

**Preaching Like the Working Class:  
A critical investigation into C H Spurgeon's teaching approaches  
and their relevance for training preachers from working-class  
communities in 21st Century Northern England.**

**By Ian D. Williamson**

**A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements  
for the Degree MA Missiology**

**All Nations, Hertfordshire**

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## Abstract

In the 19th Century, the middle-class-dominated UK church failed to engage with the working class. In 1855, Thomas Medhurst, a working-class rope maker, came to faith under the ministry of C. H. Spurgeon and immediately began preaching to his colleagues and neighbours.

Inspired by Medhurst's zeal, Spurgeon began training him for ministry. Before long, other gifted preachers requested Spurgeon's help, and the Pastors' College was born. The Pastors' College specifically catered for the poor and working class, and its ethos reflected Spurgeon's benevolence and desire to address injustice. However, it was also reflected in his missiology, as he believed that working-class preachers were best placed to take the gospel to other working-class people when equipped.

As a Christian and preacher in a middle-class-dominated church, I have struggled to access ministry training due to academic and economic disadvantages. Hearing the history of Charles Spurgeon's desire to equip Thomas Medhurst as a preacher inspired me to start Medhurst Ministries.

Motivated by the belief that lessons could be learned from Spurgeon that would help with the aims of Medhurst Ministries to train and equip working-class preachers, I began this research to demonstrate two key hypotheses: Spurgeon's approach to recruiting and training working-class preachers offers lessons that can be applied to working-class communities in 21st-century England: These lessons can be conceptualised within a biblical and missiological framework, which Medhurst Ministries can use to empower preachers across the UK from these same communities.

The main research question sought to uncover the lessons from C. H. Spurgeon's pedagogy that could be applied to training preachers from working-class communities in 21st-century Northern England, and to answer this, I employed a multi-method research strategy consisting of a literature review, an interpretive philosophical approach to gathering qualitative data through semi-structured interviews, and personal reflections at the end of each chapter to engage with the data and provide a nuanced perspective.

In chapter five, I discuss the research findings and conclude that six principles from Spurgeon's pedagogy can be used to develop a theoretical framework for training working-class preachers in 21st-century Northern England. Relationships and discipleship are central to the six principles, emphasising the importance of a preacher's relationship with God, the local church, and his indigenous community.

## **Dedication and Acknowledgements**

First, I thank God for his salvation and the blessings and opportunities he continues to bless me, including learning and preaching about my saviour.

I would like to thank the members and trustees of New Life Church and Medhurst Ministries, who provided me with the time and finances to conduct this research. I am also grateful to all the staff at All Nations Christian College, particularly Dr Kate Wiseman, who has helped, encouraged and supported me over the last three years.

I am deeply appreciative of all those who participated in the interviews. The insights and perspectives shared during these sessions were truly enlightening and have significantly enriched this research. It was a privilege to spend time listening to and learning from you all.

Finally, I dedicate this work to my wife, Rachel, and daughters, Hannah and Esther, who have endured me whinging and moaning about margin sizes, footnotes, and bibliographies for the last three years. Thank you for bearing with me!

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

Thomas Medhurst was a working-class man, a rope maker by trade,<sup>1</sup> and an aspiring actor<sup>2</sup> who, in 1855, came to faith under the ministry of C. H. Spurgeon.<sup>3</sup> Full of zeal for his saviour and the gospel that had saved him, Medhurst took to the streets to preach the gospel in some of the most undesirable communities<sup>4</sup> of Victorian London.

Despite his excitement and natural gift for preaching (evidenced by two conversions and baptisms),<sup>5</sup> Medhurst drew criticism from several middle-class church members because of his evangelistic pursuits. These complaints arose because the middle-class church members believed Medhurst, an uneducated man, would bring disgrace to the gospel. Therefore, they appealed to Spurgeon and demanded that Medhurst must be stopped from preaching.<sup>6</sup>

Upon meeting with Medhurst, Spurgeon relayed the concerns of the disgruntled church members, and, with modesty and humility, Medhurst agreed with some of their concerns.<sup>7</sup> However, he also insisted that he had a calling to preach. Telling Spurgeon that ‘I must preach sir; and I shall preach unless you cut off my head.’<sup>8</sup>

Fortunately, neither Spurgeon nor those who disapproved of Medhurst's preaching wanted to see Medhurst decapitated, literally or metaphorically.<sup>9</sup> Hence, the church members and Spurgeon decided to provide appropriate ministry training for Medhurst under Spurgeon's supervision and at his personal expense.<sup>10</sup> As part of Medhurst's training, Spurgeon entrusted him to the care of George Rogers, a nearby Congregational minister. This

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<sup>1</sup> Nicholls 1994: 27.

