Scripting a Sermon

Using the Wisdom of Filmmaking for Impactful Preaching

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and
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To the late Dean Olson, Director of Concordia College Television Center, Moorhead, Minnesota.

—*Shauna Hannan*

To the late Michael Wiese, producer-director-author-publisher, who said, "Write your books for where you want them to take you." While I never know where they will take me, this one continues to be an unexpected, rich, ever-unfolding journey.

—*Gael Chandler*

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Preface to the "Preaching and . . ." Series

Preachers are not just preachers. When they step into the pulpit they are also theologians, storytellers, biblical teachers, pastors, historians, psychologists, entertainers, prophets, anthropologists, leaders, political scientists, popular culture commentators, ethicists, philosophers, scientists, and so much more. It is not that they are expected to be masters of homiletics and jacks of all other trades. Instead it is that when preachers strive to bring God's good news to bear on the whole of human existence, a lot is required to connect the two in existentially appropriate and meaningful ways.

The Perkins Center for Preaching Excellence (PCPE), directed by Alyce M. McKenzie, has partnered with Westminster John Knox Press to create a book series that contributes to that work in a new way. While homiletical scholarship has long drawn on the full range of biblical and theological disciplines as well as a variety of philosophical and rhetorical disciplines, this series attempts to push the interdisciplinary dialogue in new ways. For each volume, the PCPE brings together as coauthors two scholars—a homiletician and an expert from another, nontheological field to bring that field into conversation with homiletics in a way that offers both new insights into preaching as a task and vocation and new strategies for the practical elements of sermon preparation and delivery.

The first two volumes brought preaching into conversation with advertising and humor studies. In this third volume, preachers are given the chance to examine their homiletical practices through the diverse lenses of filmmaking. What preacher has not left a movie or turned off a television and thought, "I wish I could preach with that kind of effect"? Shauna Hannan and Gael Chandler help us bridge that gap.

O. Wesley Allen Jr.
Series Editor

Introduction

The film and television industry has exploded in popularity as shows are available on the big screen, home theater systems, and even cell phones. It's as if everyone is wired for the screen. This reason alone makes it worth a preacher's time to become adept at the language of film. Increasingly, people have more cinematic literacy than biblical literacy. In their book *Deep Focus*, Robert K. Johnston, Craig Detweiler, and Kutter Callaway confirm the cultural importance of films: "The cinema has become an important means of cultural communication, a contemporary language in need of understanding and explication. . . . Some even believe that cinema studies is positioned to become the new MBA, a means of general preparation for careers in fields as diverse as law and the military."[1] Although multimedia literacy is not one of the accreditation standards for theological schools (yet!), add theological studies to these diverse fields.

For many, visual images (whether still or moving) have replaced text as the central tool of communication. This substitution challenges theology's centrality of the Word (text) and revives a long-standing love/hate relationship between the pious and images. The obstacles are especially palpable for an oral/aural ecclesial practice like preaching. After all, faith comes through hearing (Rom. 10:17), not seeing,

1. Robert K. Johnston, Craig Detweiler, and Kutter Callaway, *Deep Focus: Film and Theology in Dialogue* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic Press, 2019), 11.

right? Despite such challenges, the Reformation spirit asks theologians to embrace new means of communicating the gospel. Might *cinematic literacy* be today's printing press?[2]

As seminary education continues to follow the higher education trend toward online teaching and learning, instructors recognize the need to enhance their multimedia literacy. Minimally, it is important to note that many of our students are already literate in the contemporary language of cinema. Churches, too, have been dabbling in the use of images, from iconography to screens in the sanctuary. The COVID-19 pandemic thrust preachers and other church leaders onto the virtual screen scene in new ways, and many have continued an online presence even when it was safe to gather in person again. Clearly the need for multimedia literacy is not going away. Again, as the authors of *Deep Focus* put it, "Movies serve not simply as a commodity but as a primary storytelling medium of the twenty-first century, interpreting reality for us, providing us with a common language, and acting as a type of cultural glue."[3]

The aim of this book is to boost preachers' cinematic literacy—which we are defining as the ability to decipher and interpret the content and language of films as told with pictures and sounds via acting, directing, cinematography, and editing—in order to seek convergences between filmmaking and homiletics for the purposes of enlivening the preached word, communicating the gospel, and impacting hearers and our world. We reference many films and film scenes and encourage you to watch them. They are readily available on disk or online (links are not provided because they are subject to changes or vanishing).

DIFFERENCES AND SIMILARITIES

To be sure, the differences between the two crafts are evident. One is primarily oral/aural and the other visual. One is generally live, the other preproduced. One is explicitly located within a religious/spiritual setting in the present, and the other can be located anywhere at any time. Preaching requires a product each week, if not multiple products within a week, and films routinely take years to produce. Whereas films are often entirely fabricated, preaching is expected to be "based on true events."

Despite numerous differences between the two fields, there are enough similarities that preachers have much to learn from filmmakers.

2. Terms that are in the "Key Filmmaking Terms" glossary are italicized on first use.
3. Johnston, Detweiler, and Callaway, *Deep Focus*, 10.

This book will show that both professions seek to impact others and the world and both do so by paying attention to the reactions and subsequent actions of the "audience." Filmmakers and preachers alike use techniques that can be traditional or unconventional. Their work is served by being collaborative and interactive. Both crafts require a balance of perspiration and inspiration, the "mundane and the magical," you might say. The latter highlights the mystery of the process, which may produce something different (better or worse) than the hoped-for or visualized results. Even so, the intentionality of the filmmaker offers food for thought for preachers, which the book's chapters will highlight.

THE SCOPE OF THE BOOK

Timothy Cargal notes that "several writers have discussed the cultural prominence and importance of film by describing it as a '*lingua franca*' or '"cultural currency" in which discussions about life and death (and life and depth) issues are conducted.'"[4] We hope that preachers might tap into this lingua franca in order to assist churchgoers in discussions about life and death and life and depth (!) issues.

