisle in church became a figurative river he had to cross as God convinced him that he must be baptized. For twenty

²⁷Warren W. Wiersbe, *Preaching & Teaching with Imagination: The Quest for Biblical Ministry* (Wheaton: Victory Books, 1994), 16.

years after receiving Christ as his personal savior Saen had refused to be baptized. But that week in July 1995, when God burned a picture of the Rubicon River on the retina of my soul and told me to preach it, Saen decided to be baptized. The worshiper's right brain wants to see a Susan B. Anthony coin, touch a building block, and hear the sound of an exploding vase. Preaching God's pictures compels response.

2. The Anointing of God

How is the preacher to see God's pictures, paint them in colorful words, and then deliver them in such power that people are compelled to respond? I recall the words of the prophet, "Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit," says the LORD of hosts" (Zechariah 4:6). During the twelve weeks of this project I was constantly on my knees before God seeking his face and the anointing of his Holy Spirit. Deep down in my heart I knew that I could not convince anyone to respond to the preaching of God's Word in the Sunday morning sermon. Jesus explained that we can do nothing without him. "Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for apart from me you can do nothing" (John 15:4-5). I have no doubt about who does the convicting when God's Word is being preached. "Nevertheless I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Spirit will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send him to you. And when he has come, he will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and

of judgment" (John 16:7-8). I am impotent, but he is almighty! Proverbs 21:1 records this truth, "The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD, like the rivers of water; he turns it wherever he wishes."

Certainly Jesus of Nazareth was the greatest preacher of response in recorded history. He was an anointed preacher. Seven hundred years before Jesus began to preach in the power of the Holy Spirit, God gave pictures to the prophet Isaiah (Isaiah 1:1) and through his Spirit God inspired the very words (Isaiah 59:21) of Isaiah and caused him to declare that God's Spirit would come upon his *anointed Messiah*. "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the LORD has *anointed* me to preach good tidings to the poor, he has sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; to proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn, to console those who mourn in Zion, to give them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they may be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that he may be glorified" (Isaiah 61:1-3).

Luke 4:21 records Jesus' claim that he fulfilled this prophecy of Isaiah for which the people of Nazareth tried to kill him. The Gospel of John reports the personal testimony of John the Baptist claiming the *anointing* of God's Spirit upon Jesus. "After me comes a man who is preferred before me, for he was before me. I did not know him; but that he should be revealed to Israel, therefore I came baptizing with water. I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and he

remained upon him. I did not know him, but he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'Upon whom you see the Spirit descending, and remaining on him, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.' And I have seen and testified that he is the Son of God" (John 1:29-34).

After being released from the custody of the Sanhedrin, the apostles Peter and John reported to their companions who then raised their voice to God, "Lord, you are God, who made heaven and earth and the sea, and all that is in them. Truly, against your holy servant Jesus, *whom you anointed*, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and people of Israel, were gathered together to do what your hand and your purpose determined before to be done" (Acts 4:23-31).

In the *Concise Encyclopedia of Preaching* edited by William H. Willimon and Richard Lischer, William C. Turner writes in his article, "The Holy Spirit and Preaching":

Preaching relies on the Spirit in every aspect. The Spirit communicates the living Word to the preacher and fashions it as a vital address to the hearer. The Spirit works in sermon preparation and delivery to discern the heart and the situation of those who hear preaching and to guide their spiritual walk. This includes not only bringing persons to faith but also nurturing and deepening faith, which itself is a gift of the Spirit imparted through preaching.²⁸

Throughout my entire thesis project I experienced a special *anointing of the Holy Spirit* in the selection of Bible passages, sermon titles, message development, and the sermon delivery including the response time. Of the Sundays involved,

²⁸William C. Turner, "The Holy Spirit and Preaching," William H. Willimon and Richard Lischer, eds. *Concise Encyclopedia of Preaching* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), 227.

three were unusual in the power of the Holy Spirit's *anointing* during the preparation, delivery, and response. The three were: "Crossing the Rubicon" on July 16, "The Power of a Promise" on August 6, and "But You Would Not" on September 24. In my personal interview concerning the sermon, "But You Would Not," preached on September 24th, I told how the Spirit lifted me out of myself during the response time after the first breaking of the vase. My experience was like Charles Swindoll's that I refer to on page 21 of this thesis:

Then there is the actual delivery. You've preached enough, Mike, to know there are times---I don't want this to sound spooky---but there are times I feel almost outside myself. . . I think the Spirit's prompting, his motivational work---falls under the umbrella of his *anointing*. So that when you've finished---and I really mean this sincerely---you feel like you don't deserve credit for it.²⁹

In all aspects of preaching I cannot remember another twelve-week-period of such *powerful anointing of the Holy Spirit* upon my preaching ministry as the summer of 1995. In fact, this principle of the anointing of God will continue foremost in my understanding of preaching for response from this time forward.