<sup>2</sup> Dallimore 1988: 103.

<sup>3</sup> DiPrima: 2023: 112.

<sup>4</sup> Dallimore 1988: 103.

<sup>5</sup> Ray 1903: 322.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid: 321.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid: 322.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ray 1903: 322.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

arrangement ultimately led to the establishment of the Pastors' College in 1857, of which Rogers became the Principal.<sup>11</sup>

The Pastors' College was created with the aim of training students at an economic or educational disadvantage with the intention of raising up working-class preachers who could reach other unreached working-class people with the gospel.<sup>12</sup> Spurgeon, like many missiologists,<sup>13</sup> understood that indigenous preachers are vital,<sup>14</sup> if not best placed, to preach to people from their own culture.<sup>15</sup> Therefore, he recruited and trained spiritually and culturally qualified working-class men, teaching them to plant and pastor churches as well as how to preach in working-class areas.<sup>16</sup>

Missiologists of today also understand the value of training and equipping indigenous Christians for mission. This is because:

It is tactical for the global body of Christ in the current page of Missio Dei to develop cross-cultural workers who will cultivate their cultural uniqueness, utilize it for the benefit of the Great Commission, and mobilize it to reach under-reached groups in similar cultural backgrounds.<sup>17</sup>

However, although this understanding is commonly accepted and practised within missions, it appears to be ignored or neglected within the UK church. This is seen in that, within one hundred and thirty years of Spurgeon's death, the poor and the working-class are once again absent from the UK church. Figures show that the middle-class dominate UK church attendance<sup>18</sup> and that 81% of practising Christians have a degree compared to 27% of the population.<sup>19</sup>

As a working-class Christian and preacher, I have struggled to access ministry training due to academic and economic disadvantages. I have similarly struggled to find preachers who

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<sup>11</sup> Mohler and Hart 1997: 221.

<sup>12</sup> DiPrima 2023:113.

<sup>13</sup> Williams 1991:33.

<sup>14</sup> Smither 2023: 10-Point Vision for Missionary Teams.

<sup>15</sup> Andrews 2009: 13.

<sup>16</sup> DiPrima 2023: 124-125.

<sup>17</sup> Lee 2023: Utilizing Indigenous Cultural Traits for Cross-Cultural Missions.

<sup>18</sup> Premier Christian News 2015.

<sup>19</sup> Williams, Brown 2022: 7-8.

can preach with cultural and contextual relevance to my life. Therefore, hearing the history of Charles Spurgeon's desire to equip Thomas Medhurst as a preacher encouraged and inspired me to start Medhurst Ministries.<sup>20</sup>

## 1.1 Hypotheses

I believe there are lessons to be learned from Spurgeon that help with the aims of Medhurst Ministries, to train and equip working-class preachers. This dissertation will aim to demonstrate two key hypotheses:

- There are lessons to be learned from Spurgeon's approach to the recruitment and training of working-class preachers that can be applied to working-class communities in 21st Century England.
- These lessons can be conceptualised within a biblical and missiological framework for use by Medhurst Ministries to empower preachers across the UK from these same communities.

During this research, the term working-class will be used broadly to also include those who would be described as precariat, emergent service workers and the technical middle-class.

## 1.2 Methodology

After conducting a literature review, I used an interpretivist philosophical approach to gather qualitative data through semi structured interviews. Drawing on autoethnographic principles, I also engaged with the data by using a personal reflection at the end of each chapter.

In response to the concern about auto-ethnographers generalising and speaking for others,<sup>21</sup> my reflections will remain a singular voice chronicling my personal experience alongside the voices and experiences of others. Therefore, I am using my personal faith and ministry journey as evidence to explore my research questions and triangulate conclusions from the interviews and literature review.

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<sup>20</sup> Medhurst Ministries 2023.

<sup>21</sup> Edwards 2012.

The interpretivist philosophical approach was chosen because of the advantage that interpretivism allows for the study of 'areas such as cross-cultural differences in organizations, ethical issues, leadership, and factors impacting leadership.'<sup>22</sup> However, despite concerns about the reliability of data gathered through interpretivist studies, these studies are considered to have a high level of legitimacy because the data tends to be trustworthy and honest.<sup>23</sup>

### 1.3 Answering the Research Questions

The main research question that this dissertation will answer is:

- What lessons can be learned from C. H. Spurgeon's pedagogy that helps to train preachers from working-class communities in 21st Century Northern England?

To do this, the research will answer several other questions starting with:

- What approach did C. H. Spurgeon's take to recruit, train, and equip working-class preachers in 19th Century England and why?

This question will be answered through a literature review of historical and contemporary records of Spurgeon's varied ministries, philanthropy, and in particular his motives and praxis for training working-class preachers in Chapter two.

