

**Preaching With  
Variety, Session Two:  
The Bible as  
Literature and  
Rhetoric**

**Singapore Bible College Seminar by Dr. Jeffrey Arthurs in July 2014**

**Preaching Professor at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary**

**Uploaded by Dr. Rick Griffith • Singapore Bible College**

**All files in many languages for free download at [BibleStudyDownloads.org](http://BibleStudyDownloads.org)**



**What is literature?  
Should we think of the  
Bible as “literature”?**

**What is rhetoric?**

# Definitions of “Rhetoric”:

- **Cicero**: Speech designed to persuade.
- **Francis Bacon**: Rhetoric is the application of reason to the imagination for the better moving of the will.
- **Lloyd Bitzer**: Rhetoric is a mode of altering reality, not by the direct application of energy to objects, but by the creation of discourse which changes reality through the mediation of thought and action.
- **Donald Bryant**: Adjusting ideas to people and people to ideas.
- **Arthurs**: The use of symbols, primarily words, to influence an audience.

From Wayne C. Booth, *The Rhetoric of RHETORIC* (London: Blackwell, 2004), 4-8.

**Should we think of the Bible as “rhetoric”—words used to influence an audience?**

# The Bible As Rhetoric

- **Bernard Ramm: “Holy Scripture is not a theoretical book of theological abstraction, but a book that intends to have a mighty influence on the lives of its readers.”**

Bernard Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985), 113.

- **Dale Patrick and Allen Scult: “The Bible’s main form of exposition, the narrative, is most appropriately characterized as primary rhetoric, its primary objective being to persuade its audience.”**

Dale Patrick and Allen Scult, *Rhetoric and Biblical Interpretation* (Sheffield: Almond, 1990), 29.

