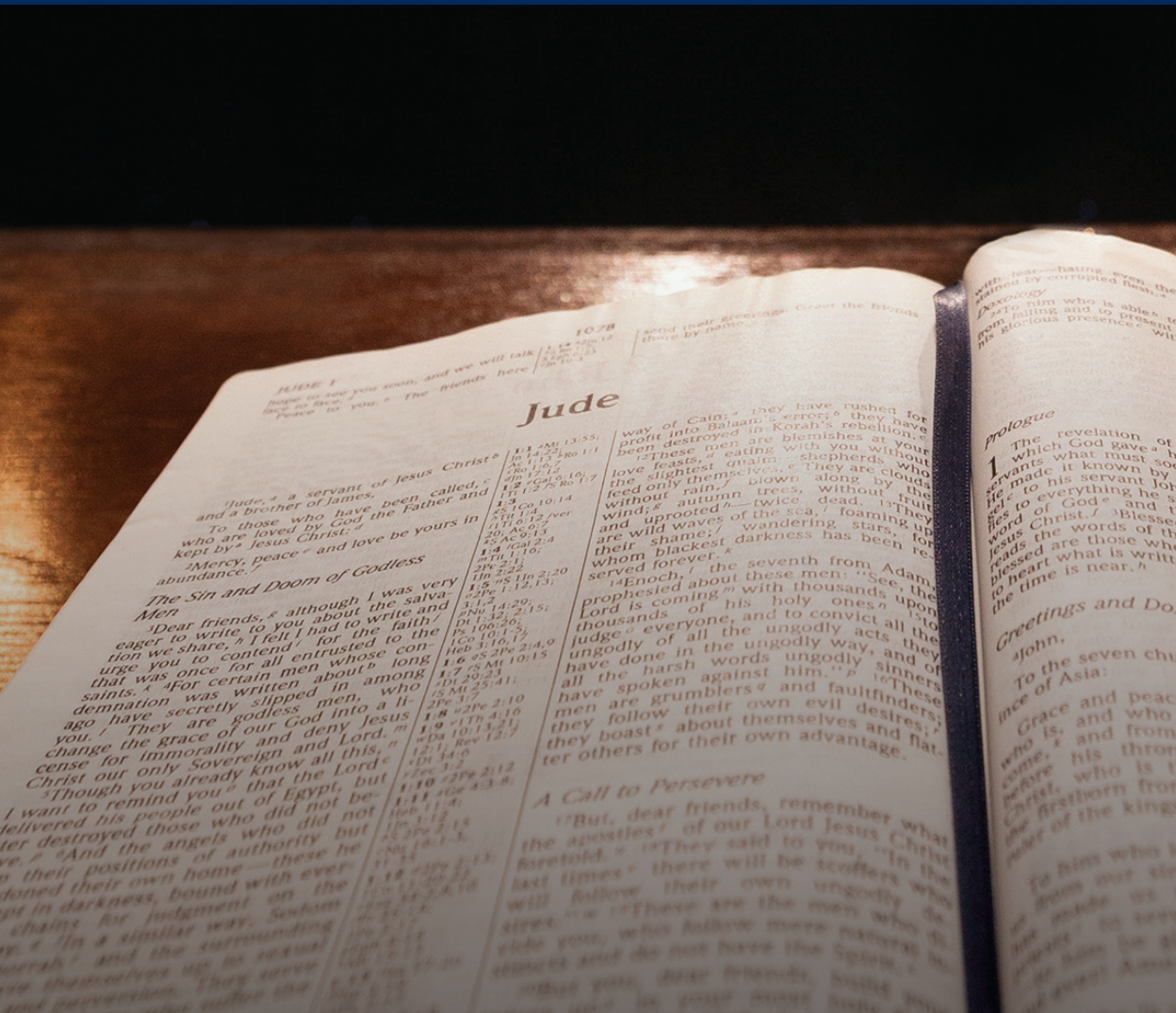


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Keeping Your People Glued to Jude: Using Illustrations that Stick¹

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John Phillips once told the story of a young Indian brave in New Mexico that fell in love with a young girl. This created a problem since she lived on the other side of the reservation and the distance between them was significant. In order to communicate with each other, they revived the ancient tradition of sending smoke signals. The brave would send smoke signals to his love and she would reply in the same manner. After a while, communication by smoke signals caught on across the reservation. It became somewhat of a pastime for people to sit outside to see what people were saying. While this “renaissance” in communication occurred, the United States tested its first atomic bomb. An old Indian man that was sitting on the front porch with his wife looked up at the massive mushroom cloud and said, “Huh. I wish I would have said that.”² The difference between a sermon that sticks and a sermon that is soon forgotten is oftentimes found in the way it is illustrated. Illustrating the text is vitally important and worthy of consideration.