The following chapters then focus on the data gathered from semi-structured interviews (carried out with the participant's consent and ethical approval)<sup>24</sup> taken with the following three groups: working-class preachers, working-class church members and middle-class pastors who train preachers. The data from these interviews were then compared to the limited sociological and anthropological literature on class values and traits as well as historical and contemporary theological and missiological literature that explores native

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<sup>22</sup> Dudovskiy 2019.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> See Appendix

agency and Indigenous traits, including works on the ministries and praxis of Henry Venn, Rufus Anderson and John Ross.

Chapter three, four and five features the data from the first group of interviewees that consist of four white, male, working-class preachers. Although the interviewees are all male this is to be expected for preachers from conservative and reformed evangelicalism in the UK due to their complementarian theological convictions. Despite all the preachers being white, there is a diversity in country of origin, with those being interviewed describing themselves as being English, Welsh, Irish, and Scottish-Traveller.

The purpose of this group is to answer the following questions:

- What opportunities and challenges do working-class preachers experience that impact their ability to fulfil their calling?
- How can these challenges be addressed, and opportunities maximised?
- How do working-class preachers of today relate to Spurgeon's approach to preaching and the training of preachers?

The second group to be interviewed can be found in chapter four. They are composed of four working-class church members who attend churches situated in areas of deprivation across the North of England. The group includes two men and two women. Three describe themselves as white English and one describes themselves as mixed race English and Pakistani.

The purpose of this group is to answer the following question:

- How can working-class culture and communication styles enhance preaching in working-class communities?

Finally, the third group of interviewees are found in chapter. They consist of four white, English middle-class males who have experience of pastoring churches and training preachers in the local church, at residential bible colleges and through distance learning. Again, the lack of class, ethnic and gender diversity within the interviewees is reflective of their roles within conservative and reformed evangelicalism in the UK.

This group, along with the working-class preachers and church-members help answer the following question:

- Can Spurgeon's principles be conceptualised within a framework for training preachers from working-class communities in Northern England?

#### **1.4 Researchers Reflection**

As I finalise this dissertation, I am reminded of 1 Corinthians 1:26-28, I pray that the findings of this weak and foolish researcher will be used to encourage other weak and foolish Christians to step out in faith and fulfil their godly potential.

#### **1.5 Summary**

I have outlined the research's motive, methodology and hypothesis. I will now proceed to the literature review in chapter two. Chapter two investigates both the historical and contemporary literature and resources that catalogue Spurgeon's motives and methods for teaching working-class preachers to determine if lessons can be learned to develop a similar practice for teaching working-class preachers in 21st-century council estates.

## Chapter 2: Spurgeon and the Working-Class

This chapter is a literature review that will assess both the historical and contemporary literature and resources that catalogue Spurgeon's motives and methods for teaching working-class preachers and lends itself to answering the following question:

- What approach did C. H. Spurgeon's take to recruit, train, and equip working-class preachers in 19th Century England and why?

Once this is analysed alongside chapters three and four, we will be able to answer the following question in chapter five:

- What lessons can be learned from C. H. Spurgeon's pedagogy that helps to train preachers from working-class communities in 21st Century Northern England?

### 2.1 The 19<sup>th</sup> Century Church and the Working-Class

The development of the Pastors' College came at a time when, due to a perfect storm of social mobility,<sup>25</sup> the departure of traditional, conservative, evangelical doctrine,<sup>26</sup> and the desire to see theology as an academic subject,<sup>27</sup> many congregations and ministers of established and nonconformist churches abandoned working-class communities.

David W. Bebbington describes these theological and sociological changes as 'three broad trends'<sup>28</sup> and it is these trends that are also acknowledged by Roy Joslin when describing the twelve factors which 'affected the force and flow of the river of alienation'<sup>29</sup> of the working-class in the Victorian church.

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<sup>25</sup> Mohler and Hart 1997: 218-219.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid: 217-218.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid: 218.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid: 217.

<sup>29</sup> Joslin 1987: 21.

The trend for academia within the UK church continued to grow after the removal of academic restrictions that had previously prevented nonconformists from attending Oxford and Cambridge universities.<sup>30</sup> As a result, there was greater interest in preachers and clergy who were well-educated and had scholarly-sounding credentials.<sup>31</sup>

Along with scholarly preaching, the middle-classes who dominated the church valued and promoted personal piety, politeness, and moralism. They were happy to display charity and send money to the poor and working-class, yet sadly, they were unwilling to embrace and fellowship with them.<sup>32</sup> From pew rents to how congregants were expected to dress like the middle-class, the lack of working-class representation in the pews, pulpits, and diaconates, made it apparent that the working-class were not welcome in many churches.<sup>33</sup> However, it is also important to acknowledge the resentment and distaste many of the working-class and poor had towards what they saw as an elitist, hypocritical church at this time.<sup>34</sup>