Religion and film have been connected ever since the first films in the late nineteenth century, such as *The Horitz Passion Play* (1897) and *Passion Play of Oberammergau* (1898). Before the First World War, more than seventy films based on biblical themes were shot. Even so, at times religion has opposed film by forbidding churchgoers from going to cinemas and banning certain movies, as exemplified by the Production Code and the Roman Catholic Church's Legion of Decency developed in the 1930s.[5] Some religious organizations have continued the obstruction attempts with an eight-year boycott of Disney

4. Timothy B. Cargal, *Hearing a Film*, *Seeing a Sermon: Preaching and Popular Movies* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 3. Cargal cites Robert K. Johnston, *Reel Spirituality: Theology and Film in Dialogue* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2000); Clive Marsh and Gaye Ortiz, eds., *Explorations in Theology and Film* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997); and Craig Detweiler and Barry Taylor, *A Matrix of Meanings: Finding God in Pop Culture* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003).

5. A Hollywood motion picture standard instituted in 1934 and enforced until 1968, the Hays Code, as it was popularly known, prohibited profanity, nudity, drug use, sex, miscegenation, ridicule of the clergy, childbirth, and more in movies and was promoted by Christian sects.

(1997–2005) and current cries to defund the company along with castigating certain movies and Hollywood in general. More recently, some have demonized Oscar-nominated *Barbie* (2023) for its gender roles and transgender characters, calling for a boycott, and they presumably wouldn't have warmed up to director-cowriter Greta Gerwig's comments in a *Vox* interview, "Barbie was invented first. Ken was invented after Barbie to burnish Barbie's position in our eyes and in the world. That kind of creation myth is the opposite of the creation myth in Genesis."[6]

All the while, theologians have mined films for biblical themes and filmmakers have sought out theologians as conversation partners when incorporating theological themes into their films. Many books address these concerns. This book is different, however. It focuses on craft and asks what preachers can learn from filmmakers in order to apply cinematic literacy to their homiletical craft.

Each chapter identifies common challenges for crafting sermons and then presents essential components of filmmaking that preachers might employ for more effective preaching. Throughout the book we draw from a variety of filmmaking genres, such as drama, comedy, documentary, and horror, since we believe that every film genre can be fodder for preachers as they develop their craft. Even more, multiple filmmaking formats (e.g., feature film, short film, television series) are useful for increasing one's cinematic literacy for the purpose of sermonic impact.

Coming Attractions

Chapter 1, "Begin with the End: Shooting for Impact." Sermons that are detached from the realities of people's lives have little impact on belief and behavior. This chapter identifies the techniques filmmakers use to focus on their audience and to create impact and translates them into suitable techniques for preachers.

6. Alissa Wilkinson, "In the Beginning, There Was Barbie: Turns Out Greta Gerwig's Barbie Movie Is a Biblical Metaphor after All," *Vox*, July 20, 2023, www.vox.com/culture/23800753/barbie-review-bible-eden. See also Jennifer Sandlin, "Evangelicals Rail against Barbie, Demand Americans Not Take Children to See Film," boingboing, July 20, 2023, https://boingboing.net/2023/07/20/evangelicals-rail-against-barbie-demand-americans-not-take-children-to-see-film.html.

Chapter 2, "Cast and Crew: Collaborating for Impact." Sermons that represent only one person's work and viewpoint fail to equip people to fulfill their baptismal call to proclaim. This chapter demystifies how film directors, cast, and crew work together to create and deliver a show. It challenges preachers to move beyond operating as solo artists in order to empower others to become part of a sermon's cast and crew.

Chapter 3, "Fade In: Creating the Opening." Sermon openings that are disconnected from the rest of the sermon or from the biblical pericope neglect to set in motion the sermon's theme, tone, and hoped-for outcome. The chapter discusses how filmmakers create opening scenes that set up the rest of the film and provides concrete recommendations for making the first minutes of a sermon more impactful.

Chapter 4, "Scenes, Beats, and Pacing: The Building Blocks." Sermons, like films, can try to do too much or go in too many directions with too many characters, losing their audience or leaving them confused. The chapter covers how filmmakers construct scenes and script narratives that flow at an understandable, believable rate.

Chapter 5, "Cut by Cut: Editing for Story and Audience." Preachers should think like film editors who stand in for the audience and act as the final writer by pacing the story, removing shots and scenes that do not forward the action, and asking with every cut, What does the audience need now? What do they need to know with each sentence, paragraph, story, and claim?

Chapter 6, "Fade Out: Creating the Closing." Sermons often contain too many endings or finish too abruptly. Preachers might wonder how to "land the plane." This chapter highlights the ways films reach their final fade-out and presents preachers with choices for making a sermon's closing most effective.

Chapter 7, "Outtakes." This short closing chapter builds on the rest, offering final recommendations and challenges, such as looking at preaching and artificial intelligence (AI), considering a sermon's sound track, and creating a trailer (preview) of a sermon.

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Begin with the End: Shooting for Impact

Movies change us. Sermons change us too. We hope. In this time of increasing cinematic literacy, not only have we developed the sense that films are supposed to affect us but we also have the capacity to identify a film's impact on us beyond "I liked it" or "I didn't like it." Have you ever wondered why so many people share with others a film's impact on them but many (if not most) worshipers rarely talk with one another about their worship experience, especially the Sunday sermon? Imagine if churchgoers were impacted by a sermon and could share their experience beyond "I liked it" or "I didn't like it." Increasing such homiletical literacy begins with the practices of preachers themselves, which is why this chapter focuses on how preachers might achieve their desired impact as effectively as filmmakers do by doing what filmmakers do.

FILMMAKERS AND STORY

Identifying and Achieving Desired Impact

Where Filmmakers Start

Simply put, filmmakers start with the story they want to tell. This story can spring from a newspaper article, someone or something in the filmmaker's life, a current or historical event or person, or a thread on social

media. It can be "based on true events" or adapted from a play, novel, video game, or other creative entity. A story can also spring entirely from the creator's imagination, catalyzed by research, stream-of-conscious freewriting, *blue skying* (freewriting with others in a writer's room), and always by just plain putting pen to paper or keyboard to computer. The setting can be the past, present, or future as the story conveys an era, a life, an event, a philosophy, and much more.

Part of conceiving a show involves deciding how the story will best be told. Will it work better as a *documentary* or fiction? Should it be a short film, a feature, a TV series?[1] If fiction, what genre fits best? Some of the most impactful films have had little or no planning at all. Most people witnessed the impact of the video of George Floyd's murder, the news coverage of the gallant end of Serena Williams's decades-long career, and the televised US House Select Committee hearings about January 6. In these examples, filmmakers did not plan, they just captured. Normally, however, creating a story for a film involves months, if not years, of research and planning, inspiration, and perspiration until the film is exhibited and begins to impact viewers.

