

# GENRE-SENSITIVE EXPOSITORY PREACHING EPISTLES

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

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## 1 TIMOTHY 4:16

Keep a close watch on  
yourself and on the teaching.  
Persist in this, for by doing so,  
you will save both yourself and  
your hearers.

# REVIEW

- God has inspired both the content and the genre of biblical texts. Both are part of authorial intention.
- Every genre has its own literary form, and each form produces a set of rhetorical effects.
  - For example, narrative has plot, character, and setting. What is the rhetorical effect of plot?  
Character?
- Expository preaching exegetes both the content and the form of the text, so that . . .
- The sermon says what God said in the text and does what God does through the text.

# PREVIEW

- Literary/Rhetorical Features of Epistle.
- How to recreate those dynamics in our preaching.
- But first, a few introductory thoughts. . .

# “LETTER” OR “EPISTLE”?

Letter . . . . . Epistle

Informal

Formal

Written quickly

Written with care

Personal

Public

Short

Long

Philemon, 2 and 3 John

Romans, etc.

## LITERARY/RHETORICAL FEATURES:

Epistles were an excellent communication technology for the Apostles to continue their ministries even after leaving the area. They convey “presence-in—absence.” Epistles are the closest written form we have of face-to-face communication.

## LITERARY/RHETORICAL FEATURES:

- Content: “Task Theology.”
- Argumentation: Ground the imperative in the indicative.
  - Give generously! Why? (2 Cor. 8:8-9).
  - In humility count others as more significant than yourselves! Why? (Phil 2:1-8).
  - Love each other! Why? (1 John 3:11).
  - Obey the government! Why? (Romans 13:1-7).

# DISCUSSION

- If you were to argue/persuade like the epistles, how might you ground these commands in the indicative?
- Avoid sexual immorality, because . . .
  - see 1 Thess. 4:6, 8.
- Do not lie, because . . .
  - See Eph. 4:25.

# RHETORICAL FUNCTIONS OF ARGUING FROM INDICATIVE TO IMPERATIVE

- Transcendence.
- Memory.
  - We are the “Lord’s Remembrancers.”

# PREACHING AS REMINDING

James Thompson, NT scholar:

Paul's preaching reminds us that, in preaching to those who have already heard, we are not forced to say something new each week. In speaking to one congregation, we speak to a variety of listeners. Some—especially in a post-Christian society—have not heard the Christian message well. Others will forget . . . if their memories are not refreshed.

*Preaching Like Paul, 174.*

# LITERARY/RHETORICAL FEATURES:

- Content: “Task Theology.”
- Argumentation:
  - Ground the imperative in the indicative.
  - Pragmatic benefits.
    - See 2 Cor. 8:10 (“This benefits you . . .”)
    - See Romans 13:3 (“Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good.”)

# DISCUSSION

- If you were to argue/persuade like the epistles, with pragmatic benefits, how might you frame the same arguments?
- Avoid sexual immorality, because . . .
- Do not lie, because . . .

# RHETORICAL FUNCTIONS OF ARGUING PRAGMATICALLY

- Involuntary attention!
- Much better chance of changing opinion and behavior.

## COHEN'S LAW

Information which is given in response to a perceived need makes a greater impact and is retained longer than information which is given and then applied.

## ARGUING FROM PRAGMATIC NEEDS

Howard Hendricks: “Teachers never lack motivated learners when they speak to needs. The greater people’s pain, the greater their motivation to learn. With their marriage crumbling, a couple will be compelled to hear a sermon series on family peace, but they would likely give only half a mind to a series on ‘Reconciling God’s sovereignty and Human Freedom.’”

## LITERARY/RHETORICAL FEATURES:

- Content: “Task Theology.”
- Argumentation:
  - Ground the imperative in the indicative.
  - Pragmatic benefits.
  - Linear logic.

## LITERARY/RHETORICAL FEATURES:

- Content: “Task Theology.”
- Argumentation.
- Form. The genre of “epistle” is supple.
  - Permeated with small forms.

## SMALL FORMS IN EPISTLES

- Proverbs (1 Cor. 15:33)
- Creeds/hymns (1 Tim. 3:16, Phil. 2:6-11)
- Lists (Romans 1:29-31, Gal. 5:22-23)
- Rhetorical questions (James [13 in chapters 2-5]; Romans 8:31-35)
- Apostrophe (1 Cor. 15:55)
- Doxology (Romans 11:33-36)

## LITERARY/RHETORICAL FEATURES:

- Content: “Task Theology.”
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One rhetorical effect of this is **attention**.

## ATTENTION-HOLDING POWER OF SMALL FORMS

Alfred Edersheim, states that in the first-century that the synagogue homily kind of preaching “*must be attractive*”: “Parables, stories, allegories, witticisms, strange and foreign words, absurd legends, in short anything that might startle an audience” was commonly used.