The purpose of text-driven preaching is to communicate the structure, spirit, and substance of the text. Sometimes the process is described by noting three simple things that should be done with the text—explaining, illustrating, and applying. Others might prefer to describe the preaching task with just two words: explanation and exhortation. These expositors concentrate on a thorough explanation of a selected text coupled with an exhortation for their hearers to obey, otherwise known as application. A concerted effort is made to transfer the information of the text and then offer a challenge to obey. If one of these preachers asked for a critique of their sermons I would affirm their exposition and exhortation; however, I would point out their weakness in illustration. In short, I would say, “You leap in explanation, but you limp with illustration.”

Text-driven preaching contains more than explanation and exhortation; illustration must be included, even if it is considered a subcategory of explanation. Preachers who do not put forth the effort to illustrate the text

¹This article is a transcription of an address by the same title delivered to the Advanced Expository Preaching Workshop, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2–3 March 2015.

²John Phillips, “The Lord Strong and Mighty,” (Jacksonville, FL: Jacksonville Pastor’s Conference, 1994). CD.

will find their sermons ruined by the Scylla and Charybdis of abstraction and boredom.

I came across a comic in a Baptist newspaper with two men talking to each other.³ The first man says, “Our pastor used fifty-eight scriptures in his sermon. He knows how to exhaust a subject.” The reply of the other man was, “as well as his audience.” Many preachers are guilty of exhausting an audience with explanation, explanation, explanation, or even exhortation, exhortation, exhortation, and never illustrating the text. Preachers that place illustrative efforts on the back-burner of sermon preparation have actually misunderstood the fundamental purpose of illustrations. Illustrations are not optional window dressings; rather, they are a necessary means of communicating the meaning of the text.

The word “illustration,” comes from the Latin *illustrare*, meaning “to cast light upon.”⁴ In short, illustrations clarify meaning and as such are key components in explaining the text. Constructing a sermon without illustrations is like building a house without windows. It is no wonder congregations often fail to see the point of sermons when illustrations are absent.

Preaching the book of Jude is no exception. In fact it may be argued that Jude, along with the other Epistles, are a secondary form of preaching.⁵ Operating with the idea of Jude as a form of preaching, we will look at the book as a sermonic model and mine the method of illustration embedded within. In doing so, we will consider not only how to illustrate sermons, but also how to illustrate them well by considering five ways to temper sermons with illustrations that produce better sermons.

Temper Sermons with Illustrations Embedded in the Text

Text-driven preachers should not look to add anything to or beyond the text with their illustrations; rather, they should temper their sermons with illustrations already embedded in the text. There are two extremes with sermon illustrations. First, a sermon may contain too much illustrative material. This is a sermon with little more than narratives, stories, and personal anecdotes. A few years ago, a friend and I were attending a youth

³*The (Oklahoma) Baptist Messenger*, 26 February 2015, accessed 9 December 2015, <http://www.mydigitalpublication.com/publication/?i=247053&cp=10>.

⁴Al Fasol, *Essentials for Biblical Preaching: An Introduction to Basic Sermon Preparation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989), 82.

⁵Sidney Greidanus said, “In the Greek tradition, a letter was a stand-in for its author. . . . Hence one can characterize the New Testament Epistles as long distance sermons.” Sidney Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text: Interpreting and Preaching Biblical Literature* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 314. William Barclay stated that “Paul’s letters are sermons far more than they are theological treatises. It is with immediate situations they deal. They are sermons even in the sense that they were spoken rather than written.” William Barclay, “A Comparison of Paul’s Missionary Preaching and Preaching to the Church,” in *Apostolic History and the Gospels: Biblical and Historical Essays Presented to F. F. Bruce on His 60th Birthday*, ed. W. Ward Gasque and Ralph P. Martin (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), 170.

event at a newly remodeled facility. The quality of music and the massive high definition screens were unbelievable. When the preacher came out the young crowd erupted in applause and I thought to myself, “This is going to be good.” My opinion changed rather quickly as I listened to how the preacher handled the text. The first thing I noticed was that the preacher did not even have a Bible in his hand. Perhaps, I thought, he would put the text on the screens, utilizing the new technology. Twenty-five minutes later, however, the sermon concluded having only presented a number of humorous anecdotes and stories, and a few misquoted and misaddressed texts of Scripture. I left saddened that the opportunity to preach the Bible to six-thousand youth was wasted with anecdotes, stories, and humorous narratives. Text-driven preachers must avoid sermons that are nothing more than illustrations and lack biblical explanation.