Reading the Audience

Filmmakers achieve maximum impact by paying careful attention to their potential audience from conception to delivery as they develop and present the story they want to tell. Simone Bartesaghi relates the director's process in his book *The Director's Six Senses:*

> We tell our stories by selecting words that our audience can understand. We try very hard to make sure that the story that begins in our mind will eventually become the same story in our audience's mind. . . . When the movie is watched by the audience, it's experienced again piece by piece, shot by shot, sound by sound, and it's important that the pieces of the puzzle are going to be put together with the same meaning by the audience.[2]

1. A feature has an ideal running time of ninety minutes; a TV show has a set, contracted time ranging from twenty-five to sixty minutes. A video might have no required length and be only minutes long (such as a music video) or last for seconds, as viral videos have repeatedly demonstrated. To summarize, duration depends on format and exhibition requirements.

2. Simone Bartesaghi, *The Director's Six Senses: An Innovative Approach to Developing Your Filmmaking Skills* (Studio City, CA: Michael Wiese Productions, 2016), xi–xii.

Underlying every decision a filmmaker makes about the story is a desire for and commitment to the film impacting the audience. Starting with the scriptwriter, filmmakers consider who their audience will be. While seeking as wide a viewership as possible, they will also target specific audiences, such as tweens, LGBTQIA+ people, and the global majority by their choice of subject matter, characters, actors, and genre. As one author puts it, "The filmmaker organizes shots, camera movement, editing, and music to elicit certain reactions so that viewers will respond right on cue precisely as intended."[3] Once filmmakers dream up the story, they need to be able to describe it quickly and clearly to potential buyers, collaborators, and viewers. Enter the *logline*.

Cinematic Loglines

Also referred to as a *one-liner*, a logline is a succinct sentence (sometimes two) that dynamically communicates what the movie or TV series is about. The logline is the elevator pitch, a high-concept summary of the screenplay, which should contain the opposing forces—protagonist and antagonist—and the conflict, what is at stake. Originally a nautical term, "logline" came into use in early Hollywood when the burgeoning studios began keeping logbooks with short summaries of the hundreds of scripts they owned. Here's a sample logline: A wealthy old woman remembers a love affair she had as a young woman on an ill-fated luxury liner (*Titanic*). If the movie is a documentary, the logline must show what the protagonist is up against, such as exposing a corporation's malfeasance, discovering a family secret, or revisiting a time in history with new research. For instance, the logline for *My Octopus Teacher* might be this: a divorced cinematographer dives deep into the ocean to befriend an octopus while seeking reconnection with his son.

How do filmmakers use a logline? Primarily, it's deployed by those who pitch the project—screenwriter, director, and producer—to secure funds or get the show produced by a studio or production company. People involved in *production* (filming) and *postproduction* (editing) will use their own words to describe the show to friends and family and be unaware of the logline. The logline may be refined as the show changes during script development and following *final cut* when it becomes part of the marketing campaign. The superpower of the logline throughout

3. William D. Romanowski, *Cinematic Faith: A Christian Perspective on Movies and Meaning* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2019), 55.

the filmmaking process and during exhibition is to summarize the story and sell people on the show.

Film Genre and Impact

In developing the story, a filmmaker will determine not just *what* the story is about and *who* the intended audience is, but also *how* to tell it most faithfully and truthfully. Will it best be told as a drama? A thriller? A horror film? It is fitting that the film *mother!* (2017), with its biblical and allegorical elements of the contemporary plight of Mother Earth, is a psychological horror movie. Under what circumstances might a comedy work better than a documentary to illuminate a controversial or complex set of political truths? *Tootsie* (1982) aimed to portray life for aspiring actresses via its cross-dressing male lead character. Consider also the satirical comedy *Don't Look Up* (2021), an allegory for what could happen if we ignore our changing climate. Or would the science fiction genre be more fitting, as demonstrated in the dystopian *Snowpiercer* (2013), which skewered capitalism by focusing on a nonstop train with sealed cars segregated by social class that relentlessly circles the earth?

Films can amuse, illuminate, inform, motivate, manipulate, propagandize, frighten, and give catharsis. Each genre can and does do much more. Take, for example, documentaries. In their book *Producing with Passion,* Dorothy Fadiman and Tony Levelle note, "When you make a documentary, you hold the potential to open people's eyes and take them beyond their usual way of seeing the world."[4] Don Schwartz, film critic and regular contributor to the magazine *cineSOURCE,* suggests that choosing to see documentary films is like choosing the "red pill" from *The Matrix* (1999), thereby waking the person up—"giving him the opportunity to escape." He writes,

> It is the provocative films—on socio-political-economic injustice, on histories ignored, on our destruction of the world—that challenge our dearly-held beliefs and values. Documentary filmmakers are liberators; they offer the Red Pill. . . . Yes, the Red Pill tastes bitter; it can be deeply disturbing, demoralizing. Its side effects include nausea and vomiting as we release the phantasies

4. Dorothy Fadiman and Tony Levelle, *Producing with Passion: Making Films That Change the World* (Studio City, CA: Michael Wiese Productions, 2008), xiv.

> [*sic*] we've engorged. Or, we may choose to remain "comfortably numb."[5]

In short, filmmakers want to create something that makes an audience feel something. Even more, they want something to happen.

How to Gauge Actual Impact

In the end, filmmakers learn the impact of their films from box office sales. However, well in advance of a film's release, they gauge impact by hosting prerelease screenings where they solicit viewers' oral and written feedback on the show's story, characters, plot, and theme along with its level of engagement and other criteria. During production and postproduction, filmmakers solicit input from colleagues and coworkers: screenwriter from writing groups, director from actors, cinematographer, editor, and producers. Filmmakers have a clue how their work will impact their audience. Still, as much as Hollywood moguls deem it the film "business," there are no infallible tools for predicting box office. A sure thing can flop, an independent movie can become a hit, a critics' darling can draw low returns, an art film can achieve a cult following.