3. Touching Real Needs

Worshippers want to and will respond if the preacher will ask them to respond in an area of real need. Most of our worshipers have already accepted the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior and been baptized. When Jesus said to the woman at the well, "Go, call your husband, and come here," he touched her real need of a

²⁹Charles Swindoll, "Fanning the Flame: Preaching and the Holy Spirit," *Preaching: The Professional Journal for Preachers* (Louisville: Preaching Resources, November-December 1985), 51.

lasting, intimate relationship, for she had had five husbands. Sidney Greidanus says that without genuine relevance there is no sermon and this truth causes us to focus on the congregation. In chapter eight, "The Relevance of a Sermon," of his book *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text: Interpreting and Preaching Biblical Literature*, under a heading of congregational involvement and a focus on addressing needs, Greidanus asserts:

Congregational involvement can be further heightened by aiming the sermon at specific needs in the congregation, by addressing the sermons, as the text before it, to specific questions. There seems to be a lot of difference in the quality of the attention accorded when the preacher begins by giving the impression that he is going to try and answer a question which is real and important in the lives of the people in the pews.³⁰

On September 3, 1995, the message touched a real need in Caren Karr as her interview on page 107 of this thesis reveals:

I liked hearing a different view of what it meant to be trusted with a talent and use it for profit. The building blocks said to me that the whole church has to work together by contributing each part in order to complete the job of building the church. I liked the idea of bringing my building block to the altar to show in a different way how everyone has to help if the church is to be built. This solidified my theology on how everyone is valuable and important.

Caren Karr needed to be a trusted, valued, important part of the team. Caren had accepted Jesus Christ as her personal savior, been baptized, and joined the Bethel Baptist Church membership long before I came to Getzville as Bethel's preaching pastor. I was in my seventh year at Bethel when I preached the sermon,

³⁰Sidney Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text: Interpreting and Preaching Biblical Literature* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1988/1994), 184.

"Profiting in His Trust". Caren had never come to the altar during my years as pastor except for worker dedication Sundays in connection with vacation Bible school. On Sunday, September 3, 1995, the preaching of God's Word touched a real need in her life, and she responded in a way she had never responded before.

Greidanus cautions that we are not to shift our attention exclusively to the congregation because the sermon must hold the horizons of text and congregation together. He writes that the sermon has been described as:

An ellipse with two foci: the text of the Bible and the situation of the hearers Preparing and delivering a sermon means that these two foci have to be interrelated in a process of continual reciprocity. Therefore, as one cannot select a text, formulate a sermon theme, and select a sermon form without an eye to the congregation, so one cannot reflect on the relevance of the sermon without an eye to the text---it is, after all, the relevance of the text that must lend relevance to the sermon.³¹

He continues to emphasize that if preachers wish to pass on the message in its original relevance, they ought to focus on that question behind the text, on the reason why the text was written---its goal or purpose. The task of the preacher is not to *make* the text relevant, but to *show* its relevance. Every properly selected preaching-text seeks to accomplish a specific goal among the original hearers: answer a question, comfort, encourage, correct, teach, motivate to obedience, trust, praise, etc. If preachers can delineate that specific goal and state the question to which the text is a focused response, they are halfway to conceiving a truly relevant sermon. The other half, of course, is discovering a genuine analogy among their contemporary hearers so that the text is an authentic response to their question,

³¹Greidanus, 157.

sorrow, discouragement, sin, ignorance, lack of trust, praise, obedience, etc. The key to proper application of a passage is *comparing life issues*. To apply a passage preachers must try to decide what is the central issue with which the passage is concerned. Then they must try to decide whether such issues are still active in the lives of the listeners. When preachers bring together the real life issues of the listeners and the text, the listeners will experience enhanced response.