### **2.1.1 Spurgeon's Desire for Change**

Spurgeon knew that if the church truly desired to redress the balance and reach the working-class, it must be willing to provide tailored and contextualised training<sup>35</sup> for people from working-class communities. People who could already communicate effectively with, and genuinely love the communities that they came from.<sup>36</sup> Spurgeon seized the opportunity to train Medhurst and establish the Pastor's College with providential timing<sup>37</sup> whilst embedding an ethos against elitism,<sup>38</sup> injustice,<sup>39</sup> and heresy<sup>40</sup> that was corrupting the church and alienating the working-class and poor.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Mohler and Hart 1997: 218.

<sup>31</sup> Joslin 1987: 20.

<sup>32</sup> Joslin 1987: 33-36.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid: 33-34.

<sup>34</sup> Clark 2018: 17-18.

<sup>35</sup> Spurgeon 1871: 217.

<sup>36</sup> DiPrima 2023: 123.

<sup>37</sup> Mohler and Hart 1997: 221.

<sup>38</sup> DiPrima 2023: 114.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid: 112-116.

<sup>40</sup> Dallimore 1988: 67.

<sup>41</sup> Spurgeon 1871: 217-219

Determined that no one with a godly call would be excluded from ministry because they were unfortunate to have been born into financial hardship and lacked the opportunity of an education,<sup>42</sup> Spurgeon removed the academic and financial barriers that prevented those from working-class communities accessing theological and ministry training.<sup>43</sup>

Spurgeon's approach to addressing financial obstacles was unprecedented. He not only waived college fees for the most disadvantaged students but also provided them with a stipend that covered their basic needs, such as housing, food, clothing, and resources,<sup>44</sup> often at his own expense.<sup>45</sup> Not only did Spurgeon acknowledge the need to remove the financial barriers from training for ministry, but he also advocated for fair and reasonable salaries for qualified preachers when they were employed by a church.<sup>46</sup>

Like Medhurst, many of Spurgeon's students had little or no education,<sup>47</sup> however if a prospective student had an 'earnest tone and an irresistible urge to preach'<sup>48</sup> Spurgeon was content to train him and provide the theological, practical, and educational support that they needed.<sup>49</sup> In addition to theological training subjects like maths, grammar, and science were taught in evening classes that were open to the college students, perspective students and the local community.<sup>50</sup>

The training was structured towards each individual student's needs,<sup>51</sup> was practical,<sup>52</sup> and all examinations were devised and assessed internally.<sup>53</sup> Therefore, Spurgeon's unique ministry training approach meant there was a sharp increase in those training for Baptist ministry. Alex DiPrima estimates that between 1871 and 1911 the Pastor's College

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<sup>42</sup> Ray 1903: 326-327.

<sup>43</sup> DiPrima 2023: 113.

<sup>44</sup> Ray 1903: 326.

<sup>45</sup> Spurgeon 1973: 99.

<sup>46</sup> Spurgeon 1867: 17-20.

<sup>47</sup> Randall 2005: 3.

<sup>48</sup> Nicholls 1994: 28.

<sup>49</sup> DiPrima 2023: 119.

<sup>50</sup> Randall 2005: 76-78.

<sup>51</sup> Mohler and Hart 1997: 229.

<sup>52</sup> Nicholls 1994: 67-78.

<sup>53</sup> Mohler and Hart 1997: 228.

accounted for more than half of those training for Baptist ministry, with the majority of men being from the lower classes.<sup>54</sup>

### 2.1.2 Recruitment

Although Spurgeon spoke about 'opening a door of hope'<sup>55</sup> to the working-class and despite making it easier to access theological training through the removal of the academic and financial barriers, Spurgeon's methods did not mean access for all. The final barrier was Spurgeon himself. Prospective students would have to meet his strict code for godliness, holiness, and a practical track record for both preaching and evangelism.<sup>56</sup> Therefore, Alex DiPrima describes the entry requirements to the Pastors College as being both 'High and Low'.<sup>57</sup>

It was low because of the removal of academic and financial barriers. However, it was high because of Spurgeon's expectations of those who wanted to train with him. Spurgeon did the final vetting, requiring everyone to be admitted having at least two years of proven experience and competency in preaching and soul-winning.<sup>58</sup> To ascertain the suitability of the applicants, the potential students had to provide Spurgeon with references from the ministers of their home churches.<sup>59</sup>

To satisfy Spurgeon, the references needed to confirm that each applicant not only had a natural giftedness for preaching, but it also had to evidence their servant heartedness and willingness to serve their local church and community. Not only did Spurgeon set the bar high for the practical giftings and zeal of the potential students, but he also set the bar high for their spiritual life. There was an expectation for any successful candidate to have a deep prayer life and a visible display of piety and godliness.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> DiPrima 2023: 120.