Second, a sermon may be virtually void of illustrations, metaphorical language, or word pictures. These sermons are preached by those who treat the pulpit as though it were a classroom lecture. Though there is a plentitude of information, the sermon is devoid of illustration. This reminds me of a sermon I once heard. The preacher presented a tremendous amount of exegetical information, yet during the long and tedious process of presenting this information, I felt like I was being held underwater. He was declining nouns, parsing verbs, and explaining the text. After twenty minutes, however, I needed a break. This is not a critique of his explanation, which was good, but I needed a change. Communicating information is vital; nevertheless, a lack of illustrative material is tantamount to holding an audience under water. A good illustration—a good word picture—brings the audience up for air.

Text-driven preachers should avoid both extremes. Do not over-illustrate and preach without explanation or exegesis. Nor should you over-explain and bore the audience with a constant and continual transference of information. Good preachers follow the eleventh commandment—Thou shalt not be boring. A preacher will avoid boredom and abstraction if he aims for an accurate representation of the text under consideration while taking advantage of the many illustrative opportunities that abound within it.

Jude contains a significant number of similes, metaphors, and illustrations. In fact, it could be argued that the majority of the book is illustrative in nature. In approaching Jude as a text to preach one should, first, note the various word pictures. For example, “contend earnestly” (v. 3), “for certain persons have crept in unnoticed” (v. 4), “to build ourselves up” (v. 20), and “snatching them out of the fire” (v. 23) are all excellent word pictures.⁶ These are only a few examples. Do not resist illustrative language and imagery that helps captivate and turn the hearer’s ear into an eye.

Second, note the many similes and metaphors. Consider, for example,

⁶Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture references are from the New American Standard Bible.

“just as Sodom” (v. 7), “like unreasoning animals” (v. 10), and “These are the men who are hidden reefs in your love feasts when they feast with you without fear, caring for themselves; clouds without water, carried along by winds; autumn trees without fruit, doubly dead, uprooted; wild waves of the sea, casting up their own shame like foam; wandering stars for whom the black darkness has been reserved forever” (vv. 12–13). Jude is full of similes, metaphors, and word pictures.

Third, also note the many Old Testament narratives referenced in Jude. In verse 5, Exodus is referenced. In verse 6 fallen angels, in verse 11 Cain, Balaam, and Korah. In verse 14, you have Enoch spoken of, who of course, is an Old Testament character. You even have a possible, depending on your view, Apocryphal narrative referenced in verse 9.

A cursory reading of Jude reveals that illustrations abound. The point is not that Jude lacks the use of clear propositional statements, but to highlight that scores of embedded similes, metaphors, and illustrations in Jude also contain propositional truth. Many of the illustrations in Jude’s epistle are references to Old Testament narrative. The job of the text-driven preacher is to mine them, understand them, and present them in their context, which includes their specific genre. In order to exposit the Bible rightly, one must consider the genre of the specific biblical text so that it is treated in the manner in which God intended. In preaching Jude, and other texts, pay attention to the Old Testament references so that you can temper your sermons with illustrations embedded in the text.

Temper Sermons with the Fruit of Word Studies

The second major point is that we need to temper our sermons with the fruit of word studies. Words and phrases contain a wealth of illustrative material and are often overlooked. The problem of finding good illustrations oftentimes can be solved by simply looking at the rich word pictures already embedded in the text. It takes work, but it will greatly improve a sermon.

In order to temper sermons with the fruit of word studies a few points need to be addressed. First, never miss the perfect tense. The perfect tense in Koine Greek is what I call, “the money tense.” A perfect tense verb is a past event with ongoing results. These verbs are not in the text by chance nor circumstance, rather, they have been placed there by the Holy Spirit to communicate something special. Though the preacher should be careful about being too technical, the need exists to explain the perfect tense. Make sure you mine out perfect tenses to see the rich truth communicated through them.