On Sunday, August 27, 1995, Erin McNary dashed to the altar and asked, "May I have that \$50 bill?" because it answered her question of how she could go on the Chapel's next mission trip. The message that Sunday focused on Jesus' words in Matthew 7:7-11 about asking, seeking, and knocking. Erin was soon to enter her senior year in high school and was already making application to various colleges and universities for her future studies in pre-medicine with a focus on biology and science. Her daily quiet time with the Lord needed a word from God to help build her faith in asking, seeking, knocking. Because she recognized the relevance of God's presence in the preached word that Sunday, she responded by coming to the altar and granting me a personal interview.

4. Listening to the Listeners

How is the preacher to know what the listeners are thinking? How can their questions be heard or their life issues be recognized? Throughout my 25 years as a preaching pastor I have taught a Sunday school class which helps me listen to the listeners because the small group setting of these classes allows for two-way dialogue. This is why I bowl on the church bowling team and play second base on

the church softball team. I enrolled in Reginald Bibby's 1994 summer course on religion in Canada at McMaster Divinity College for the specific purpose of listening to the listeners. This is why I read *Newsweek*, George Barna's research on religion in America, *Psychology Today*, *Christianity Today*, *Current Thoughts & Trends*, and Josh McDowell's research of nearly 4,000 Christian teenagers in his *Right from Wrong* book and materials. McDowell's research shows that without a true relationship to the teaching authority the listener will rebel to the truths being taught or preached:

The first pillar of effective communication is relationship. That's what biblical morality is all about: our relationship with God and with others. We cannot impart truth, therefore, apart from honest, meaningful relationships. Simply occupying a position of authority, such as pastor, youth worker---even mother or father---by no means guarantees that you can effectively teach a young person right from wrong. Anyone who wishes to pass on biblical values to someone else must begin by developing a strong, positive relationship with that person.³²

In his article, "Listening to the Listeners," in the Library of Christian Leadership's volume one edited by Marshall Shelley, *Changing Lives through Preaching and Worship*, Haddon Robinson talks about content overload, preaching efficiency gauge, and then highlights pre-sermon feedback:

Feedback, however, begins as the sermon is still brewing. Here pastors hold an advantage over other speakers, since they interact daily with members of the audience. This in turn colors and shapes the handling of biblical material and the approach to the message. In order to develop a sensitivity to current questions, John Stott joined a reading group that met monthly. They explored the ideas

³²Josh McDowell, *Right from Wrong: What You Need to Know to Help Youth Make Right Choices* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1995), 122.

and implications of significant books. When Stott preached on contemporary issues, he formed an *ad hoc* group of specialists to help him learn the personal dimensions of the problem. As an outgrowth of the challenging dialogue, Stott's sermons, while solidly biblical, were as up-to-date as next week's newsmagazine.³³

I like adages, and my favorite is "Sharing is the lifeblood of friendship." In the case of listening to the listener my adage is "**Know your listener, lest your listener say no to you.**" On one response form of January 21, 1996, a worshiper wrote "God spoke to me about my sinful selfishness through your sermon today. What I want to know is this, 'How can I *consistently* refrain from focusing on my selfish wants?'" I pondered this question in prayer asking for God's permission to preach a sermon in answer to the person's question, which I did on Sunday, January 28, 1996. During the twelve weeks of this project back in the summer of 1995 I spent six hours each week watching the video recordings of the services in an effort to learn from the listeners concerning how they respond and what helps them respond, including what puts them to sleep. The discussion group and the interviews also helped me take the pulse of Bethel's congregation during the project.

5. Focusing On God's Calling

The calling to preach God's Word is an awesome vocation! It requires a sure focus---a focus on God in Christ and on the listeners in the pews with the challenge of bringing them together through the power of the Holy Spirit. During the twelve weeks of my thesis project I was so focused on listening to the listeners,

³³Haddon Robinson, "Listening to the Listener," Marshall Shelley, ed, *Changing Lives Through Preaching and Worship* (Nashville: Moorings, 1995), 39.

sermon preparation, delivery, and evaluation I had little time for anything else. Growing up on the small farms in central Indiana and later on the larger farms in North Dakota I noticed the *blindens* about the eyes of the work horses. When I asked about the purpose of the *blindens*, I was told that *blindens* protected the horses from distractions. In the parable of the soils Jesus explained that although the thorny soil was productive soil, it was so busy in personal pleasures and profits that it had no time to focus on being fruitful for God.