<sup>55</sup> Randall 2005: 76.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> DiPrima 2023: 117.

<sup>58</sup> Randall 2005: 76-77.

<sup>59</sup> Nicholls 1994: 62-73.

<sup>60</sup> Spurgeon 1889: 311.

Even with the high expectations of Spurgeon, and despite many applicants (whether rich, poor, academic, or illiterate) being refused entry for failing to meet the spiritual and practical requirements,<sup>61</sup> recruiting students to the college was never an issue.<sup>62</sup> Applications were high, and Spurgeon was never afraid of turning down unsuitable candidates. He often tested the applicants' motivations by provoking them during their interviews. One student, J. C. Carlile, when recalling his preliminary interview for admission to the college, exclaimed how Spurgeon had tried to discourage him from continuing the process by explaining how ministry brings very few social or financial benefits.<sup>63</sup>

### **2.1.3 The Importance of Relationships**

For those applicants who had been able to navigate the interview process and were able to satisfy Spurgeon of their godly calling and suitability for training, they were quickly welcomed into a tight knit learning community that had relationships and discipleship at its core.<sup>64</sup> Spurgeon endeavoured to nurture the relationship between his students and God, by placing a strong emphasis on both individual and corporate prayer and devotions.<sup>65</sup> The emphasis on personal devotions within the college was so impressive it made the news and was reported in the British Standard.<sup>66</sup>

Spurgeon taught that a right relationship with God is essential to guard against personal and pastoral temptation and to keep the minister's gospel zeal burning. He often warned of the dangers of ministerialism<sup>67</sup> (being mechanical in the pulpit and forgetting your personal need for the gospel) and the temptations that make the difference between being distinguished in or disqualified for ministry.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Randall 2005: 76.

<sup>62</sup> Spurgeon 1973: 100.

<sup>63</sup> Mohler and Hart 1997: 228.

<sup>64</sup> Randall 2005: 49.

<sup>65</sup> Spurgeon 1881: 304-305.

<sup>66</sup> Nicholls 1994: 66.

<sup>67</sup> Spurgeon 1875: 11.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid: 12-17.

However, Spurgeon also emphasised the need for developing deep human relationships<sup>69</sup> and he helped to foster these relationships by encouraging the students to not only share their recreational time with one another, but also their personal struggles and need for the gospel to transform their lives.<sup>70</sup> These things were made easier for the students as Spurgeon demanded that the other students refrained from ridiculing those who were sharing their difficulties.<sup>71</sup>

Not only did the students develop deep relationships with one another they also grew in their love for Spurgeon and the other college staff. Arnold Dallimore describes how, immediately after enrolling in the college, the students knew Spurgeon as their friend<sup>72</sup> Dallimore also describes how Spurgeon's humour and generosity meant that the favourite time of the week for many students was the Friday afternoon lectures that he conducted.<sup>73</sup>

Another practice that was unique to the Pastors College was how Spurgeon encouraged the relationships between his students, his church members and their families. All the single students were given lodgings with local families, many of whom were members of the Metropolitan Tabernacle.<sup>74</sup> Apart from the financial benefits of lodging with a family, Spurgeon promoted this arrangement for the benefits and protection it afforded his students.

Living with a Christian family helped to keep the students, many of whom were single, young men from temptation and sin.<sup>75</sup> It also kept them grounded and protected them from an academic bubble which might promote a culture of elitism, immaturity, frivolity,<sup>76</sup> and alienation from the real world and those they were training to reach with the gospel.<sup>77</sup> There was also much learning to be had (especially for recently converted, single students) by watching Christian family life play out warts and all.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Randall 2005: 49.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Dallimore 1988: 106.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Mohler and Hart 1997: 225.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid: 226.

<sup>76</sup> Nicholls 1994: 66-67.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid: 225-226.

<sup>78</sup> Spurgeon 1870: 149.