As an example, consider verse 1, “Jude, a bond-servant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James, to those who are the called, *beloved* in God the Father.” The word “beloved” is in the perfect tense, which means these are persons not just loved at one moment but that they are continually loved. In other words, God’s love is not just past, but also present and future. We see another perfect tense in the next phrase, “*kept* for Jesus Christ.” This concept of being

kept is not for just one day, but is also inclusive of past, present, and future. It is the continual watchful eye of God the Father looking over his flock. In unpacking these two present tense verbs we are able to find helpful illustrations embedded in the text.

Second, study all verbs in the text closely. Many verbs are etymologically rich and yield great fruit for illustrations. Examples are found in verse 3, “Beloved, while I was making every effort to write to you about our common salvation, I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith.” The phrase, “appealing that you contend earnestly,” presents the word “appealing,” which is the word παρακαλέω. Παρα is a preposition that oftentimes means “alongside,” and καλέω is a verb that means “I call.”⁷ The word παρα (*para*) is easy to remember. Those jumping out of airplanes need *parachutes*—something that comes alongside those who are falling. Those that have legal issues need a *paralegal*—one who comes alongside and offers assistance. Those who are hurt need a *paramedic*—one who comes alongside someone in need and offers aid. When the preposition and the verb are joined together in the word παρακαλέω, it is translated, “to appeal, to urge, or to make a strong request.”⁸ The etymology of this word comes from the speeches of leaders and soldiers who urge each other on. It is used in speeches and commands that sent fearful and hesitant soldiers and sailors courageously into battle.⁹ A simple word study of one word richly adds illustrative opportunity to a sermon. In illustrating this word a preacher can easily tell of a military leader encouraging his troops. This point has many illustrations available like the story of William Wallace, who called the sons of Scotland to fight against the English. Without serious word studies important and simple illustrations would be missed.

Furthermore, consider the word “contend.” The word was used of athletic contests and the struggle and effort of athletes in their games. The word means to exert maximum effort when taking part and contending for something, and is translated “to struggle for” or “to contend for.”¹⁰ In the mere examination of verbal word studies illustrations are easily and readily found.

Finally, notice the imperatives. Though there are only six imperatives in Jude, consider the one in verse 21, τηρήσατε, “keep yourselves in the love of God.” This is an aorist imperative that means one should not begin to keep themselves, rather they should accomplish or finish it. There is an urgency in the imperative, as Robertson says.¹¹ As imperatives are studied, helpful word pictures become obvious.

For those preachers who have not had the opportunity to study Greek

⁷Walter Bauer, *A Greek English Lexicon of the New Testament*, ed. and trans. William F. Arndt, F. Wilber Gingrich, and Fredrick W. Danker [BAGD], 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), s.v. “παρα,” “καλέω.”

⁸BAGD, s.v. “παρακαλέω.”

⁹William Barclay. *More New Testament Words* (London: SCM, 1958), 134.

¹⁰BAGD, s.v. “ἐπαγωνίζομαι.”

¹¹A.T. Robertson. *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Nashville: Broadman, 1933), 6:194.

formally there are a variety of studies that have done the work for you. A few helpful resources along these lines include, Wuest's *Word Studies from the Greek New Testament*,¹² A. T. Robertson's *Word Pictures in the New Testament*,¹³ and *The New Linguistic and Exegetical Key to the Greek New Testament*.¹⁴ I typically begin my studies with Wuest, but the latter volume is worth its price in gold, for in it every single verb in the Greek New Testament is parsed. Oftentimes, it is like picking low-hanging fruit off of a tree since much of the work is done for you. Many times these works present a word picture I am able to utilize to craft an excellent illustration. There is not a need to have great experience in Greek to utilize these helps; use them to study the words and find the word pictures present in the text. This will help you as you temper your sermons with the fruit of word studies.