A preacher must be about the business of God's calling, which is listening to the listeners, noting real needs to touch, seeing God's pictures, and praying for God's anointing. When Jesus was a boy of twelve, he once got so absorbed in listening to the teachers in the temple and asking them questions that he was left behind when the family headed for home in Nazareth. After three days his parents found him in the temple astonishing the people with the understanding of his answers. When his mother admonished him, Jesus replied with this powerful thought, "Why is it that you searched for me? Did you not know that I must be about my Father's business" (Luke 2:49)? Where would one expect to find Joseph Haydn, Fredric Chopin, or Linus? At the piano! Where would you expect to find Babe Ruth, Willie Mays, or George Brett? At the ball park! Where would you expect to find Charles Stanley, John Stott, or Charles Swindoll? In the pulpit! The apostle Paul wrote "No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who enlisted him as a soldier" (2 Timothy 2:4).

In his book *Preaching with Freshness* Bruce Mawhinney outlines six keys to

long-term freshness and power in preaching and each one is another form of focusing on the calling to preach.³⁴ 1. *Enter the pulpit with full reservoir power.* Keeping the reservoir full involves scholarship, reading God's Word, private prayer, and the unction of the Holy Spirit. Mawhinney challenges the preacher to know key insights into the customs and times of the Bible, to read through a whole book of the Bible each week in addition to the study of Sunday's text, to hold private prayer meetings with God, and to stay full of God's Spirit because people know whether you have it or not. 2. *Practice ongoing self-evaluation.* Self-evaluation includes reviewing audio and video tapes of your preaching to notice elements like the sagging of voice enthusiasm, the pacing of the presentation, the describing of events and ideas with an easy to follow logic, the adorning of truth with a grace-filled personality, and the refreshing of listening ears by being on the cutting edge. Mawhinney urges us to develop strong introductions and conclusions, to use gestures that match the content of the sermon, to avoid a preacher tone by using more conversational style, to read the audience and adjust accordingly so as to not belabor a point or be too impersonal. 3. *Maintain extensive reading in fields other than ministry.* His sixfold path consists of reading from six different books at the same time instead of only one. He suggests that we spend at least one day each month in the library periodical room researching a "hot" topic and that we should continually gather, file, and review illustrations. 4. *Develop a long-term sermon plan.*

³⁴Bruce Mawhinney, *Preaching with Freshness* (Eugene: Harvest House, 1991), 255.

He calls us to design a full year of sermons after an evaluation of the congregation's weakness and long-term needs. 5. *Learn through sermon analysis.* Mawhinney insists that we let the masters of preaching teach us by studying the sermons of preaching greats, listening to sermon tapes or videos of televised preachers, and being sure to keep a notebook of their strengths. 6. *Take in refreshers.* As a preacher himself, the author says that preachers should study preaching techniques by reading at least one good book on preaching each year, attending seminars and refresher courses, and letting *iron sharpen iron* through interaction with colleagues.

During the twelve weeks of this thesis project I was focused on preaching for response. This leads me into the third phase of my analysis: the examination of relationships, as I try to understand how the various elements came together to form the big picture of enhanced response to God's presence in the preached word in the Sunday morning sermons at Bethel Baptist Church during the summer months of 1995. There were influences on all the separate elements that caused them to be collectively fruitful. Here are three relationships that I believe impacted the final outcome of enhanced response.

1. The Spirit of Generosity

Jesus taught "Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you give, it will be measured back to you" (Luke 6:38). This spirit of generosity was evidenced by all of us at Bethel during the summer months of 1995.

Those with special projects, such as drawing up a new church constitution, were willing to lay them aside until after the thesis project. Many of our people really did not want video cameras in the sanctuary but they were willing to grant it as a gift to me; several individuals told me this directly. I cheerfully spent more than \$1,000 of my personal money to buy the symbols of God's pictures. On August 27, 1995, I gave nearly \$500 in cash to various individuals who came to the altar in faith asking "May I have that \$10 bill or that \$50 bill?" Buying the thank-you cards, the Susan B. Anthony silver dollars, the beautiful vase, building blocks, and oriental fans brought me great joy. I love to give. I also gave my focused attention to the project at hand. I really gave myself to what was happening in our midst including a focused seeking of God's anointing.