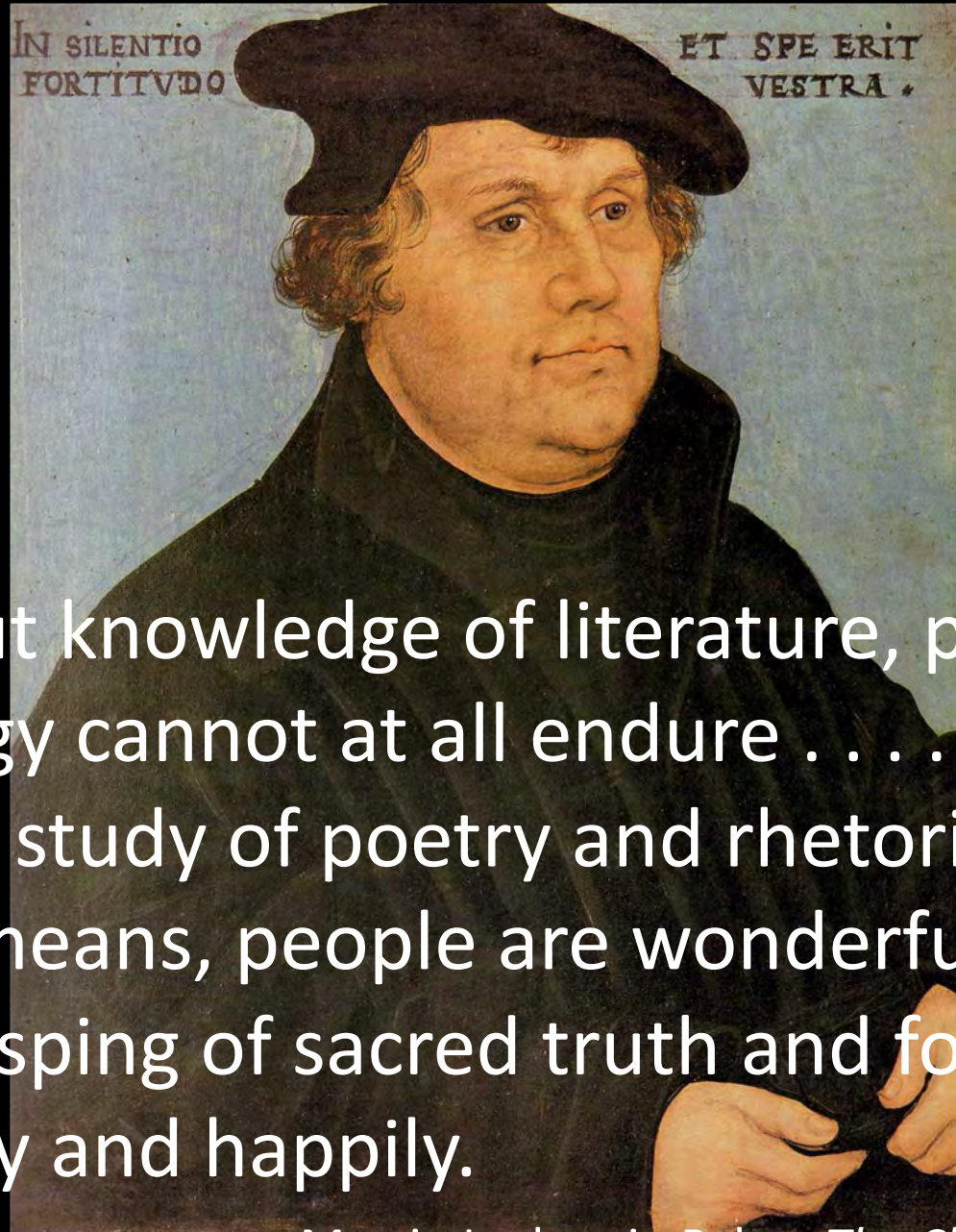
# The Bible As Rhetoric

- John Sailhammer: “A text is . . . an embodiment of an author’s intention, that is a strategy designed to carry out that intention.”

John Sailhammer, *Introduction to Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), 46-47.

- C. S. Lewis: “The Bible is so remorselessly and continuously sacred that it does not invite, it excludes or repels, the merely aesthetic approach.”

C. S. Lewis, “They Asked for a Paper: The Literary Influence of the Authorized Version,” in Amos Wilder, *Early Christian Rhetoric* (Cambridge: Harvard U P, 1971), xx.