For Spurgeon, building relationships was also key to preaching and he taught his students that the 'Christian minister out of the pulpit should be a sociable man. He is not sent into the world to be a hermit, or a monk of La Trappe.'<sup>79</sup> Moreover, he encouraged his students to be approachable, hospitable warm and loving. He also taught them to encourage their congregations to ask questions about their sermons and seek spiritual advice where necessary.<sup>80</sup>

#### **2.1.4 Local Church Based**

One relationship that set the Pastor's College apart from other theological training of its time was its amalgamation with the Metropolitan Tabernacle.<sup>81</sup> Not only was being linked with the local church essential for the discipleship of the students, having Spurgeon as their pastor, meant that the students benefitted from regularly hearing Spurgeon preach, further strengthening the bond between Spurgeon and his students. Their relationship was described as 'akin to the many-sided feeling of a clansman for his chief'.<sup>82</sup> With at least one third of all Spurgeon's students enrolling as existing members of the Metropolitan Tabernacle.<sup>83</sup>

For students who did not have weekly preaching assignments, listening to Spurgeon's weekly sermons complemented the mid-week training they received at the Pastor's College, with George Rogers describing this as similar to the way Jesus trained His disciples.<sup>84</sup> Not only was being part of a local church beneficial for spiritual development, it also provided practical lessons in ministry, such as witnessing the weekly Christian mission of the church,<sup>85</sup> attending church business meetings, services, and participating in charitable enterprises.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Spurgeon 1875: 182.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid: 183.

<sup>81</sup> Nicholls 1994: 106.

<sup>82</sup> Mohler and Hart 1997: 226.

<sup>83</sup> Nicholls 1987: 78.

<sup>84</sup> Mohler and Hart 1997: 226.

<sup>85</sup> Nicholls 1994: 66.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid 66-67.

### 2.1.5 Intercultural Learning

Within London, the alienation between Christian ministers, theological students and the working-class was exasperated by the relocation of bible colleges and student accommodation to the more affluent North and West of the city.<sup>87</sup> Therefore, those training to take the gospel to the working-classes had little or no understanding of the 'poverty, powerlessness and helplessness that pervaded many working-class areas after the mid-Victorian era'<sup>88</sup>

Students from the Pastors' College based south of the river might have been better placed geographically to reach these communities, yet many of the families that boarded the students were lower middle-class and the busy schedules of the students hindered them from associating with and learning the culture within working-class communities.<sup>89</sup>

However, regarding gaining an understanding of the culture of working-class communities, the Pastors College had a distinct advantage over other institutions, namely, many of its students were poor and working-class.<sup>90</sup> Therefore, not only would there have been a high volume of students with first-hand knowledge of working-class culture, but it is also highly likely that both the middle-class staff and students would have gained valuable insights into this culture through spending time and developing relationships with working-class students.

The only ambition that Spurgeon had for the college and the preachers he trained was to bridge the gap between the church and the working-class, and he hoped to do this by training hundreds of preachers who not only understood the gospel but also the people they were trying to win to Christ.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid: 107.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> Nicholls 1994: 108.

<sup>90</sup> Spurgeon 1881: 302-303.

<sup>91</sup> DiPrima 2023: 121.

### 2.1.6 Theologically Robust and Christ Centred

Spurgeon strongly believed that much of the injustice that was seen in the church of his time was a result of heresy being preached from the pulpit.<sup>92</sup> Therefore, the Pastors College prepared the students to preach through a training programme that taught Calvinistic theology,<sup>93</sup> biblical exegesis<sup>94</sup> and the importance of producing Christ centred sermons.<sup>95</sup> This method of theological training was rare at the time,<sup>96</sup> and Spurgeon often came under fire for his doctrinal stance.<sup>97</sup>

Despite these attacks which came from the secular press<sup>98</sup> and fellow ministers,<sup>99</sup> Spurgeon resolved to persevere in teaching and preaching reformed doctrines, despite those who were more liberal saying that his beliefs were outdated and calling him egotistical.<sup>100</sup> Along with hyper-Calvinists doubting his salvation.<sup>101</sup>

Unashamed of his doctrinal beliefs, Spurgeon taught his students to craft their sermons and to preach in a similar way. By encouraging his students to choose a text that fits the spiritual needs of their congregation,<sup>102</sup> Spurgeon also stressed the importance of preparing the sermons with prayer,<sup>103</sup> structuring them with profound theological truth,<sup>104</sup> and making them Christ-centred.<sup>105</sup> Spurgeon also taught that before preaching to the congregation, the student must first preach it to himself.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Mohler and Hart 1997: 219.

<sup>93</sup> Dallimore: 1988: 105.

<sup>94</sup> Chang 2022: 31.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid: 35.

<sup>96</sup> Nicholls 1994: 34-41.

<sup>97</sup> Dallimore 1998: 63-72

<sup>98</sup> Ray 1903: 165-181.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid: 157-165.

<sup>100</sup> Piper 2015: 14.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> Spurgeon 1875: 84-85.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid: 40-52.

<sup>104</sup> Spurgeon 2018: 26-31.

<sup>105</sup> Spurgeon 2016: 100.

<sup>106</sup> Spurgeon 1886. 293.