*The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah,*  
(McLean, VA: MacDonald, 1883), 1:448.

# LITERARY/RHETORICAL FEATURES:

- Content: “Task Theology.”
- Argumentation.
- Form. The genre of “epistle” is supple.
  - Permeated with small forms.
  - Permeated with metaphors.

Two rhetorical effect of metaphor are **attention** (again) and **collaboration**.

## LITERARY/RHETORICAL FEATURES:

- Content: “Task Theology.”
- Argumentation.
- Form. The genre of “epistle” is supple.
  - Permeated with small forms.
  - Permeated with metaphors.
  - Citation/allusion.

One rhetorical effect of this is (again)  
**collaboration.**

# “PRE-FORMED MATERIAL” IN EPISTLES OF PAUL

Romans	27%
1 Corinthians	17%
2 Corinthians	11%
Galatians	32%
Ephesians	54%
Philippians	7%
Colossians	42%
1 Thessalonians	37%
2 Thessalonians	24%
1 Timothy	43%
2 Timothy	16%
Titus	46%
Philemon	0%

# LITERARY/RHETORICAL FEATURES:

- Content: “Task Theology.”
- Argumentation.
- Form. The genre of “epistle” is supple.
  - Permeated with small forms.
  - Permeated with metaphors.
  - Citation/allusion.
  - Oral/aural.

# COSTS TO PRODUCE AN EPISTLE

Epistle	Number of hours to make final copy	Cost in U.S. dollars (2004)
Romans	11.5	\$2,275
1 Corinthians	10.7	\$2,108
Galatians	3.6	\$722
1 Thessalonians	2.4	\$484
1 Timothy	2.8	\$554

# LITERARY/RHETORICAL FEATURES:

- Content: “Task Theology.”
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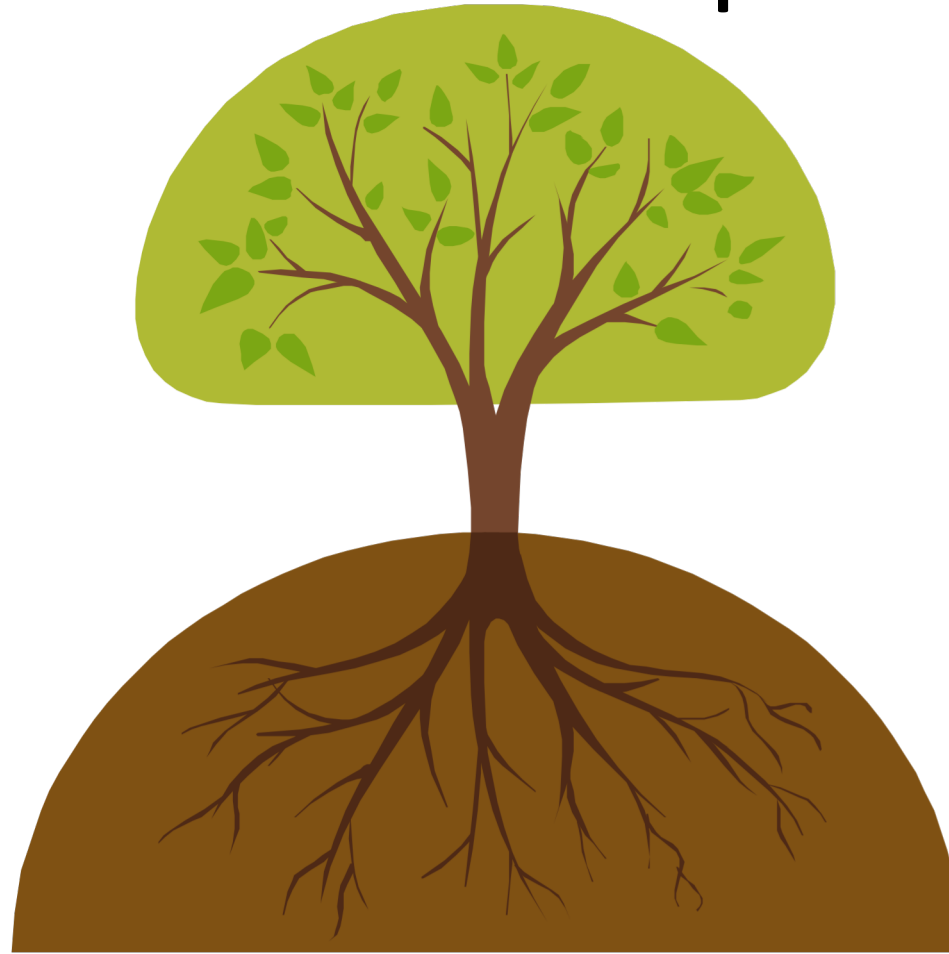
One rhetorical effect of this is **vigor**.