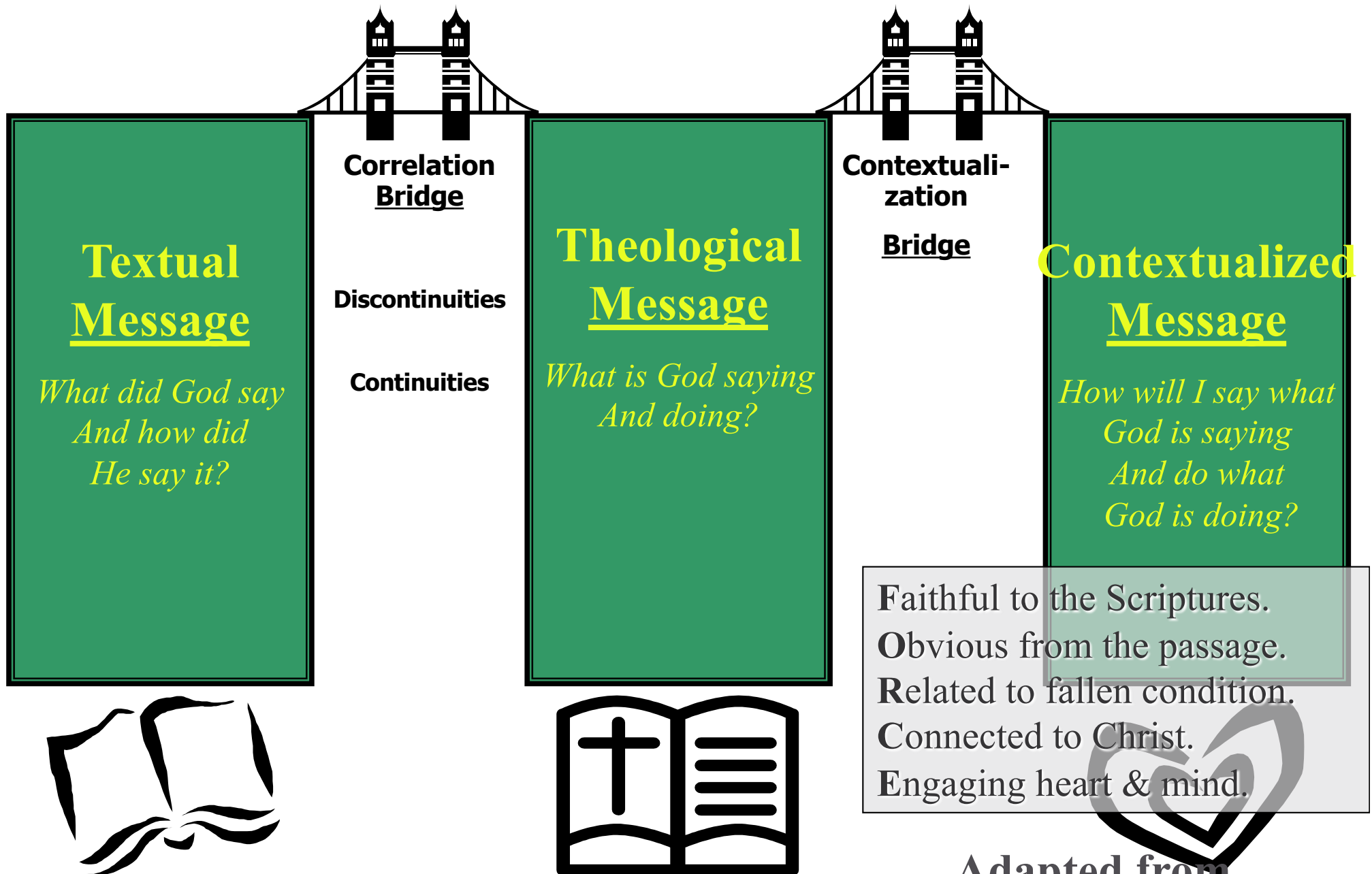


Without knowledge of literature, pure theology cannot at all endure . . . . I see that by [the study of poetry and rhetoric] as by no other means, people are wonderfully fitted for the grasping of sacred truth and for handling it skillfully and happily.

Martin Luther, in Ryken *The Christian Imagination*  
(Colorado Springs: Waterbrook, 2002).

# Some Sources for Biblical Interpretation and Rhetorical Criticism:

- Arthurs, Jeffrey D. "Biblical Interpretation Through Rhetorical Criticism: Augmenting the Grammatical/Historical Approach." Ph.D. diss., Purdue Univ., West Lafayette, IN, 1992.
- Bullmore, Michael, A. "Re-examining Author's Intent: The Nature of Scripture, Exegesis, and the Preaching Task." Unpub. paper presented at the Evangelical Homiletics Society, Oct. 1997.
- Kennedy, George A. *New Testament Interpretation Through Rhetorical Criticism*. Chapel Hill, NC: U of North Carolina P, 1984.
- Kuhn, Karl Allen. *The Heart of Biblical Narrative: Rediscovering Biblical Appeal to the Emotions*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2009.
- Medhurst, Martin J. "Rhetorical Dimensions in Biblical Interpretation: Beyond Style and Genre." *Q J of Speech* 77 (1991): 214-26.
- Patrick, Dale and Allen Scult. *Rhetoric and Biblical Interpretation*. Sheffield: Almond Press, 1990.



**Adapted from  
 Campus Crusade**

# Genre:

**One way literature and rhetoric intersect**

Literature

Rhetoric

Genre

# Same Truth, Different Genre (different experience)

Poetry embodies  
ideas in images.

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not be in want. He makes me lie down in green pastures, He leads me beside quiet waters, He restores my soul. (Psalm 23:1-3)