Beyond the box office, there are other measures for how a film impacts an audience. One such indicator emerged in the 1980s. Created by comic artist and graphic novelist Alison Bechdel, the *Bechdel Test* measures the representation of women in movies and fiction.[6] To pass the test, a film must have at least two featured women who talk to each other about something other than a man. This informal analysis has been used to evaluate movies and TV shows and correlate them with box office returns. Research studies have consistently documented that films that pass the test perform better financially. Journalists Versha Sharma and Hanna Sender ran the Bechdel Test on the fifty top-grossing movies of 2013 and concluded, "The grand total domestic box office number for the movies that passed [the test] is significantly higher than the domestic box office total for the movies that didn't. We're

5. Don Schwartz, *Telling Their Own Stories: Conversations with Documentary Filmmakers* (Berkeley, CA: Don Schwartz, 2013), 2.

6. Bechdel's graphic memoir *Fun Home* morphed into a Broadway musical and won a Tony in 2015 and many other awards.

talking billions."[7] The Bechdel Test has fostered other tests, notably the Vito Russo Test for LGBTQIA+ portrayal, an Orthodox Jew test, and a test that examines characters with questions such as "Are there two named characters of color? Do they have dialogue that doesn't involve comforting or supporting a white person?"

In the final analysis, the impact on lives may add up to far more than box office receipts. Jeff Skoll, first president of eBay, chair of Participant Media, and executive producer of *An Inconvenient Truth* (2006), stated, "One metric of success that we use is whether more good comes from the film than just putting the money directly to work in a non-profit organization involved in the same issue. . . . We will take risks on projects where we think we might lose money, because we hope that the good that comes from that outweighs the risk. It's a different kind of philanthropy."[8]

Film Impact Teams

No filmmakers work more tirelessly toward a desired impact than documentary filmmakers. They rely on crowdsourcing and grants, partnering with individuals, not-for-profits, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and corporations not only for funds but also for spreading the word so that the film will reach its audience and achieve its desired impact. While social media, influencers, and reporters (print and online) are critical, documentary filmmakers have begun to put together "impact teams" to determine how films change hearts and minds and motivate their viewers to take action.[9] In addition to filmmakers and marketers, the impact team can be composed of consultants from other walks of life, including statisticians, nonprofit personnel, journalists, government employees, and social activists.

In the last decade, this desire for impact has advanced to a new level with the inception of a new filmmaking role, the "impact producer," who

7. Versa Sharma and Hanna Sender, "Hollywood Movies with Strong Female Roles Make More Money," *Vocativ,* January 2, 2014, quoted in Alanna Vagianos, "This Graph Proves That Everyone Loses When Hollywood Is Sexist," *Huffington Post*, January 3, 2014, https://www.huffpost.com/entry/hollywood-sexist-bechdel_test_vocativ_n_4536277.

8. *San Jose Mercury News* interview with Jeff Skoll by Bruce Newman, October 2005, quoted in "Beyond the Box Office: New Documentary Valuations," Channel 4 BRITDOC Foundation, May 2011, https://impactguide.org/static/library/AnInconvenientTruth_BeyondTheBoxOffice.pdf, 4.

9. Britdoc.org/Impact, "Meet the Impact Producer," *The Impact Field Guide and Toolkit: From Art to Impact*, https://impactguide.org/.

is responsible "for maximizing a film's potential for social change."[10] The impact producer and their team track trailer views, website traffic, audience and email list numbers, critics' responses, organizations partnered or worked with, Facebook likes, community screenings, theatrical and broadcast runs, festivals, and awards. *The Age of Stupid,* a 2009 UK film tackling climate change, allowed "anyone anywhere" to organize a film screening.[11] The impact team documented the results in their case study of *The Age of Stupid,* writing, "Crucially, the organiser [of the film screening] keeps any profits for themselves or their campaign. This empowers and engages audiences before they have even seen the film because, in a sense, it hands the film and its issues directly back to the audience."[12] The team concluded that "the impact of this film built on the awareness of the issues and saw not just individuals but corporations and governments commit to, and exceed, a 10% cut in their emissions."[13]

With audience participation in mind, the company Imagine Impact (launched in 2018 by Brian Grazer, Ron Howard, and Tyler Mitchell) created an "open submission process" in order to

> identify and develop feature film ideas in four specific genres over the next year that they will then bring to Netflix. . . . Imagine Impact was launched . . . as a means of accelerating and democratizing the script development process by attempting to remove bias from the submission process, allowing the writer's voice to speak for itself and the most viable projects to move forward, regardless of the applicant's location, demographic, or representation status.[14]

10. Impact producers are now listed on film credits. See https://impact-guide.org/impact-in-action/the-role-of-film-teams/ and Jackson DeMos, "Research Study Finds That a Film Can Have a Measurable Impact on Audience Behavior," USC Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism, updated May 3, 2023,https://annenberg.usc.edu/news/centers/research-study-finds-film-can-have-measurable-impact-audience-behavior.

11. Britdoc.org/Impact, "*The Age of Stupid* Case Study," The Impact Field Guide and Toolkit, https://impactguide.org/static/library/AgeOfStupid.pdf, 4.

12. "*Age of Stupid* Case Study," 4.

13. "*Age of Stupid* Case Study," 7.

14. Dave McNary, "Netflix Teams with Ron Howard and Brian Grazer's Imagine Impact to Develop Films from Rising Filmmakers," *Variety,* June 17, 2020, https://variety.com/2020/film/news/netflix-ron-howard-brian-grazer-imagine-1234637665/.

These kinds of entrepreneurial advances in the film industry highlight increased attention on audience impact even when films are hatched with an eye to ratings and the box office. It is fair to say that in raising awareness about a particular film, the impact team sometimes shapes the film itself. Filmmakers also benefit personally from focusing on impact in ways that range from respect to popularity and increased opportunities to make the kinds of films they are passionate about.

PREACHERS AND STORY

Identifying and Achieving Desired Impact

While preachers do not have the time or budget to engage in market research as filmmakers do, they stand to benefit by focusing on impact. There are a variety of manageable practices to glean from the filmmaking industry regarding how to impact audiences and to gauge the actual impact, for example, being clear about and refining the story being told, paying particular attention to the audience's needs, arranging prerelease "screenings," focusing on the "how" as well as the "what," and following up with hearers.

Where Preachers Start

Preachers begin with a story as well—the biblical story. Take a moment to identify how you might encapsulate God's story by filling in the blank:

The biblical story is about _____
_____
_____.

Taking a cue from the film industry's use of the logline—the high-concept summary—this statement should contain the opposing forces (protagonist and antagonist), the conflict, and what is at stake. For instance, one might say the biblical story is about how a divine being loves its creation so much that it becomes human both to understand the injustices experienced by the beloved creation and to challenge and overcome the oppressive systems that instigate those injustices.