### 2.1.7 Preaching to the Human Condition

Not all of Spurgeon's critics were negative, with one reporter from the Evening Star describing his preaching style as relational and how all who listened to him felt 'interested and at home.'<sup>107</sup> The Journalist continues to chronicle how Spurgeon crafts his sermons to engage his audience with contextual illustrations laced with humour and imagery<sup>108</sup> that takes the hearer on a personal and practical journey as he appeals to 'the common human experience and aspirations'<sup>109</sup> with images 'drawn from the homes of common people'.<sup>110</sup>

The reporter further comments how Spurgeon used anecdotes that were both emotive and realistic, had a delivery that was a 'rough, graphic force and faithfulness'<sup>111</sup> and announced, explained and applied doctrines to his hearers.<sup>112</sup> Spurgeon also taught that to be effective, the preacher must explain the passage clearly,<sup>113</sup> move the minds and emotions<sup>114</sup> of the congregation by using illustrations that illuminate the text,<sup>115</sup> and supply applications that show the hearers how to respond to what they have heard.<sup>116</sup>

### 2.1.8 Personality and Appearance

Having a loathing for lifeless, clinical preachers,<sup>117</sup> Spurgeon urged his students to preach with personality<sup>118</sup>, incorporating humour<sup>119</sup> and emotions<sup>120</sup> when appropriate, whilst also being honest in their personal need for the gospel.<sup>121</sup> Like himself, Spurgeon insisted the

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<sup>107</sup> Ray 1903: 235-237.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid: 237.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

<sup>113</sup> Chang 2023: 32-33.

<sup>114</sup> Spurgeon 2016: 18-20.

<sup>115</sup> Spurgeon 1905: 1-5.

<sup>116</sup> Spurgeon 1875: 73.

<sup>117</sup> Spurgeon 1906: 140-148.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid: 134.

<sup>119</sup> Spurgeon 1905: 43-46.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid: 185.

<sup>121</sup> Spurgeon 2018:155-156.

preacher be relational in their preaching,<sup>122</sup> showing their love for Jesus and their congregation<sup>123</sup> in how they cater the sermon to the listeners needs,<sup>124</sup> which also included keeping the sermon straight to the point and by not preaching for too long.<sup>125</sup>

Not only was Spurgeon concerned about how the sermon was crafted and delivered he also taught his students to be aware of how their attire and behaviour could negatively affect how their sermon is received. He talks about the importance of clothing and how the preachers desire to appear official, religious or even as a fashion-conscious dandy could distract his audience from hearing the gospel. He encouraged the preacher to be clean and tidy yet dress in a manner that doesn't bring attention to himself.<sup>126</sup>

Regarding how the preacher behaves in the pulpit, Spurgeon warns his students that like his illustrations, his mannerisms, gestures and speech must be monitored so that they engage the congregation rather than distract them from the gospel.<sup>127</sup> And although he encouraged his students to avoid stiffness or being mechanical,<sup>128</sup> to speak clearly and to pronounce their words correctly, he also warned them against acting, putting on a strange voice and over exaggerated mannerisms.

## **2.2 Researcher's Reflection**

This literature review highlights how Spurgeon was dissatisfied with how much preaching of his day alienated the working-class and blamed this on preachers speaking in the 'language of the university rather than the universe'.<sup>129</sup> It also shows Spurgeon's determination to develop the Pastor's College into an institution that would 'train gospel preachers'<sup>130</sup> and

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<sup>122</sup> Ibid: 189-190.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid: 150-153.

<sup>124</sup> Spurgeon 1875: 87.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid: 144-145.

<sup>126</sup> Spurgeon 2013: 17-20.

<sup>127</sup> Spurgeon 1906: 116-136.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid: 117-118.

<sup>129</sup> Spurgeon 1871: 217-218.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

'hard-working men'<sup>131</sup> who could 'speak to the hearts of the masses'<sup>132</sup> rather than 'producing scholars or fine gentlemen'.<sup>133</sup>

When speaking of the need for plain-speaking gospel preachers who could reach the working-class, Spurgeon claimed that:

... many of our churches need a class of ministers who will not aim at lofty scholarship, but at the winning of souls; -- men of the people, feeling, sympathising, fraternising with the masses of working men; -- men who can speak the common language, the plain blunt Saxon of the crowd.<sup>134</sup>

As I read the above quote, I was struck by the irony of how, since entering the world of academia, I have had the plain, blunt Saxon coached out of me and the language of the university imposed upon me. Moreover, I began to think 'What would Spurgeon think of my dissertation?' Would he be pleased that I am fighting to keep hold of my personality by remaining faithful to my mother tongue,<sup>135</sup> or would he perceive me as having embraced an alien communication style that is 'stilted, official, fussy and pretentious'?<sup>136</sup>

## 2.3 Summary

The UK church was preoccupied with elitist preaching and was driving the working-classes away. Spurgeon knew that a new type of preacher was needed to redress the balance. Understanding the principles of native agency, Spurgeon was motivated to develop the Pastors' College so that he could train and equip the working-class preachers that he believed were needed to reach people just like them. Therefore, it became 'Spurgeon's ambition to train hundreds of popular preachers who would embrace the masses and speak directly to the lives and concerns of the people.'<sup>137</sup>

Relationships were central to how Spurgeon catered for the personal, practical, and spiritual needs of the students by providing the following:

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<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

<sup>134</sup> Spurgeon 1899: 129.