The tyranny of the urgent had to be appeased for twelve weeks! I was not out of town attending classes at McMaster Divinity College. I was really present at Bethel Baptist Church, with members of the congregation, in the community searching for symbols of God's pictures. Bethel Baptist Church has five separate governing boards plus a Council of Elders, and I am an *ex officio* member of all these boards, except the Deaconess Board, where I am expected to not only attend, but also to make a significant contribution. In addition I serve on any task force, constitution committee, or special emphasis that is currently important. During the months of July and August 1995 all these meetings were virtually suspended by consensus of the congregation to allow us all to focus on our thesis project of preaching for response. Even my normal Sunday school class, which usually requires a weekly preparation beyond my preaching requirements, was replaced by

a discussion group I facilitated in connection with the weekly sermons and peoples' responses. The editor of *Leadership: a Practical Journal for Church Leaders*, wrote about his late father in the Winter 1996 issue:

Dad is the only layperson I know who left a church because it wouldn't pay the pastor a reasonable salary. He stood in the annual meeting and called for a long-overdue raise. But some folks in small towns see financial matters a certain way, and the proposal was rejected. To Dad it was a matter of principle. Generosity marks a person's character, he believed, and so does miserliness.³⁵

In the summer of 1995 Bethel Baptist Church was washed in a spirit of generosity.

2. The Spirit of Expectation

Jesus taught, "If you have faith and do not doubt, you will not only do what was done to the fig tree, but also if you say to this mountain, 'Be removed and be cast into the sea,' it will be done. And all things, whatever you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive" (Matthew 21:21-22). For three years the Bethel congregation had been waiting for the talk about my Doctor of Ministry efforts to become some real blessing for the local congregation. With the unanimous approval of the thesis project of preaching for response at the June 11, 1995, membership meeting, everyone's expectations began to rise. There was a feeling in the air that pastor was going to be preaching better sermons because he had been studying such things at McMaster Divinity College for two years and because this was going to be the focal point of his thesis project. The congregation also

³⁵Kevin H. Miller, "From the Editor," Marshall Shelley, ex ed, *Leadership: A Practical Journal for Church Leaders* (Carol Stream: Christianity Today, Inc., Winter 1996), 3.

hungered for more visible response. Bethel had plateaued, and everyone hoped that this project would be the impetus for renewal. In addition, there would be video cameras in the sanctuary keeping an eye on anyone whispering to a neighbor, dozing during the sermon, or failing to show some kind of response. It was truly a time of renewed hope and expectation. I felt this spirit of expectation, too. Something special was beginning to happen at Bethel Baptist Church.

My alteration of the worship service to make room for a ten minute "response time" enhanced the spirit of expectation. I moved the sermon up to a position about fifteen minutes after the call to worship which bumped the offering and prayer time to a place after the sermon. This resulted in a 10:00 A.M. start time, 10:20 A.M. sermon, 10:50 A.M. "response time", 11:00 A.M. offering, 11:05 A.M. chorus time, 11:15 A.M. prayer time, and 11:30 A.M. stop time. The idea of a "response song" added to the spirit of expectation. During the "response time" I had a recording artist's song played through the audio system while the worshipers responded to God's presence through the response form or by taking the action that I outlined such as bringing a building block to the altar. The response songs and artists were chosen if their verbal message fit the thrust of the sermon and if their musical texture was able to encourage the listeners in their response. Rarely have I witnessed such a spirit of expectation. This spirit of expectation continued.

3. The Transcendent Spirit of God

"The angel said to Mary, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the highest will overshadow you; therefore, the holy one who is to be born

will be called the Son of God. With God nothing is impossible'" (Luke 1:34-38). The summer of 1995 was a gift of grace from God to Bethel Baptist Church. The number and quality of responses amazed me beyond my imagination. "He is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages" (Ephesians 3:20-21).

On August 06, 1995, I witnessed 25% of the congregation at the altar in tears as they prayed for God to move our men to take spiritual responsibility in their homes and at church. On July 16, 1995, I witnessed 70% of the congregation at the altar picking up a thank-you card to send as a challenge or encouragement to someone else. On September 03, 1995, I witnessed virtually 100% of the congregation at the altar with a building block, hoping that God would renew Bethel Baptist Church. I would love to relive the summer of 1995. God was alive in our midst. In all my life, Sunday, August 20, 1995, was the only Sunday I have witnessed an adult man stand before the congregation asking to be forgiven for his critical spirit and his failure to fulfill his responsibilities at church. In all my years in Baptist churches, Sunday, September 10, 1995, was the only Sunday I have witnessed an adult man having his feet washed at the altar before God and the congregation. The responses went far beyond experience and expectation in quality and quantity. It was God's doing.

In my thesis project I discovered five *apples of gold* or principles of preaching for response and three relational ingredients. I am deeply committed to live by these gifts from God, as I trust him for the enhanced responses of those who

hear his Word preached through me. Although the humanly measurable responses excite me, the eternal decisions in human hearts, seen only by God, are what motivate me to live by these new findings.