# HOW TO PREACH EPISTLES

## **Logos:**

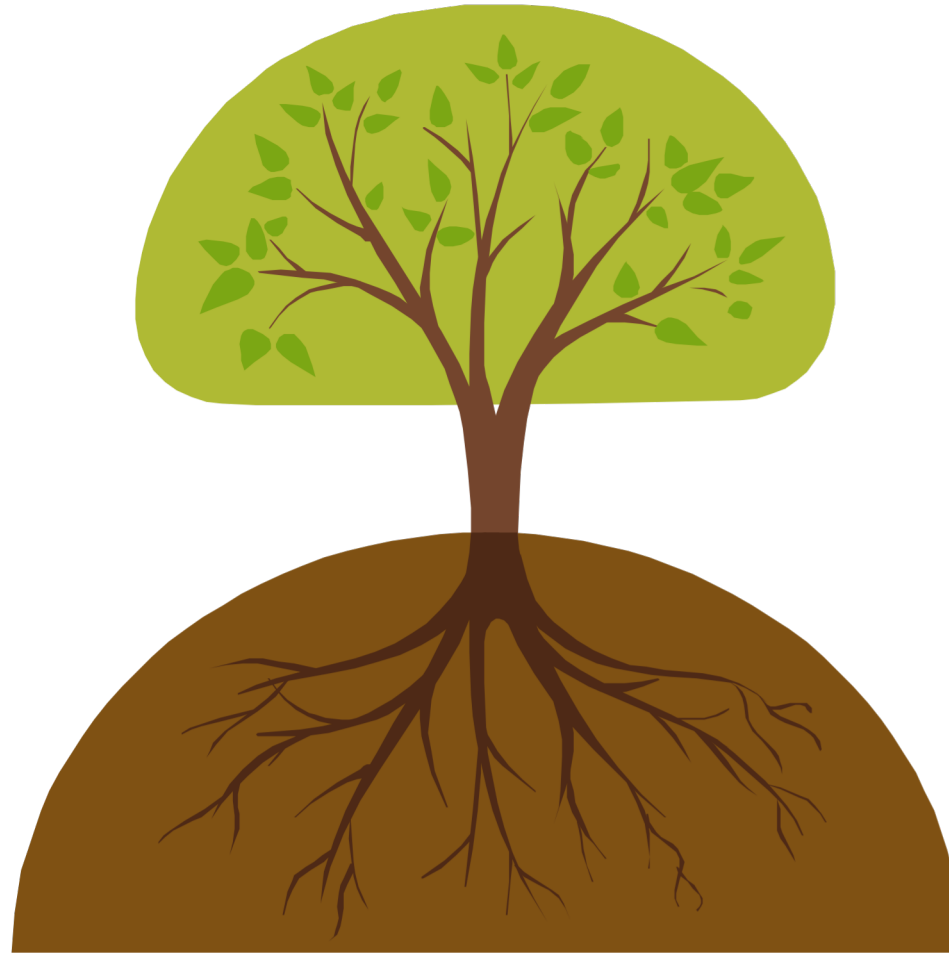
- Ground the moral imperative in the theological indicative.

Imperative: God's Expectation



Indicative: God's Motivation

Be generous!



I am generous.  
(2 Corinthians 8:9)

# An example from Tim Keller

"If I had preached on lying ten years ago, I might have said, 'Don't lie. Tell the truth because Jesus is truth. And if you have lied, Jesus will forgive you.' That appeal stops at changing external behavior.

Today I might preach: 'Let me tell you why you're not going to be a truthful person. I lie most often to avoid others' disapproval. If I just try to stop lying, it won't work because my need for others' approval overwhelms my good intentions. I allow other people, instead of Jesus, to determine my worth.'

If you want to stop lying, you have to find what is motivating your sin—like my tendency to look to others for affirmation—and replace it with the security you can find in Jesus."

*"Preaching Amid Pluralism," Art and Craft, 216.*

# HOW TO PREACH EPISTLES

## **Logos:**

- Ground the moral imperative in the theological indicative.
- Remind. Be the “Lord’s Remembrancer.”

## **Pathos:**

- Use support material that recreates the passage’s mood.
- Use delivery that embodies the passage’s mood and “presence.”

## COMMUNICATION SCHOLARS ESTIMATE:

- 65% of all “social meaning” is conveyed non-verbally.
- 93% of all “emotional meaning” is conveyed non-verbally.

# TRUTH THROUGH PERSONALITY

Augustine: the art of preaching consists of discovering truth in Scripture and then “teaching” [*profundo*] it. The Latin word means “pour forth,” “cause to flow.” Truth pours through human messengers.