Theological Confession  
states ideas in  
abstractions.

God the Creator of all things doth uphold, direct, dispose, and govern all creatures, actions, and things, from the greatest even to the least, by His most wise and holy providence. (Westminster Confession of Faith)

# Same Truth, Different Genre (different experience)

## In the Psalms...

We “stagger.”

“Arrows fly by day.”

We rest in a “shelter”  
or under a “wing.”

• Trees “clap their  
hands” and seas “lift  
their voices.”

## In Theology...

We are confused.

We fear.

We are secure.

Creation testifies to  
the joy and creativity  
of the Creator.

# Same Truth, Different Genre (different experience)

## In the Psalms...

Rivers, fields, mountains, vineyards, gates, the temple, and the heavens are the imaginative domains of the psalmists; donkeys, locusts, lions, and jackals walk its paths; brides, farmers, watchmen, and armies act on its stage. Poets use concrete images to prompt experience.

## In Theology...

Definitions and abstractions are the tools of theologians to achieve precision and accuracy.

# **Every genre has its own ways of influencing the careful reader. For example:**

- Narrative has plot, character, and setting.
- Psalms have parallelism and figurative language.
- Parables have analogy and rudimentary qualities of narrative.

# Thus:

- Because expository preachers pay attention not only to *what* a text says, but *how* it says it, consideration of a text's literary/rhetorical qualities should be part of our exegetical tool belt . . .
- So that we can say what the text says and do what the text does.
- The form of a sermon should take into account the form of the text.
- Preaching with variety helps us do so.