A Word of Caution

The Book of Acts records a word of caution lest we think that we caused these miracles of response to happen. "Now when Simon saw that through the laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Spirit was given, he offered them money, saying, 'Give me this power also, that anyone on whom I lay hands may receive the Holy Spirit.' But Peter said to him, 'Your money perish with you, because you thought that the gift of God could be purchased with money'" (Acts 8:18-20). The long-time head coach of the Miami Dolphins, Don Shula, was pressured out of his position at the end of the 1995 season because his team failed to make it into the super bowl. Although Don Shula has won more games than any other professional football coach in the history of football, he was forced out to make room for Jimmy Johnson who has won the super bowl twice. I watched the televised interview where Don Shula lamented how on paper they had a winning team. At the end of the 1994 season the team owner, management, other coaches, and Shula decided what needed to be done for Miami to have a championship season. Then they took the required actions and acquired the right players. Even the best players can't win unless they all come together; this is also true when preaching for response. All the separate elements have to blend into a mystical, magical, anointed reality. As a chemist knows which catalyst or enzyme is essential to bring all the separate

elements into dynamic relationship, God knows how to heal the soul of every individual and every congregation. Some things are humanly measurable, and other things are only divinely observable. My urgent need is to seek his kingdom and righteousness at all times leaving to his care the divine details of human response to God's presence in the preached word of the Sunday sermon.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

Thirty months ago I began this awesome adventure by gathering around an expanded table with nine other first-time Doctor of Ministry students at McMaster Divinity College. It was a beautiful, summer day in August 1993, a perfect day to begin our study of research methods with professors and students in a spirit of collegial confidence and good will. I was praying "O Lord, we are ten students; and I don't know that we will all graduate. You know! In your grace, may I be one of the graduates? May I be in McMaster's first class of Doctor of Ministry graduates? Help me to cross the finish line in one wholesome, healthy peace. And, Lord, help me to truly learn something so that I won't feel that I've totally wasted \$18,000 and three years of my life."

I was forcibly pulled out of my worshipful rapture by a proposed case study. It seems that some research students were observing people in public washrooms without their knowledge or permission. The first question was: "Is it ethical to observe others in research efforts without their knowledge or permission?" The second was: "Is it possible to observe an honest response if the respondents know that they are being watched?" We enjoyed a heated debate as we tugged at the opposing ends of this dilemma.

In my research project I observed worshipers responding to the preaching of God's Word on Sunday mornings in the sanctuary under the watchful eyes of two video cameras. Was I so unethical that the cameras were hidden and the worshipers had no idea they were being watched? Or was I so naive to think that my cameras, out in full view, were recording honest responses? Is it possible that the Bethel family of friends would do anything to help their Pastor actually graduate? Would they allow themselves to be manipulated into eager responses to "pad the score" in my favor? Were there some who experienced sadistic pleasure in making it difficult for me in the hope that I might just give up and fail?

I collected real data. I measured the response of Bethel's worshipers as they encountered God's preached word. I gathered four different kinds of evidence. The cameras built a library of video footage showing people nodding agreement and even coming down the aisle to the altar in tearful prayer. Twenty-four percent of the worshipers filled out response forms and freely put them in the offering plate, week-after-week for three months. In fact, they are still using the response forms and turning them in twelve weeks after the project is complete. Seventeen of these people came out early on Sunday mornings to discuss the previous week's sermon and how they had responded to it throughout the week. Fourteen of these worshipers actually let me tape record their interview with me as they shared personal accounts of how they were responding to God's presence in my Sunday morning sermons. It would be incredulous to believe that this was all a hoax! Yes, some people stayed away during the twelve weeks of observed response to preaching.

The bottom-line question is: can this be repeated? Can preachers in big cities, suburbs, small towns, and out in the country duplicate the results that I have documented in my dissertation? I believe they can! I believe that worshipers want to be stimulated unto response. I believe that God's Spirit is itching to touch people and help them grow in his likeness and glory. Believe me, I am less than the least. If God would bother to bring a lively preaching-response to Bethel Baptist Church in Getzville through me, he would be delighted to do even more through others in their ministry setting. I didn't do anything extraordinary that is beyond the reach of other preachers in God's service. I am not a superstar! Just the opposite.