The writer seeks to change blood into ink; the preacher seeks to change ink into blood.

Charles Bartow

# HOW STIR PASSION IN OTHERS?

The only effectual method is to be moved yourself . . . . There is obviously a contagion among the passions.

Hugh Blair (Christian rhetorician and pastor) from *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Letters*.

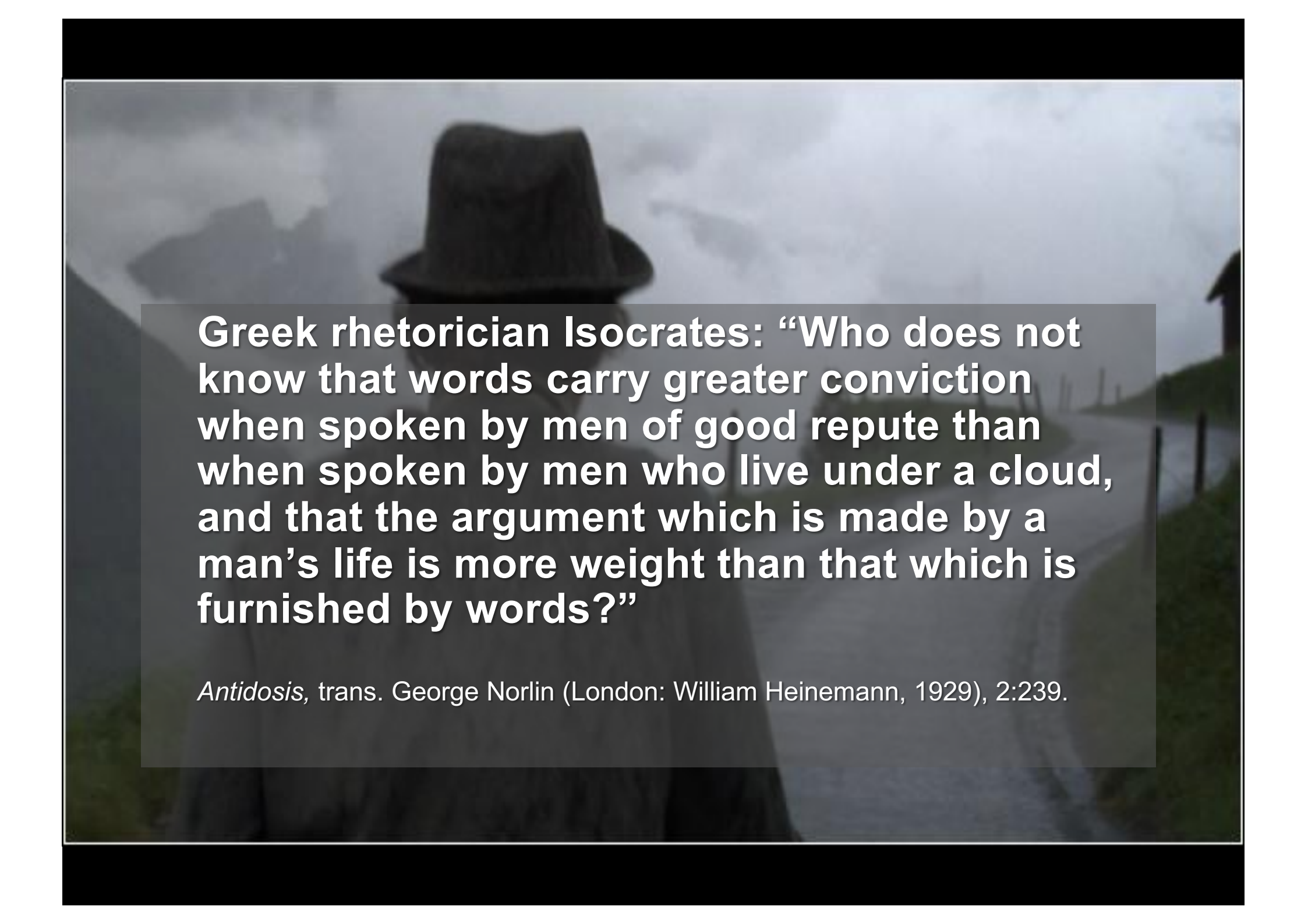
# HOW TO PREACH EPISTLES

**Logos:**

**Pathos:**

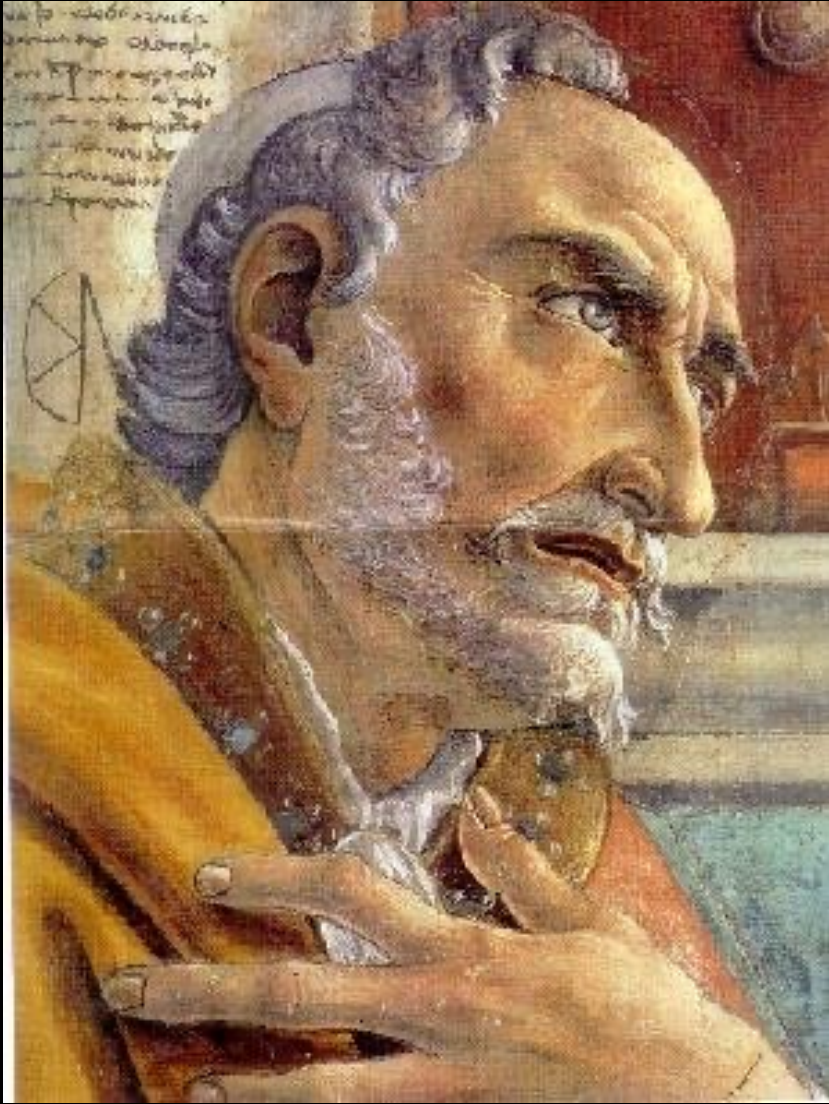
**Ethos:**

- Judicious use of self-disclosure.

A person wearing a dark hat and coat is walking away on a path under a cloudy sky. The person is in the center of the frame, and the path leads into the distance. The sky is overcast and grey. The overall mood is somber and reflective.