Temper Sermons with Illustrations from the Old Testament

The third major point is that our sermons should be tempered with illustrations from the Old Testament. There is some disagreement among homileticians concerning the use of certain kinds of illustrations. There are those that suggest that we should never use the Old Testament for illustrative purposes, but rather use an illustration from experiences of the lives of the congregation. For example, in terms of using the Old Testament for illustrating, Jay Adams writes in *Preaching with Purpose*, "Don't do it. Always use the Bible authoritatively, never illustratively."¹⁵ Donald Sunukjian also does not use the Old Testament as an illustration book. He said, "I'm not real big on illustrations that are outside the living experiences of my listeners. While these may be interesting, they first of all seldom add anything to the understanding of the biblical concept, and more importantly, they don't help the listeners see how the concept actually shows up in *their* lives. I prefer to use scenarios from their daily experiences. These have the advantage of concrete and contemporary relevance."¹⁶

Though men like Adams and Sunukjian say not to use the Old Testament for illustrations, a look at the New Testament's usage of the Old indeed reveals that the biblical authors used the Old Testament for illustrations. In speaking of Israel in 1 Corinthians 10:11, Paul says, "Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come." Paul seems to think that Old Testament narratives were written to be examples for its readers. Though the Old

¹²Kenneth Samuel Wuest, *Word Studies from the Greek New Testament: For the English Reader* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973).

¹³Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*.

¹⁴Cleon L. Rogers Jr. and Cleon L. Rogers III, *New Linguistic and Exegetical Key to the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998).

¹⁵Jay E. Adams, *Preaching with Purpose* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), 103.

¹⁶Abraham Kuruvilla, "Don Sunukjian: How I Preach," *Homiletix.com*, 17 March 2014, accessed 9 December 2015, <http://homiletix.com/don-sunukjian-how-i-preach/>. Italics his.

Testament is certainly more than an illustration book, it has been (as Jude demonstrates), and can be used as examples for Christians.

This, of course, is not an attempt to argue for only using Old Testament illustrations. There should be a healthy balance of Old Testament and contemporary examples and illustrations. However, when Old Testament references are embedded in the text, as Jude does (see v. 11), a great opportunity exists to tell the Old Testament story.

In discussing the appropriateness of illustrations used in sermons, it is also helpful to consider the purpose of illustrations. Illustrations serve as more than entertainment—they actually explain the text or apply the sermon. The use of good illustrations will make text-driven preaching even more powerful. Can you imagine an illustration that informs, delights, and challenges all at the same time? One of the most powerful illustrations I ever heard was given at the beginning of a sermon. The preacher began with the story of the third epic fight between Muhammad Ali and Joe Frazier. He mentioned how the Thrilla in Manila began and how Smokin' Joe looked asleep until the fifth round. In the tenth round Ali hit Frazier in the eye and Frazier's eye began to swell. Before the final round as both men were in their corners, Frazier's manager, Eddie Futch looked at his boxer and decided to not let the fight continue—Ali had won. In concluding the illustration the preacher said, "The ironic thing is that Ali was sitting across the ring in the other corner and Ali had told his trainer that if Frazier came out to fight he would not continue." Then the preacher punctuated the illustration by saying, "All Frazier had to do to win the fight was to stay in the fight." This illustration not only piques the interest of the congregation, but it also applies truth at the same time. This is the idea Jude has in mind when he says to "contend earnestly for the faith." In order to contend earnestly one needs only to stay in the fight to win.

When utilizing an illustration, the preacher must consider all aspects of it. As an illustration is given, more is happening than just the telling of a story. Illustrations should explain the text and also provide listeners with insights into the text. When done well the illustration oftentimes serves as application at the same time. The same thing is true in utilizing an illustration from the Old Testament like Korah (Num 16:1–35). Here is a man who came out with the children of Israel, grumbled and complained against God, and God destroyed him and his followers. The application from that illustration is obvious: Do not be like Korah!

In summary, text-driven preachers need to make sure to utilize word studies and illustrations and to understand that Old Testament narratives do more than provide preaching fodder. These illustrations serve to explain propositional truth and apply that truth to everyday life. Temper your sermons with illustrations from the Old Testament.

Temper Sermons with Well-Crafted and Wisely-Placed Illustrations

The fourth major point is to temper sermons with well-crafted and wisely-placed illustrations. Jude shows that he carefully crafted and placed his illustrations for maximum effect and force. Notice the illustrative description of the ungodly ones in Jude's warning (vv. 4–16). Verses 4 and 16 provide propositional truth that illustrate the verses between them (vv. 5–15). Basically, the book of Jude is an illustration sandwich, or what the scholars would call an *inclusio* with the illustrative material in the middle. This placement of illustrative material is not by chance, and careful attention to where Jude placed his illustrations should be considered. Likewise, the preacher needs to give attention to Jude's placement of illustrations in the sermon to reflect the text accurately in order to have the maximum impact.