Now let me utter a word of caution. I worked hard, extremely hard through the twelve weeks of the project. All other interests were set aside to permit a first-class focus on preaching. Every day, from early morning till late at night I was concentrating on the people's real needs, God's exciting pictures, finding a relevant text full of potential, searching for everyday symbols for the worshiper to touch like a foot-washing towel or hear like an exploding vase. And yet, the most difficult of all, was trying to surrender my selfish will to the Savior. Without his anointing, it just won't happen. The people need to sense that the preacher has been in God's presence, face-to-face. Their world is overflowing with talented heroes in every area of interest. They see more money offered, given, and misused than we will ever touch. They have heard it all from overpowering rock concerts, gospel quartets, polished soloists. They want to be saved from death, and God can do it through us.

God can do it through our preaching! Even though we are the not-so-famous preachers in neighborhood congregations God can save people from corruption and death through us, through our preaching. If only we will understand and apply the principles of preaching for response known as the five apples of gold, God will surprise us with the amount and degree of response from the members of our congregations. The five apples of gold are: 1. Seeing God's Pictures, 2. Having the Anointing of God, 3. Touching Real Needs, 4. Listening to the Listeners, and 5. Focusing On God's Calling, which is to preach. Three ingredients need to be mixed in: 1. A spirit of generosity, 2. A spirit of expectation, and 3. The transcendent Spirit of God. What I have learned is that preaching is an awesome calling. It is so demanding that I will never measure up to the standard of God's expectations nor of the congregation's. It requires more spiritual power than I have seen in a life-time. It is a full-time vocation plus two part-time jobs. It is a chemist's blend of the genius and the simpleton. It is and always will be beyond us, just out of reach. God designed preaching to be powerless without him. There are no guarantees without God! Even with God, preaching is a wild ride. Yet, I know and feel the unbelievable privilege that is mine as one of God's called preachers. May I grow in faithfulness to my calling. As I let him touch me, I will grow. Then through me others will grow too.

APPENDIX ONE

LETTERS

This is the June 6, 1995, letter to the Bethel Baptist Church congregation asking for participant cooperation in my thesis project research which was conducted in the Sunday morning worship service setting from July 16, 1995 through October 01, 1995. My McMaster ministry base team, the Bethel deacons, and the Council of Elders had approved my thesis project and recommended that the membership approve its completion. At a membership meeting on June 11, 1995, my Doctor of Ministry thesis project was approved including the use of video cameras. See page 163.

Bethel Baptist Church

995 Dodge Road ♦ Getzville, NY 14068 ♦ (716) 688-8668
Senior Pastor Dave Ewing Youth Pastor Marcus Thieme

June 6, 1995

Dear Bethel Members,

In 1992 Bethel Baptist Church authorized me to enter a Doctor of Ministry study program. In August the following year I began my Doctor of Ministry studies at McMaster Divinity College in Hamilton, Ontario. Please find a copy of Dr. William H. Brackney's letter to me of May 11, 1995, informing me that I have completed all course work towards the Doctor of Ministry degree in levels one and two, and have passed the comprehensive evaluation. Without your prayers and encouraging support, I would not have been able to accomplish this.

The third year in this program is different from the first two. The study work is not done in a classroom setting; rather, it is done in the ministry setting of the degree candidate. In my case the third year's research is to be done in the Sunday morning worship setting of Bethel Baptist Church. All the details of how this would work is presented in my thesis project proposal which I have shared with my McMaster team on May 30, 1995, and they have recommended that we go ahead with the proposal. I then shared this proposal with the Bethel deacons on June 1, 1995, and they also recommend that we proceed with the proposal. Finally, I shared my proposal with the Council of Elders on Saturday, June 3, 1995, and they too recommend that we go ahead.

Come to our 6:00 P.M. membership meeting Sunday, June 11, 1995, when I will be sharing the details of the proposal. I need your help because this study is about how I can become a better preacher of God's Word which will help you in responding to the preached word on Sunday mornings at Bethel Baptist Church. I thank you for reading this letter and for assisting me in becoming a better preacher. Thank you for praying to God on my behalf. I sure hope you can attend.

By God's Grace and for His Glory,

Pastor Dave Ewing

Celebrating A Century of God's Faithfulness

ALL FOR THE GLORY OF GOD

November 6, 1895 ♦ Matt. 5:16 ♦ November 6, 1995

APPENDIX TWO

RESPONSE FORMS

On the next four pages I include the following response forms: 1. God's Presence; 2. Noise; 3. My Response; 4. My Response, final form without fold-down-corners.