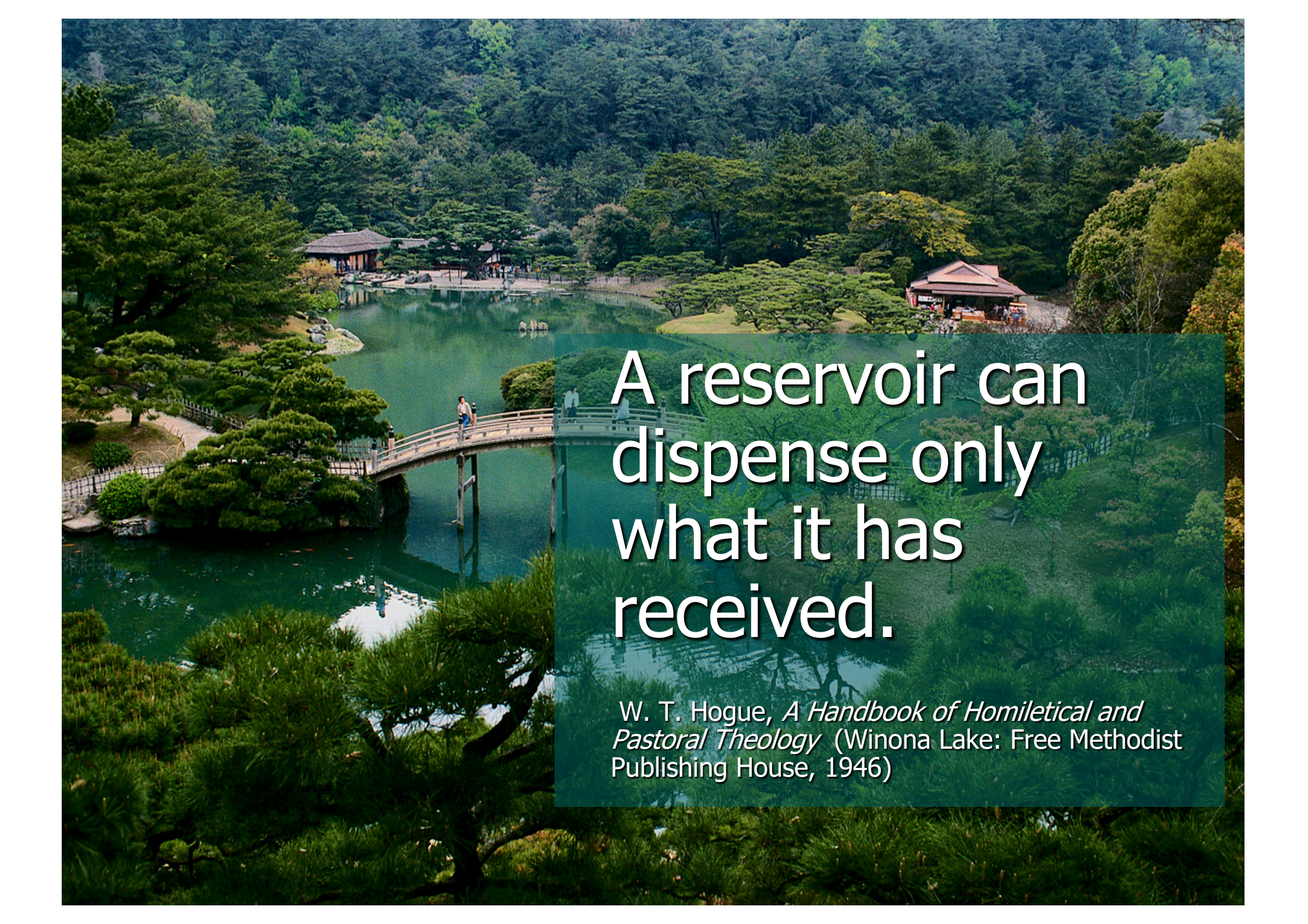
**Greek rhetorician Isocrates: “Who does not know that words carry greater conviction when spoken by men of good repute than when spoken by men who live under a cloud, and that the argument which is made by a man’s life is more weight than that which is furnished by words?”