For an example, consider one of David Allen's former sermons on Hebrews 12:1–3.¹⁷ In addressing verses 2–3 Allen utilized an illustration of an endurance runner named Cliff Young. The illustration was placed at the end of the sermon and powerfully showed how one runs with endurance. After preaching the sermon, Allen approached me and asked for a critique so that he might improve the sermon. I reminded him that the text in Hebrews ends with this verse, "Keeping your eyes on Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross despising the shame and has sat down on the right hand of the throne of God." The text actually climaxes with Jesus' completed work. This point was clearly made in Allen's sermon; however, ending the sermon with the Cliff Young illustration did not resonate with the structure of the text. I suggested to Allen that the Cliff Young illustration be moved to an earlier portion of the sermon so that he could conclude the sermon like the text by highlighting Jesus Christ. Allen accepted the suggestion, and the next time he preached the sermon he indeed moved the Cliff Young illustration to the middle of his sermon and dramatically ended the sermon with a look toward Jesus Christ and his endurance for our salvation. The sermon was magnificent, and Allen received a standing ovation. The difference was a little tweak on the placement of the sermon illustrations.

Placement, however, is not the only issue of concern. Preachers must also craft their illustrations. Mark Twain is noted for saying, "The difference between the right word and the almost right word is . . . the difference between the lightning-bug and the lightning."¹⁸ Sometimes preachers deliver illustrations ad hoc believing they are good; however, great orators, expositors, and communicators all edit their illustrations. They are carefully crafted

¹⁷David L. Allen, "The Christian's Marathon" (video of sermon, SWBTS Chapel Message, 26 January 2011), accessed 9 December 2015, <http://media.swbts.edu/item/198/swbts-chapel-january-26-2011>.

¹⁸George Bainton, *The Art of Authorship: Literary Reminiscences, Methods of Work, and Advice to Young Beginners, Personally Contributed by Leading Authors of the Day* (New York: D. Appleton, 1890), 87.

and placed. They put them in the right place so that when employed the illustrations roll off of the tongue smoothly. They are carefully honed and crafted, communicating with exact precision the picture being painted. Temper your sermons with well-crafted and wisely-placed illustrations.

Temper Sermons with Well-Delivered Illustrations

The final major point is to temper sermons with well-delivered illustrations. Illustrating well is an art and many good illustrations suffer from bad illustrators. When I stop and think about my favorite preachers they all deliver illustrations well. In addition to excellent explanation and application these preachers know how to deliver an illustration. I will never forget hearing one of my favorite preachers share an illustration about two boys. In the story one of the boys admitted to the other that he was contemplating suicide. The illustration was so powerful that women around me literally began to sob; tears even welled up in my own eyes. That illustration became an example to me of how you craft and deliver illustrations. It was perfectly delivered at the right pace and with a key, pregnant pause. I remember another illustration concerning God's care and protection. This preacher told the story of a Native American man standing out in the darkness with an arrow drawn guarding his son. Nor will I ever forget another preacher speaking of spiritual transformation with the illustration of Clark Kent stepping into a phone booth and being transformed into Superman, relating how Christians are transformed by the gospel. I will never forget Paige Patterson illustrating Hosea by presenting a zoomed-in look at Gomer's face and then pulling back her hair to notice it was not Gomer's face at all, but it was our face. I think about one of David Allen's word pictures from Hebrews, when he talked about the Bible "laying us bare." He described a wrestler who had a hold of another wrestler and how he stretched his neck, "laying him bare." Word pictures like this stick in the heart, especially when they are delivered well. I think about Jerry Vines' Eric Clapton illustration. Eric Clapton had a son, Connor, fall out of a window when he was a young boy and died. This event led Clapton to write, "Tears in Heaven." I asked Vines where he got the illustration, he replied, "Out of *Rolling Stone*." The one thing that all of these powerful illustrations have in common is that they were well crafted and flawlessly delivered. We should deliver our illustrations with *pathos*, we should use vivid illustrations that do not overpower the text, and we should illustrate the propositional truth found in the text, but by all means we must temper our sermons with well-delivered illustrations.