GOD'S PRESENCE IN THE SERMON

What evidences persuade you that God is present in any sermon?

IN THE SANCTUARY

♡ Symbols ♡ Colors ♡ Music ♡ _____

COMMENTS _____

IN OTHER PEOPLE

♡ Attitudes ♡ Reverence ♡ Responsiveness ♡ _____

COMMENTS _____

IN THE PREACHER

♡ Anointed ♡ Focused ♡ Conviction ♡ _____

COMMENTS _____

IN YOURSELF

♡ Spiritually Hungry ♡ Focused ♡ Rested ♡ _____

COMMENTS _____

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

NOISE ITEMS

Noise is anything that distracts from sensing God's presence in the sermon.

PHYSICAL NOISE ITEMS

- | | | |
|--|---------------------------------------|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Can't see | <input type="checkbox"/> I'm sick | <input type="checkbox"/> Can't hear |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I'm exhausted | <input type="checkbox"/> Other people | <input type="checkbox"/> Service Length |
| <input type="checkbox"/> _____ | <input type="checkbox"/> _____ | <input type="checkbox"/> _____ |

COMMENTS _____

PSYCHOLOGICAL NOISE ITEMS

- | | | |
|--|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Stress | <input type="checkbox"/> Bills Game | <input type="checkbox"/> Hurt feelings |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Health concerns | <input type="checkbox"/> World Disasters | <input type="checkbox"/> The economy |
| <input type="checkbox"/> _____ | <input type="checkbox"/> _____ | <input type="checkbox"/> _____ |

COMMENTS _____

SPIRITUAL NOISE ITEMS

- | | | |
|---------------------------------------|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> No devotions | <input type="checkbox"/> Lack of Love | <input type="checkbox"/> Bitterness |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Disobedience | <input type="checkbox"/> Not witnessing | <input type="checkbox"/> No fellowship |
| <input type="checkbox"/> _____ | <input type="checkbox"/> _____ | <input type="checkbox"/> _____ |

COMMENTS _____

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

MY RESPONSE FORM

I respond to God's presence in today's
sermon in the following ways:

WITH MY EMOTIONS

- | | | |
|---------------------------------|------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> ANGER | <input type="checkbox"/> COVICTION | <input type="checkbox"/> COMFORT |
| <input type="checkbox"/> SORROW | <input type="checkbox"/> FEAR | <input type="checkbox"/> JOY |
| <input type="checkbox"/> _____ | <input type="checkbox"/> _____ | <input type="checkbox"/> _____ |

COMMENTS _____

WITH MY THOUGHTS

- | | | |
|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> QUESTIONS | <input type="checkbox"/> PROMISES | <input type="checkbox"/> DEFENSES |
| <input type="checkbox"/> NEW INSIGHT | <input type="checkbox"/> _____ | <input type="checkbox"/> _____ |

COMMENTS _____

WITH MY ACTIONS

- | | |
|--|-----------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> COME TO THE ALTAR | <input type="checkbox"/> SAY AMEN |
| <input type="checkbox"/> SIGN UP TO SERVE | <input type="checkbox"/> CRY |
| <input type="checkbox"/> _____ | <input type="checkbox"/> _____ |

COMMENTS _____

WITH MY ATTITUDES

- | |
|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> EMBRACE A NEW VISION |
| <input type="checkbox"/> ENLARGE MY FRIENDSHIP CIRCLE |
| <input type="checkbox"/> _____ |

COMMENTS _____

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

MY RESPONSE

I respond to God's presence in today's
"SERMON" in the following ways:
August 06, 1995

EMOTIONALLY I RESPOND WITH

- CONVICTION JOY FEAR
 REPENTANCE THANKFULNESS ANGER

INTELLECTUALLY I RESPOND WITH

- A QUESTION A DEFENSE A PROMISE
 A PLAN A DECISION CONFUSION

PHYSICALLY I RESPOND BY

- COMING TO THE ALTAR SAYING "AMEN" ETC
 TEARS OF JOY ACTION AS OUTLINED

I RESPOND IN MY ATTITUDE BY

- EMBRACING A NEW VISION OR OUTLOOK ON LIFE
 ENLARGING MY CONCEPT OF FRIEND OR NEIGHBOR
 CLARIFICATION OF MY DOCTRINE OR THEOLOGY

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

In your own words share how you are responding to
God's presence in today's sermon 08-06-1995.
THE POWER OF A PROMISE
2 Peter 1:1-11

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