The task then focuses on the question of how one might bring this grand narrative to life in the here and now, wherever and whenever that might be. Whereas literature's aim is to turn blood into ink, à la T. S. Eliot, preaching's aim is to turn ink (i.e., the written biblical text) into blood.[15] Preaching intends to bring the sacred text, God's story, to life. Christians have taken up this challenge in the pulpit ever since Jesus's death and resurrection.[16] In so doing, preaching focuses not necessarily on the grand narrative for each occasion but on the numerous individual stories that make up that grand narrative, be they about an event, an experience, a character, or a scene. The key for preachers is being clear about and staying focused on the story they're telling.

As noted in the introduction, the first film that attempts to tell the biblical story was produced fewer than two decades after the first motion picture. That film, *The Horitz Passion Play* (1897), was followed in 1898 by the eleven-minute film *La Passion*, by the Lumière brothers.[17] Hundreds of films on biblical stories have followed.[18] None of them attempted to tell the whole biblical story. They could not have done so because the story is far too broad, too exhaustive; it defies

15. Charles Bartow flips T. S. Eliot's claim. Bartow, *God's Human Speech: A Practical Theology of Proclamation* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1997), 43.

16. Recall what might be considered one of the first Christian sermons, as recounted in the Gospel of John. While weeping after seeing that the tomb where the crucified Jesus has been laid is empty, Mary Magdalene encounters someone who she thinks is the gardener. After a brief dialogue, she recognizes the person to be Jesus, who is alive. "Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, 'I have seen the Lord,' and she told them that he had said these things to her" (John 20:18, NRSVue). That one line, "I have seen the Lord," is a sermon in the form of personal testimony, a timeless and effective form of preaching. From that first proclamation of Jesus's resurrection through today, preachers across the globe have been figuring out how to tell that story.

17. John Sanidopoulos, "Movie Review: The Passion (1898)," *Honey and Hemlock* (blog), March 3, 2020, http://www.honeyandhemlock.com/2020/03/movie-review-passion-1898.html. For an interesting view into films based on the Bible, visit the collection of biblical movie posters at https://www.dspt.edu/biblical-movie-poster-collection.

18. Films focused explicitly on religious themes are not the only films from which preachers can gain insight. As noted in the introduction, this book discusses a wide variety of film themes, most commonly those that do not focus solely on telling the biblical story.

being crammed into a fifteen-minute monologue, a short film, or even a ninety-minute film. Even filmmakers of the "greatest story ever told" tell the stories within the story. They choose a particular perspective from which to tell the story, highlighting specific characters, topics, plotlines, and genres and downplaying others as variously as sermons do. The opportunity for preachers, therefore, is to learn how filmmakers tell the story within a story effectively and adopt practices and techniques for preaching the biblical story insofar as they are appropriate and applicable; that is, insofar as they will impact a particular set of hearers in a manner fitting of God's good news.

Reading the Audience

Just as filmmakers benefit from considering their hoped-for audiences in the *development* and *preproduction* phases before *shooting* the show, so, too, might preachers pay attention to the particularities of their hearers even before they begin to craft their sermons. While the practices may not be exactly the same, the intention to impact the audience is. Intentional small steps go a long way when preachers "read their audience."

For starters, we recommend that preachers spend time (even if only fifteen to twenty minutes) at the beginning of their sermon-crafting process replying to these prompts: What is going on in the world? in the church? in your congregation? with certain individuals? with you? Addressing these and other relevant questions allows preachers to tap into the status quo and their people's lives from the start. Even though pastors accompany their congregation members as they live their lives, reflecting through writing can bring up some things that would otherwise be assumed or forgotten. Preachers might also make it a habit to ask two or three (or more) people these same questions for each sermon. Congregants will appreciate being asked.

Such preaching practices are acts of pastoral care both as a way to begin conversation with hearers and because they respect the particularities of others' experience by not making assumptions. In her book *Decolonizing Preaching*, Sarah Travis suggests that preachers "can only speak on behalf of others if they are in conversation with them. . . . Preachers cannot escape the problem of representing others, yet can strive to be as accurate as possible and clear that whenever we speak about others in our sermons we speak out of our own biases and limited knowledge."[19]

19. Sarah Travis, *Decolonizing Preaching: The Pulpit as Postcolonial Space* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2014), 97.

Second, we encourage preachers to gather people for a Bible study focused on the Sunday's preaching passage. Instead of telling participants what the story means, preachers can invite them into discussion and creative practices that motivate them to engage the story and offer possible connections to their own lives.[20] This Bible study will give preachers a sense of what hearers already know about the story and what they desire to know. It helps to identify the particular story within the grand biblical narrative that needs to be addressed; that is, a sermon's specific focus.

Sermonic Loglines

We urge preachers to develop a logline for each sermon in order to assist with the focus of the sermon. For example, a preacher might land on the following logline for a sermon based on Psalm 23: "The Holy Spirit meets people exactly where they are in their lives, even, perhaps especially, those who are in deep despair." This statement is essentially a sermonic logline, which helps the preacher swiftly describe the sermon to others. If the logline is unclear or cumbersome, preachers will need to refine it.

For the filmmaker, the logline is primarily used to market a film. For the preacher, it can be a guide in the sermon-crafting process. Marvin McMickle notes that this sermonic claim "helps sort through all of the things that could be said in any one sermon, and helps to narrow the preacher's focus down to what should and will be said in this particular sermon."[21] Ultimately, everything in the sermon, as with a film, should then be connected to the logline and contribute to the desired impact on the audience. McMickle refers to Fred Craddock, who said,

20. For more ways to tune into the lives of hearers relative to preaching practices and to invite them into the process, see Shauna Hannan, *The Peoples' Sermon*: *Preaching as a Ministry of the Whole Congregation,* Working Preacher Books (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2021).

21. Marvin A. McMickle, *Shaping the Claim: Moving from Text to Sermon,* Elements of Preaching (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008), Kindle loc. 113–14. This statement is akin to what homileticians regularly encourage preachers to write when moving "from text to sermon." Thomas Long's "focus statement" is "a concise description of the central, controlling, and unifying theme of the sermon." See Long, *The Witness of Preaching,* 3rd ed. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2016), 127.