# Variety . . . How?

- Visual Communication

# Communication Methods and Recall

Method	Recall 3 hours later	Recall 3 days later
Telling Alone	70%	10%
Showing Alone	72%	22%
Showing and Telling	85%	65%

Francis M. Dwyer, *Strategies for Improving Visual Learning: A Handbook on Effective Selection, Design, and Use of Visual Materials* (State College, PA: Learning Services 1978) in Liftin, *Public Speaking*.



"Human brains seem to have  
virtually limitless capacity for  
memory of pictures."

*Quarterly Journal of Experimental  
Psychology, 25: 207-222.*

# LOW TECH: GIVE IT A TRY

- ◉ Read Psalm 32:4-5.

When I kept silent my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long.

For day and night your hand was heavy upon me. My strength was sapped as in the heat of summer.

I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not cover my iniquity.

I said, “I will confess my transgressions to the Lord, and you forgave the iniquity of my sin.”

- ◉ Think of three ways to use two chairs to teach/illustrate the psalmist's relationship with God as described in this text.

- E.g. v. 3 (“when I kept silent”): move one chair away from first chair and make it face away.

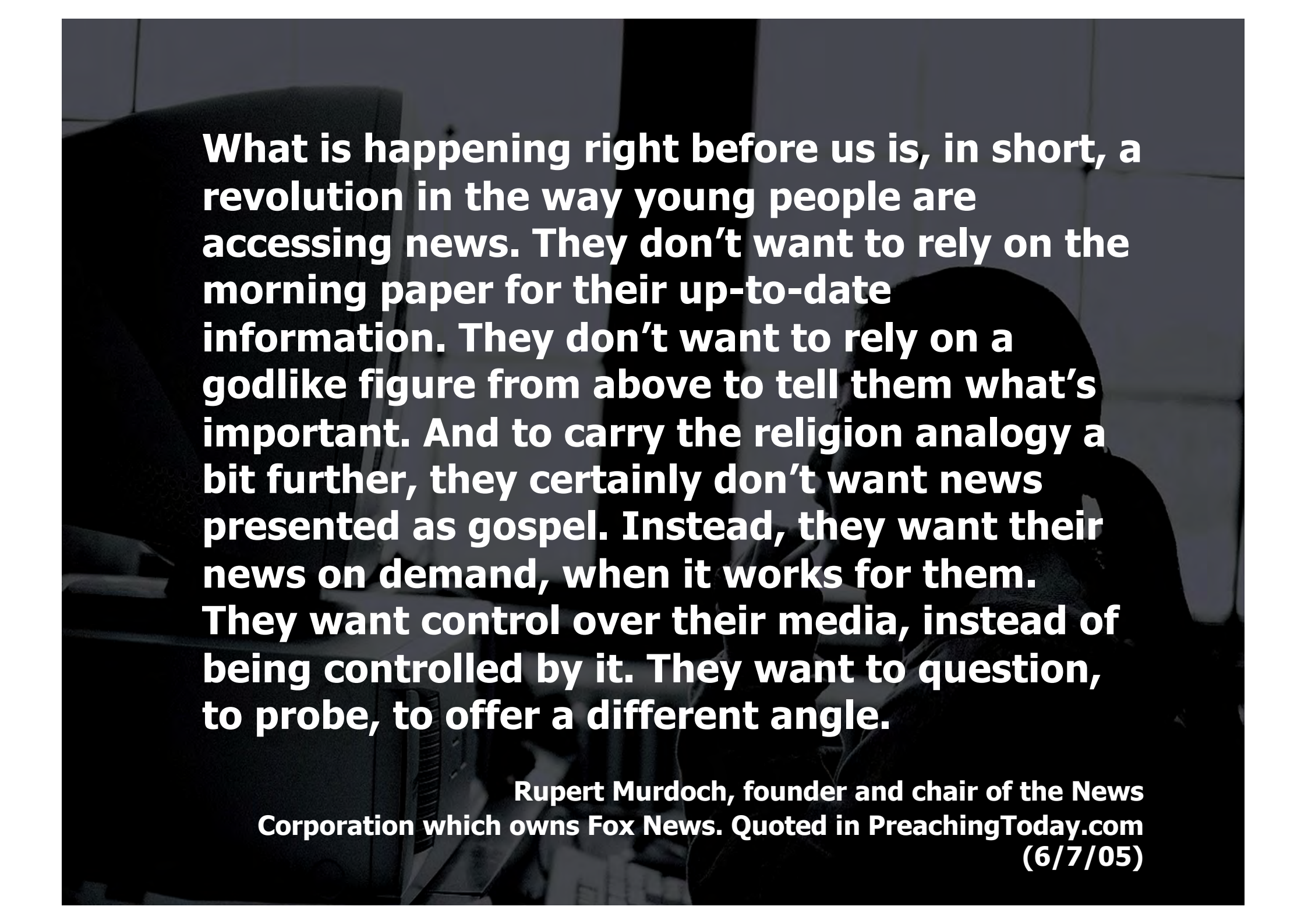
# Variety . . . How?