**

*Antidosis*, trans. George Norlin (London: William Heinemann, 1929), 2:239.



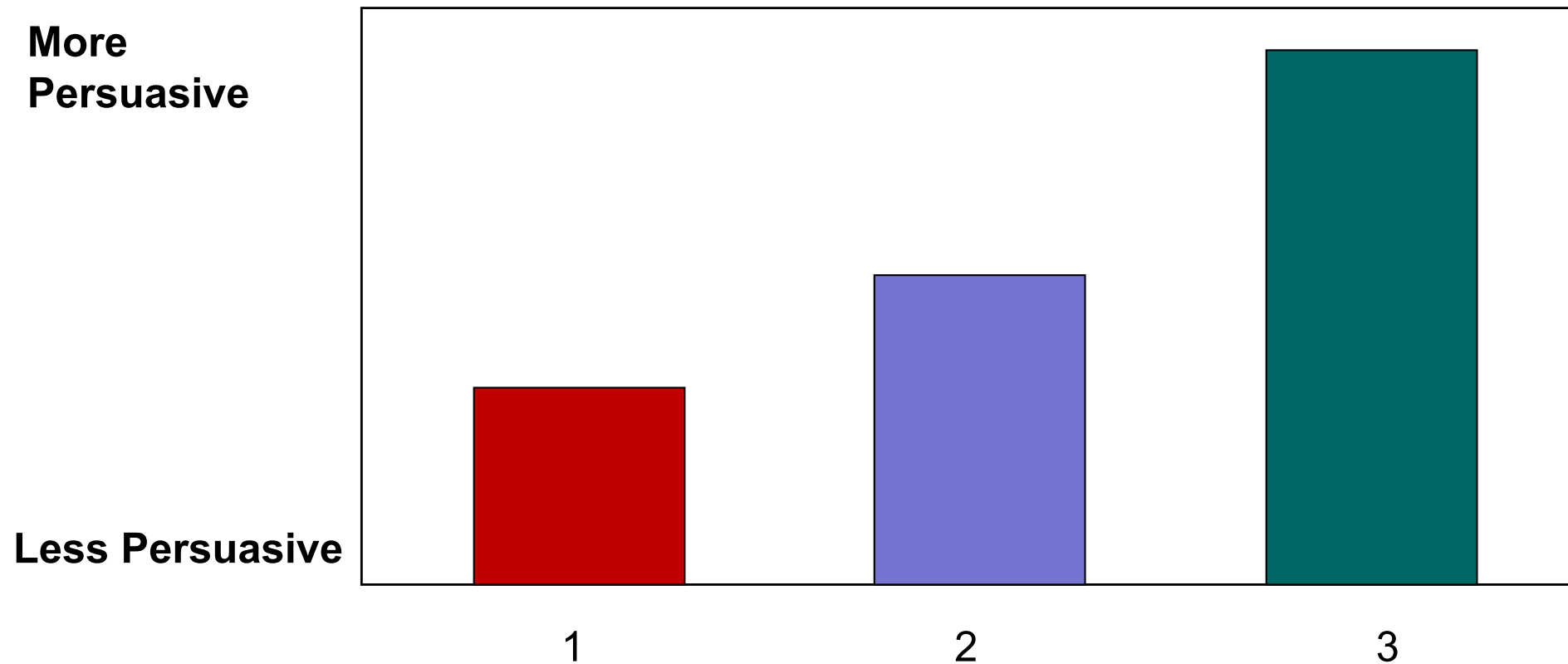
**“The life of the speaker has greater weight in determining whether he is obediently heard than any grandness of eloquence.”**

**Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, trans. Robertson, 164.**



A reservoir can  
dispense only  
what it has  
received.

W. T. Hogue, *A Handbook of Homiletical and  
Pastoral Theology* (Winona Lake: Free Methodist  
Publishing House, 1946)



**Method 1:** Assertion + evidence.

**Method 2:** Assertion + evidence + source of evidence.

**Method 3:** Assertion + firsthand experience.

Source: Hamilton, Parker, Smith, *Communicating for Results*  
(Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1982).

# HOW TO PREACH EPISTLES

**Logos:**

**Pathos:**

**Ethos:**

**Form:**

- Logical argumentation.

# LOGICAL ARGUMENTATION

If the form of the sermon influences faith, Paul's preaching is a reminder of the importance of direct speech and argumentative discourse in the formation of Christian consciousness.

James Thompson, *Preaching Like Paul*

# LOGICAL FORM: A SERMON FROM 1 THESS. 4:1-8

## I. Why should we avoid sexual immorality?

- A. **First Reason:** The Lord is an Avenger (6b).
- B. **Second Reason:** We are called to holiness, not impurity (7).
- C. **Third Reason:** To reject this instruction is to reject God (8a).
- D. **Fourth Reason:** He is giving us his Holy Spirit (8b).

## II. How can we avoid sexual immorality?

- A. **First Instruction:** Learn to control your body in holiness and honor (4).
- B. **Second Instruction:** Not like the heathen (5).
- C. **Third Instruction:** Do not take advantage of brother/sister (6a).

# HOW TO PREACH EPISTLES

**Logos:**

**Pathos:**

**Ethos:**

**Form:**

- Logical argumentation.
- Dialogue

# WHY DIALOGUE?

- The form of epistles.
- Our Lord's use of dialogue.
- The Apostle Paul's use of dialogue.  
(*διαλέγομαι*)

# HOW USE DIALOGUE?

- Question and Answer.
- Rhetorical questions.
- Interview.
- Dialogic structure.
- Feed forward.
- Dialogic delivery.
- Creative forms such as dictating to a secretary or debate.

# HOW TO PREACH EPISTLES

**Logos:**

**Pathos:**

**Ethos:**

**Form:**

- Logical argumentation.
- Dialogue.
- Examples.

## EXAMPLES ARE MINI-STORIES: BRIEF, CONCRETE INSTANCES

Some of you are in trials right now, but for others of you, the time of testing is still in the future.

- Your time may come when the phone rings at three a.m.
- Your time may come when the doctor walks toward you with a grave face, holding your x-rays.
- Your time may come when you find a note on the coffee table saying, “I’m leaving.”

## EXAMPLES ARE BRIEF, CONCRETE INSTANCES; MINI-STORIES

From a sermon on 1 Thess. 4:1-8, Avoid sexual immorality:.

- High school student considers going to the prom.
- Business man traveling.
- Pastor counseling opposite sex.