> To aim at nothing is to miss everything, but to be specific and clear in one's presentation is to make direct contact with many whose ages, circumstances, and apparent needs are widely divergent. Listeners to sharply focused sermons have an amazing capacity to perceive that the sermon was prepared with them specifically in mind.[22]

While there is already a sermonic equivalent to a cinematic logline, the focus statement, filmmaking does not have an industry-wide term for an impact statement. Preaching does. The "function statement," as Thomas Long calls it, is "a description of what the preacher hopes the sermon will create or cause to happen for the hearers. . . . The function statement names the hoped-for change."[23] For each sermon, Long encourages preachers to write a one-sentence function statement that describes what a preacher wants the sermon to do to or for the hearers in light of what the biblical text does and in light of what is known about the hearers and their lives. In other words, the preacher identifies the hoped-for impact of the sermon on individual hearers, the church, and maybe even the world. Perhaps one might call this a "functional logline."

Given the sample logline above (The Holy Spirit meets people exactly where they are in their lives, even, perhaps especially, those who are in deep despair), possible functional loglines for a sermon based on Psalm 23 might be:

- This sermon aims to comfort hearers by letting them know that the Holy Spirit is accompanying them in their grief.
- This sermon will assure hearers that while the way to newfound hope is through mourning, their weeping will one day turn to dancing.

A functional logline is not an end in itself but a means to an end—an end that aims to impact the life of the viewer, listener, or reader. Note how the writer of the Gospel of Luke begins by indicating the hoped-for impact on the message's recipients:

> Since many have undertaken to compile a narrative about the events that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed

22. McMickle, *Shaping the Claim,* Kindle loc. 115–17, quotes Fred B. Craddock, *Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1985), 155.

23. Long, *Witness of Preaching*, 127.

> on to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word, I, too, decided, as one having a grasp of everything from the start, to write a well-ordered account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may have a firm grasp of the words in which you have been instructed. (Luke 1:1–4 NRSVue)

Why, preachers, do you wish to tell God's story? What is the hoped-for impact of your proclamation? Perhaps it is so that others "may have a firm grasp of the words in which you have been instructed." Or, perhaps, it is so that your hearers may feel beloved and valued by their creator. Other possibilities might be to empower people to serve their neighbor or to challenge systemic injustices—in other words, to live differently. For each sermon, will you want primarily for your hearers to *know* something? to *feel* something? to *do* something?

Individual sermons are often based on one portion of this story even as they aim to align with the broader story. When amassed over time, the cumulative effect of a body of sermons is more than the sum of its parts. That is to say, no individual sermon can do it all. Not even the cumulative effect can exhaust the depth and breadth of the story. And yet we try. Why? Because it makes a difference; it has an impact. Preachers hope to impact people's lives. Sermons can do things.[24]

Even though there may not be an equivalent film industry term for function statement, the desired impact on the audience permeates every choice the filmmaking team makes from writing to shooting to editing, including selecting the genre of the film. So too for the preacher, the functional logline can affect the kind of content in the sermon.

The Sermon and Film Genre

Determined by a film's style, theme, plot, conventions, and character types, the primary film genres are action-adventure, comedy, documentary, drama, fantasy, film noir, horror, romance, sci-fi, and thriller. One might ask which genre is most suitable for preachers to pay attention to. We think preachers can find connections between the Bible and each of the film genres. You may utilize wisdom from one or more genres in a sermon, depending on its desired impact.

24. Intentionality can be Spirit-led and therefore need not be equated with manipulation, as some may be led to believe.

The documentary, with its desire to chronicle past, present, and future experiences, seems to be an obvious possibility. It's the "factual" nature of God's presence in our lives that the preacher hopes will impact listeners. Often unscripted, nonfiction films such as documentaries can throw shade or light on a subject; expose different lives, living situations, and points of view (POVs); or illuminate a historical period or event in order to educate, instruct, or simply bear witness to events by documenting them. Ken Burns's miniseries *The U.S. and the Holocaust* (2022) recounted how antisemitism was baked into US culture and government during Hitler's rise and World War II. Consider also the home movie, which is a type of personal documentary that puts hearers front and center as they see and hear themselves.

Sermons can also be like *dramas,* with their ability to show every type of human emotion, struggle, conflict, and relationship; to conjure villains, heroes, and antiheroes; and to take us to other worlds and times, from the past to the future. We find an example with the first two seasons of *The White Lotus* (2021–) as it pulls audiences into the world of affluence and service industry workers.

Learning from character-driven films could benefit preachers because, essentially, every sermon is a character study of God. When an audience absorbs the spectrum of human actions and reactions of a lead character, often breathing in sync with them, it is moved and motivated on many levels. The feature drama *Tár* (2022), which depicted the rise and fall of a symphony conductor, challenged audiences to ponder themes of gender, cancel culture, art, and power.

Romance may not be the first genre people think of when looking for help with preaching. Yet it could be said that the biblical story functions like a love story between God and God's beloved creation.

And what should we say about *horror*? No doubt the Bible is filled with stories of betrayal, destruction, violence, and murder. In chapter 2 of his expansive book on genre, *The Anatomy of Genres,* John Truby begins his study with horror because "the major distinction governing human existence is life versus death." He says that "Genesis in the Old Testament is where horror elements first come together as a genre."[25] But should preachers look to the horror genre for tips on impactful preaching? In her now classic feminist manifesto, theologian Phyllis Trible acknowledges that "scripture reflects [life] in both holiness and horror." She goes on to say that "reflections themselves neither man-

25. John Truby, *The Anatomy of Genres: How Story Forms Explain the Way the World Works* (New York: Picador, 2022), 22.

date nor manufacture change; yet by enabling insight, they may inspire repentance. In other words, sad stories may yield new beginnings."[26] In the introductory chapter, "On Telling Sad Stories," Trible says that her task in writing the book is

> to tell sad stories as I hear them. Indeed, they are tales of terror with women as victims. Belonging to the sacred scriptures of synagogue and church, these narratives yield four portraits of suffering in ancient Israel: Hagar, the slave used, abused, and rejected; Tamar, the princess raped and discarded; an unnamed woman, the concubine raped, murdered, and dismembered; and the daughter of Jephthah, a virgin slain and sacrificed.[27]

Trible's approach "recounts tales of terror *in memoriam* to offer sympathetic readings to abused women" and "interprets stories of outrage on behalf of their female victims in order to recover a neglected history, to remember a past that the present embodies, and to pray that these terrors shall not come to pass again."[28] With a nod to Paul Ricœur, she says, "If without stories we live not, stories live not without us. Alone a text is mute and ineffectual. In the speaking and the hearing new things appear on the land."[29] While we might leave the "land of terror," we do so, Trible says, with a limp.