- **Visual Communication.**
- **Dialogue.**

# Why Dialogue?



1. The Model of Our Lord.
2. The Model of Our Lord's Servants (like the Apostle Paul).
3. The Text.
4. Culture.



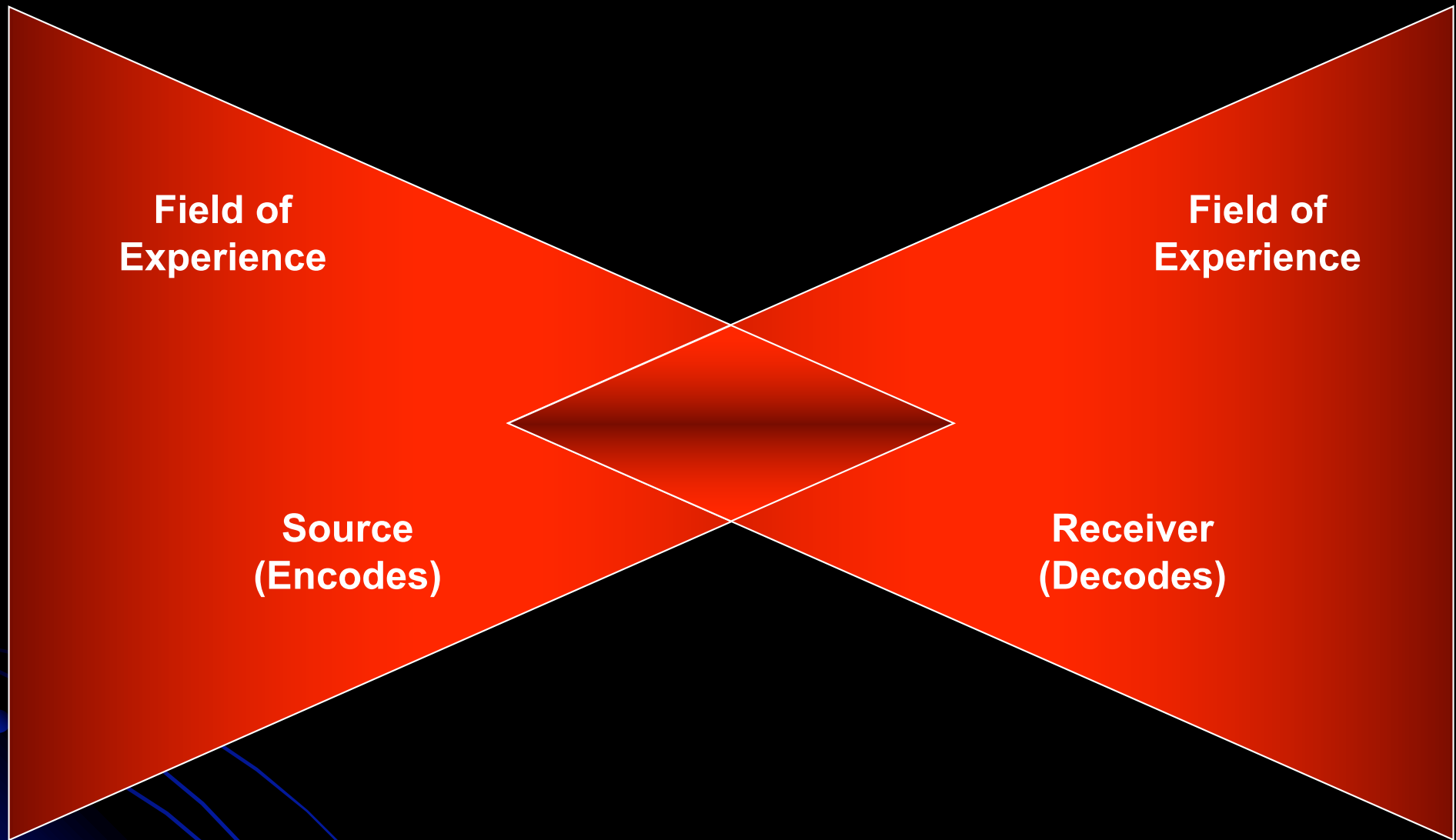
**What is happening right before us is, in short, a revolution in the way young people are accessing news. They don't want to rely on the morning paper for their up-to-date information. They don't want to rely on a godlike figure from above to tell them what's important. And to carry the religion analogy a bit further, they certainly don't want news presented as gospel. Instead, they want their news on demand, when it works for them. They want control over their media, instead of being controlled by it. They want to question, to probe, to offer a different angle.**