# HOW TO PREACH EPISTLES

**Logos:**

**Pathos:**

**Ethos:**

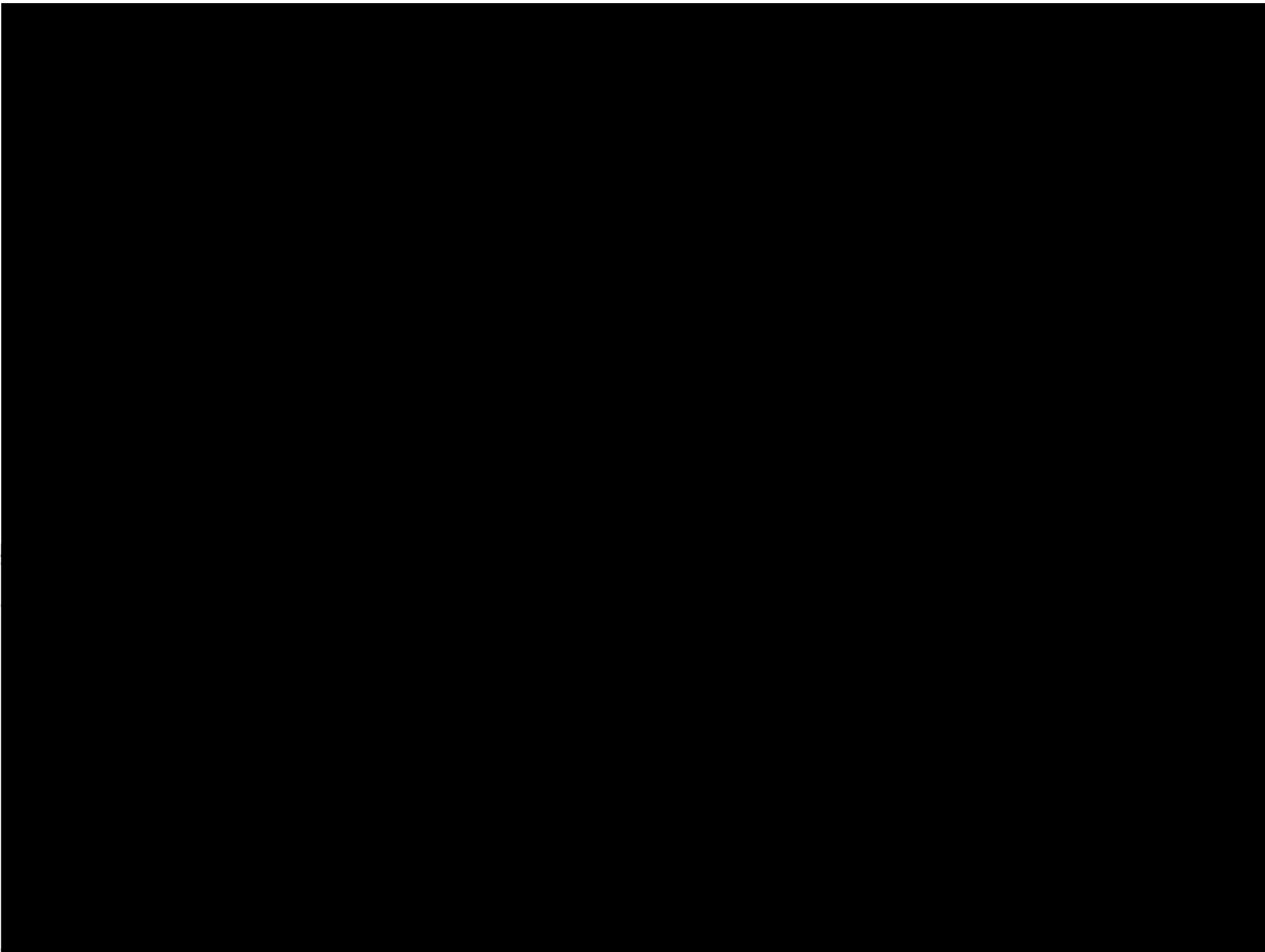
**Form:**

- Logical argumentation.
- Dialogue.
- Examples.
- Visual Communication.

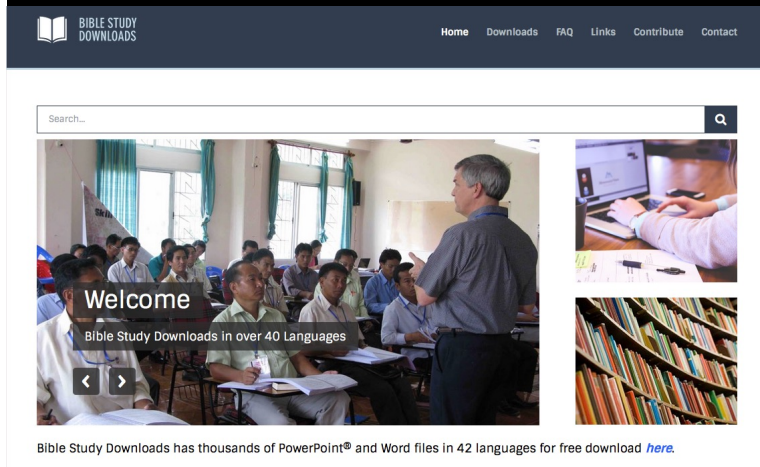


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