But a question remains: what attracts people to horror films? Author John Lyden engages the work of theologian Jon Pahl, who argues that "what viewers enjoy is surviving the ordeals witnessed onscreen: 'A viewer is, experientially, resurrected by enduring a terrifying identification with the death of a victim and then walking out of the theatre alive' as horror films 'condense the fear of death into a cinematic spectacle that displaces fear onto various actors in traumatic circumstances' after which the viewer is 'saved' by a return to the 'real world.'" Lyden concludes that "the liminal experience is itself cathartic in the mere fact that one can leave the theater whole—and even laugh off the fear."[30]

26. Phyllis Trible, *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 2.

27. Trible, *Texts of Terror,* 1.

28. Trible, *Texts of Terror,* 3.

29. Trible, *Texts of Terror,* 1.

30. John C. Lyden, *Film as Religion: Myths, Morals, and Rituals*, 2nd ed. (New York: New York University Press, 2019), 218. Lyden is quoting Jon Pahl, *Empire of Sacrifice: The Religious Origins of American Violence* (New York: New York University Press, 2010), 55.

Perhaps herein lies the usefulness of film's horror genre for the preacher. We are left to ask if, like the horror film genre, sermons might provide space for people to express and master their fears.[31] If Scott Derrickson is correct when he calls horror "the genre of non-denial," it is worth a closer look if preachers adhere to a theology of the cross that aims to "call a thing what it really is."[32]

One challenge to a preacher's engagement with certain film genres is the notion of truth telling. People might give more leeway to filmmakers to "make up" stories. However, the expectation of preachers is that what they say is true. Indeed, there is a long history of deductive preaching that aims to persuade hearers of the truth of a claim. Even so, with the rise of the New Homiletic in the late 1960s and the emergence of inductive preaching, the goal has become less about persuasion and more about transformation. Preachers can learn from the ways filmmakers tell stories that are factual, entirely fiction, or "based on true events."

The Sermon and Film Format

Beyond the discussion of genre is the question of format, source, and medium. Given that preachers are beginning with an original source, an existing text, the Bible, and adapting its message for a different medium, the sermon, it seems useful to reflect on *adapted screenplays* as a model. An adapted screenplay is a film sourced from and based on an original work first offered in another medium (e.g., novel or play). The challenge for filmmakers adapting an original text is to preserve the tone and themes from the original work as they change elements to better suit the medium. Sound familiar, preachers? One might then study films based on the biblical story, as noted above.

Preachers, however, could learn just as much by broadening the focus to other adapted screenplays, such as *West Side Story,* with its multiple and varied adaptations. Inspired by William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet,* Arthur Laurent made it into a "book musical" before Jerome Robbins and Leonard Bernstein adapted it into a theatrical

31. See Brigid Cherry, "Refusing to Refuse to Look," in *Identifying Hollywood's Audiences: Cultural Identity and the Movies*, ed. Melvyn Stokes and Richard Maltby (London: British Film Institute, 1999), 187–203.

32. In Josh Larsen, *Fear Not! A Christian Appreciation of Horror Movies* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2023), 6. On the theology of the cross, see Martin Luther's Heidelberg Disputation.

performance in the 1950s. Since then, *West Side Story* has been represented on the stage numerous times and in numerous countries. Imagine all the challenges and possibilities of recontextualizing it for each iteration. *West Side Story* was first adapted into a film in 1961 and then readapted in 2021. This point should also resonate for preachers. Comparing the various iterations is like comparing multiple sermons on the same biblical passage preached sixty years apart. Imagination and contextualization abound in the interpretations even as the creators attempt to remain faithful to the original and have an impact on the present-day context. We preachers know how our primary story ends (at least, the written part). The challenge is how we weave it into the twenty-first century. Same story—new era, new audience.

So far we've been highlighting the feature-length film, but there are other program formats, both short and extended, worth exploring. Whether it's an adaptation or an original, consider which format (meaning the structure of the story in terms of its program length, a.k.a. running time) fits all that is intended. Will the sermon be completed in a single telling akin to a long-form feature film or a short-form film or video? Or does it call for being spun out over multiple tellings, like TV episodes or a miniseries? The short film, for example, is more aligned with sermon length and, therefore, can be instructive in the way it moves through the plot quickly.[33] Keeping with this idea of length and rapid movement within each show and its episodic rhythm, one could say the television series is more similar to preaching. Each episode serves the impact of the overall series by moving along the plot, complexifying the problems, giving clues to the solutions, and, above all, withholding and revealing features of characters. In *The Homiletic of All Believers,* O. Wesley Allen Jr., writes, "As with script writing, preachers must have a bifocal approach to developing sermons—to preach effective individual sermons that *cumulatively* influence the community's proclamatory conversations and individuals' meaning-making processes."[34] Might our week-to-week sermons be binge-worthy?

33. See works by Eugene Lowry, such as *The Homiletical Plot: The Sermon as Narrative Art Form; The Homiletical Beat: Why All Sermons Are Narrative;* and *Doing Time in the Pulpit: The Relationship between Narrative and Preaching*.

34. O. Wesley Allen, Jr., *The Homiletic of All Believers: A Conversational Approach to Proclamation and Preaching* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 61; emphasis added. Allen uses the analogy of television series to illustrate the impact sought in cumulative preaching (58–64).

Sermon Form and Impact

The gamut of genres available to the filmmaker is somewhat akin to the variety of sermon forms available to the preacher. Preachers often land on a sermon form by subject matter and occasion, but the sermon form could also be chosen relative to desired impact. Just like the unfortunate tendency to generalize about a film genre (for example, rom-coms entertain and docs inform), one might generalize about the impact of a particular sermon form. For instance, a deductive sermon (a traditional three-point form) informs and therefore might be chosen when aiming to teach something about a particular church doctrine. Or an inductive sermon (much like Eugene Lowry's narrative "homiletical plot," a.k.a. Lowry's Loop) might be chosen when aiming to invite the audience into an experience (e.g., of being forgiven or liberated). However, like film genre, each sermon form does so much more.