**Rupert Murdoch, founder and chair of the News Corporation which owns Fox News. Quoted in PreachingToday.com  
(6/7/05)**

# Why Dialogue?



1. **The Model of Our Lord.**
2. **The Model of Our Lord's Servants (like the Apostle Paul).**
3. **The Text.**
4. **Culture.**
5. **Communication Theory.**



Adapted from *The Process and Effects of Communication*, ed. Wilbur Schramm (Urbana: The University of Illinois Press, 1954), 3-26.

# Preaching as “Quadruple-think”



1. “thinking out what I have to say,”
2. “then thinking out how the other man will understand what I say,”
3. “and then re-thinking what I have to say,”
4. “so that, when I say it, he will think what I am thinking!”

# Variety . . . How?

- **Visual Communication.**
- **Dialogue.**
- **Story.**

**J. Richard Middleton & Brian Walsh ask four questions which every world view attempts to answer:**

**1. *Where are we?***

- **What is real in the world where we find ourselves?**

**2. *Who are we?***

- **What is the nature and purpose of human beings?**

**3. *What's wrong?***

- **How do we account for evil and pain?**

**4. *What's the remedy?***

- **How are we supposed to act in this world?**

# Narratives can be an effective vehicle for addressing these questions.

1. **Setting** relates to “Where are we?”
2. **Character** corresponds to “Who are we?”
3. **Plot conflict** deals with “what’s wrong?”
4. **Plot resolution** provides an answer to “What’s the remedy?”

Both our identity and sense of the world are based on the story we tell of evil (what’s wrong?) and redemption (what’s the remedy?).

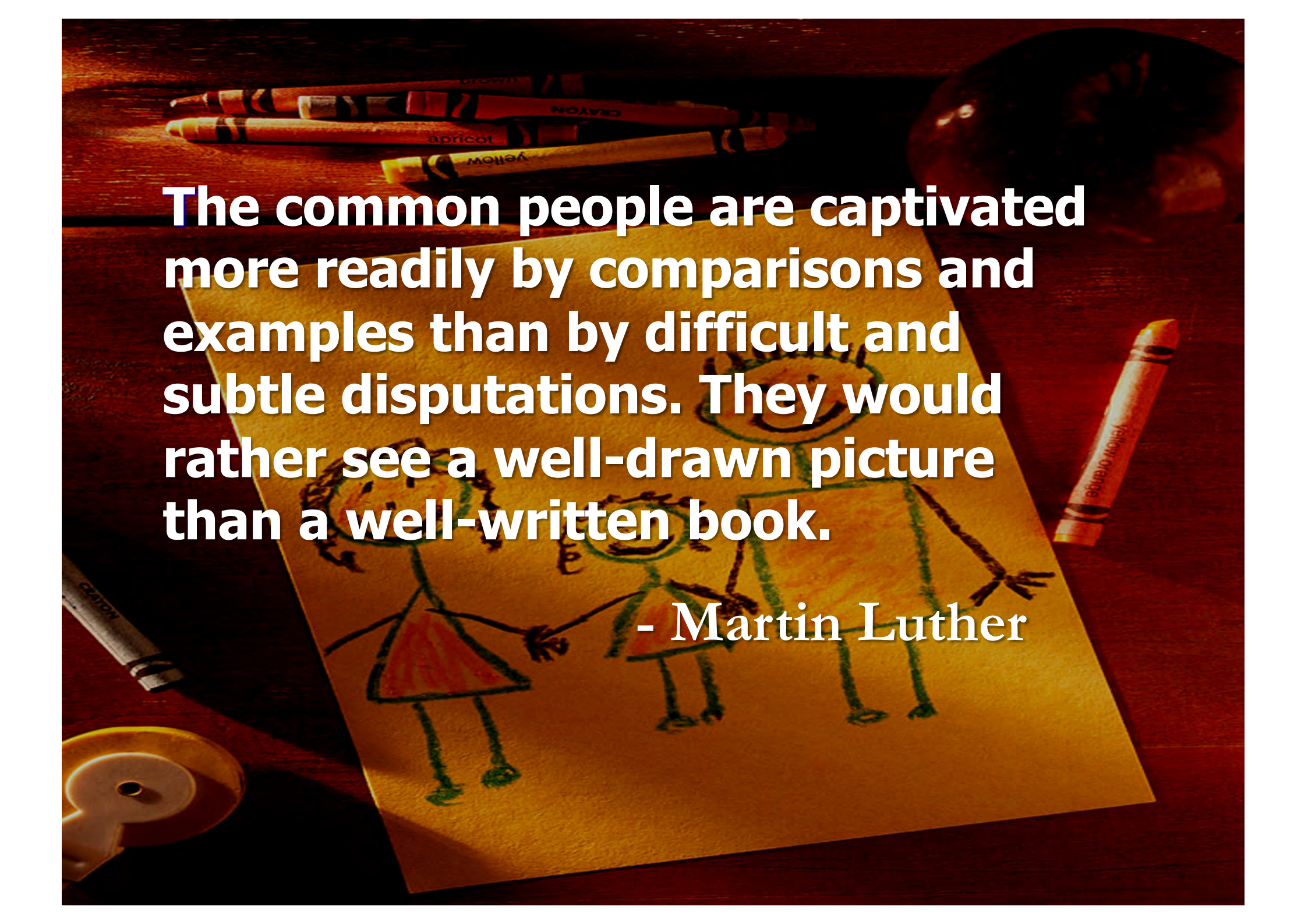
See Walsh & Middleton, *Truth Is Stranger Than it Used to Be: Biblical Faith in a Postmodern World* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1995), 64.