Another important consideration is which form best suits the occasion of the sermon. Funerals are typically (though not necessarily) serious and sad whereas festivals (like Christmas and Easter) are celebratory. On more ordinary Sundays, the tone and character of the biblical passage likely drive the form. Biblical stories produce a gamut of experiences; they can delight, inform, redirect, amuse, comfort, challenge, convict. The list goes on. Preachers begin by noticing the impact a biblical story has on themselves and others (in the presermon Bible study, for instance) and aim for the sermon to have a similar impact. In each of these scenarios, the audience and their needs are front and center in the sermon-crafting process.[35]

Above all, the "how" of preaching is just as important as the "what." Sermon form itself adds a layer of meaning. Beyond simply being a way of structuring the parts of the sermon, it is an invitation for how to hear, how to receive the message, and, in that way, is an act of pastoral care.[36] We address this more in chapter 5 on editing.

How to Gauge Actual Impact

Gauging a sermon's impact is neither quick nor easy. The congregation's offering plate is not the filmmaker's box office. While the cumulative

35. For more information on various sermon forms and their impact, see O. Wesley Allen, Jr., *Determining the Form* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2018).

36. Long, *Witness of Preaching,* 150.

effect of weekly sermons is the best way to measure homiletical impact (one documentarian called the cinematic equivalent "the longitudinal impact"[37]), preachers have a lot to gain from gauging the impact of individual sermons. Taking a cue from filmmakers, for starters, don't wait until after you've preached the sermon.

"Prerelease" Screening

Preachers would do well to consider doing their own kind of test marketing before they preach a sermon. "As preachers put words to paper, they can test certain sections with some listeners, carefully observing whether and how impact matches intent."[38] Another book in this "Preaching and . . ." book series, *Preaching and the Thirty-Second Commercial*, affirms this process:

> Advertisers' use of market segmentation and focus groups expands preachers' tools for understanding their congregation and emphatically constructing what they need from a sermon. Tools such as these help the preacher avoid general messages delivered to a general audience and instead target their particular congregation with a particularly significant message drawn from a particular biblical text.[39]

This process can be imaginary. However, conversations in real time with actual people are preferred, for reasons noted above. HyeRan Kim-Cragg also cautions against preachers making assumptions: "The close examination of and attention to preachers' own places become critical when diverse experience in the pew and that in the pulpit are in conflict."[40] She affirms that "preaching is never a solitary act. It involves people; people from the congregation, people outside the church, and even creation itself."[41] Sarah Travis speaks of "the always partial truth of

37. Michele Stephenson, "Doctalk Panel," Docland Film Festival, San Rafael, CA, October 14, 2023.

38. Hannan, *Peoples' Sermon*, 94.

39. O. Wesley Allen, Jr., and Carrie La Ferle, *Preaching and the Thirty-Second Commercial: Lessons from Advertising for the Pulpit* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2021), 47. Allen and La Ferle address the importance of moving beyond making broad assumptions through market research focus groups; see p. 42.

40. HyeRan Kim-Cragg, *Postcolonial Preaching: Creating a Ripple Effect* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2021), 55.

41. Kim-Cragg, *Postcolonial Preaching*, 58.

the preacher" since "there are limits to our ability to fully know others, let alone speak for others."[42] Travis seeks to decolonize preaching by not assuming we can "imagine" others.

So imagining is a start, but it does not go far enough. The filmic equivalent is something like the Bechdel Test, which measures actual female roles and participation. How much more important this is for the preacher who wishes to be representative of the variety of hearers in order for the gospel to ring true for them.

Sermon Impact Teams

While many preachers learn to embrace the need to identify their sermon's hoped-for impact, far fewer preachers embrace the encouragement to find out what impact a sermon actually has on their hearers. We encourage congregations to create impact teams (maybe even have an impact producer?) in order to maximize a sermon's impact, even its potential for social change.[43] Impact teams can

- help preachers "read" the audience;
- have their "ears to the ground" in ways that preachers cannot;
- serve as test hearers for certain sections of sermons, which can be particularly beneficial when a preacher sees fit to challenge hearers with prophetic proclamation; and
- begin to hear sermons differently because they are engaged at a different level; they may even develop confidence and competence to "spread the word" in a whole new way.

It doesn't take a blockbuster budget for preachers to adopt feedback practices to find out how hearers receive their sermons. Preachers, in cooperation with impact team members, can establish rhythms for finding out quickly what impact their preaching has on hearers. Consider these possibilities:

- Solicit responses to two or three written feedback questions on the back of the bulletin or on social media.

42. Travis, *Decolonizing Preaching*, 103.

43. See Shauna Hannan, "Impact Teams," in "What Preachers Can Learn from Filmmakers," Wabash Center for Teaching and Learning (2019–20), https://www.wabashcenter.wabash.edu/2020/02/what-preachers-can-learn-from-filmmakers-part-2-of-4-impact-teams/.

— Designate one table at the coffee hour following worship as the sermon roundtable where members of the sermon impact team facilitate conversation.

It is important to remember that this occasion is not for the preacher to receive ego strokes or ego strikes. Instead, consider asking simply, "What happened to you during the sermon today?" or "What in particular made this experience happen for you?" With a bit of coaching, congregation members will soon embrace the power of the pulpit for their lives.[44]

What William Romanowski says about the benefits of "spirited post-movie discussions" can apply to postsermon discussions. "We become better critics with deeper self-awareness through spirited post-movie discussions that make us consider our values, refine our point of view, and sometimes challenge us to think differently."[45] These postsermon discussions may even change our behavior for good.

SUMMARY

Filmmakers want to create something that makes an audience react. Film critic Roger Ebert said that film is an "empathy machine." Indeed, filmmakers want something to happen to the viewer. "Apathy is our worst enemy," says filmmaker Jason Wilkinson. "'Good' or 'Bad' equals success. Indifference equals failure."[46] The same may be true of the preacher's creation, the sermon. Preachers want something to happen to the hearers. While rarely does a single sermon move mountains, it can move us.

The next chapter explores the necessity of collaboration in both filmmaking and preaching in order to achieve the desired impact.

44. Hannan, *Peoples' Sermon*, 131–57.
45. Romanowski, *Cinematic Faith*, 26.
46. Author (Hannan) conversation with Wilkinson.