# Variety . . . How?

- **Visual Communication.**
- **Dialogue.**
- **Story.**
- **Experience/The Arts.**

No non-poetic view of  
reality can be complete.

John Barrows, *Theories of Everything* cited in Miller, “The Theological Significance of Biblical Poetry,” *Language, Theology, and the Bible*, eds. Balentine and Barton (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994), 230.

A child's drawing on a piece of paper is the central focus. The drawing depicts two figures holding hands. The figure on the left has a round head with dark hair, a triangular body with a red section, and thin legs. The figure on the right has a round head with a smiling face, a rectangular body, and thin legs. The drawing is done with green, red, and black crayons. Surrounding the paper are various art supplies: several crayons (one labeled 'apricot', one 'yellow', and one 'yellow-orange'), a paint palette, and a paintbrush. The background is a dark wooden surface.

**The common people are captivated more readily by comparisons and examples than by difficult and subtle disputations. They would rather see a well-drawn picture than a well-written book.**

**- Martin Luther**



## Brainstorming:

**Identify what sensory experience is here.**

**What could you do to recreate the impact *for yourself* as you study?**

**What could you do to recreate the impact *for listeners* as you preach?**

## **Psalm 28:1**

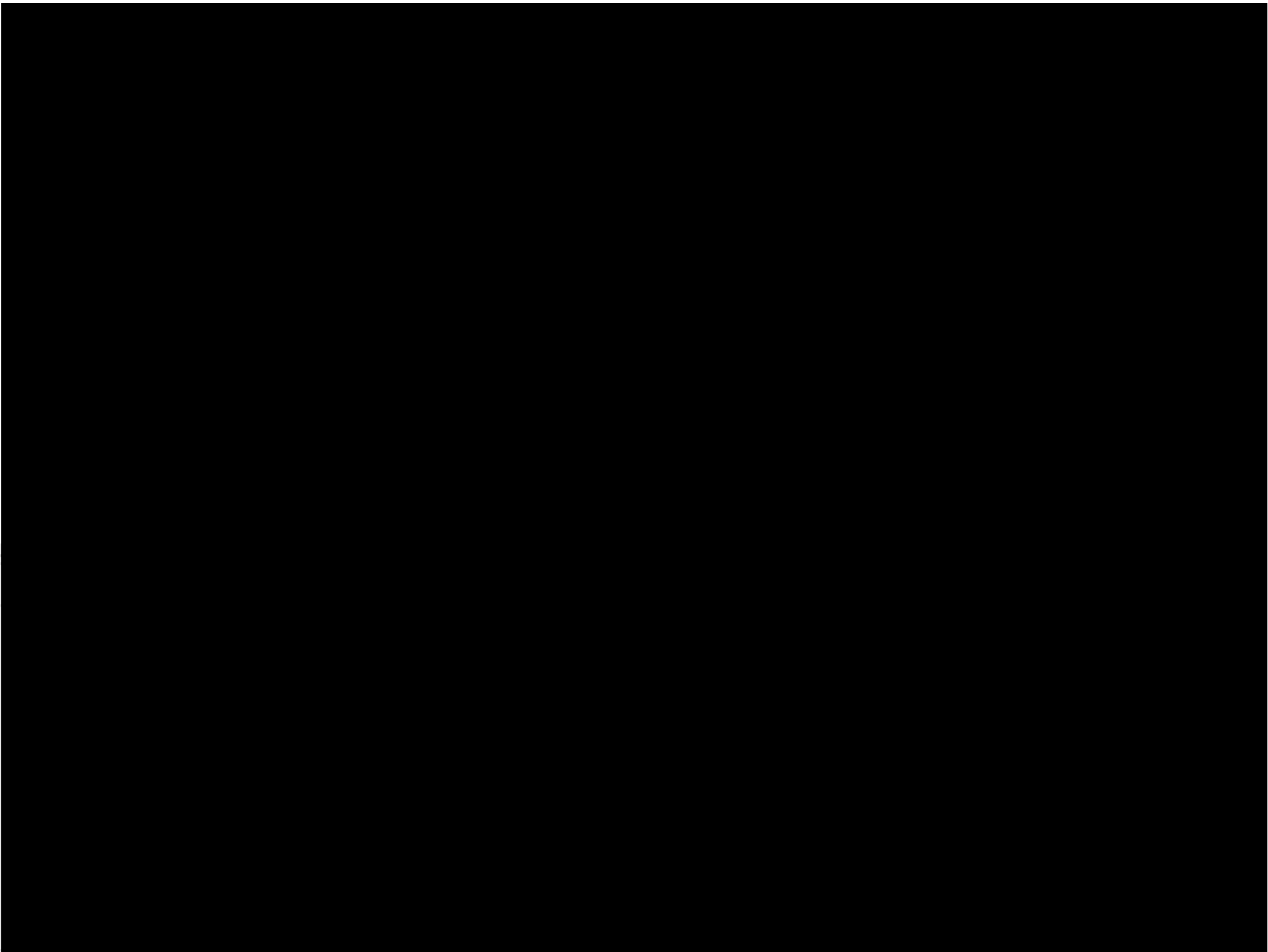
**To you I call, O Lord my Rock;**

**do not turn a deaf ear to me.**

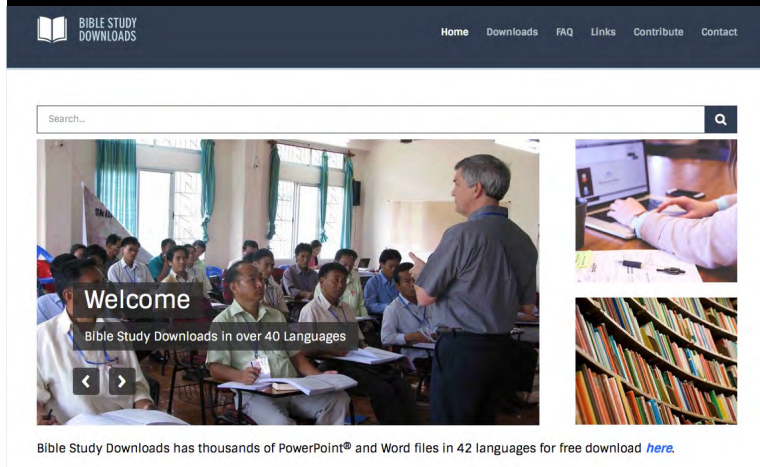
**For if you remain silent, I will be like those who have gone down to the pit.**

# Variety . . . How? (review)

- **Visual Communication.**
- **Dialogue.**
- **Story.**
- **Experience/The Arts.**



# Use this QR Code for Access



Homepage at [BibleStudyDownloads.org](https://BibleStudyDownloads.org)

# Get this presentation for free!



BIBLE STUDY  
DOWNLOADS

[Home](#) [Downloads](#) [FAQ](#) [Links](#) [Contribute](#) [Contact](#)

Search...



Bible Study Downloads has thousands of PowerPoint® and Word files in 42 languages for free download [here](#).

**Preaching (Homiletics) link at [BibleStudyDownloads.org](http://BibleStudyDownloads.org)**