<sup>135</sup> Spurgeon 1871: 217.

<sup>136</sup> Spurgeon 1875: 180.

<sup>137</sup> DiPrima 2023: 121.

- Accessible training for to all, regardless of financial and academic circumstances, opening opportunities for the working-classes.
- Placement in a local church which provided community and discipleship.
- Placement in a local Christian home which gave students security, accountability and protected against an academic bubble.
- Theological training given and assessed internally by experienced pastors rather than external academics.
- Practical training with opportunities to apply what they have learned in local churches.
- Encouragement to remain true to the student's individual personality and culture in order retain missionary power.

In the next chapter, the findings of the literature review will be compared to the data gathered from the interviews with four working-class preachers on the opportunities, challenges, and unique factors that they have faced on their ministry journey.

## Chapter 3: From Pew to Pulpit

This chapter outlines the data gathered from interviews with four working-class preachers on the opportunities, challenges, and unique factors that they have faced on their ministry journey. It will be concluded with a reflection on the commonalities with the ministry journey of the researcher.

All interviews are confidential, and pseudonyms have been used to protect the identity of the interviewees. The interview questions have been devised to answer the following question:

- What opportunities and challenges do working-class preachers experience that impact their ability to fulfil their calling and how could these be addressed?

### 3.1 How Can They Believe?

But how can they call on Him they have not believed in? And how can they believe without hearing about Him? And how can they hear without a preacher?<sup>138</sup>

In Romans 10:14, the apostle Paul stresses the urgency and necessity for preachers to take the gospel to the lost, and that if preachers fail to preach to the lost, the lost will not hear about Jesus and therefore they cannot be saved. This verse highlights the first problem working-class preachers had to face: the struggle to first hear the gospel.

The leadership of UK churches and Christian organisations is predominantly middle-class and academic.<sup>139</sup> Data also demonstrates the dominance of middle-class<sup>140</sup> academic church membership, with 81% of practising Christians holding a degree, compared to only 27% of the population.<sup>141</sup> These statistics have tangible implications for evangelism, preaching, and discipleship strategies and the training and recruitment of current and future pastors and preachers, with Bishop Philip North warning that:

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<sup>138</sup> Holman Christian Standard Bible (HCSB).

<sup>139</sup> Cullens 2019.

<sup>140</sup> Williams 1991: 33.

<sup>141</sup> Williams, Brown 2022: 7-8.

The simple and hard truth is that, in the poorest parts of the country, we are withdrawing preachers. We are seeing the slow and steady withdrawal of church life from those communities where the poorest people in our nation live.<sup>142</sup>

The above statement helps explain why all of the interviewees had reached adulthood before hearing the gospel and had little if any interaction with a local church or Christians before that time. This lack of interaction meant that before Barry came to faith, he believed the church was:

'...just for posh people. Christianity wasn't for poor people. It wasn't for people like ourselves. It was for middle-class people. And that's basically how we thought.'<sup>143</sup>

Sadly, just 130 years since the death of Spurgeon, history seems to be repeating itself as the poor and the working-class are once again unrepresented within, primarily unreached by, and alienated from the UK church. Therefore, it is vital that the church develops its understanding and praxis in taking the gospel to the working-class and then training them for future gospel ministry.

### **3.1.2 Culture Shock**

What is clear from the research is that the UK church is dominated by a white, middle-class culture and despite the working-class 'not being a separate ethno-linguistic group'<sup>144</sup> or fitting 'the classic definitions of unreached people groups',<sup>145</sup> they are unreached, and face many cultural and linguistic barriers within the middle-class church.<sup>146</sup> Martin describes his transition into the church and ministry training as follows:

I was completely taken out of anything that I knew and understood. Forced to live in a world that was completely alien to me. I mean, there's little doubt now, looking back, what I know about things like culture shock.<sup>147</sup>

Joanne McKenzie explains that emotions, clothing, language, and accents are clear, physical signs of class differences,<sup>148</sup> and this is apparent in how Martin started to

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<sup>142</sup> Woods 2017.

<sup>143</sup> Preacher Barry 2024: 03:03.

<sup>144</sup> Arthur 2020.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid.

<sup>147</sup> Preacher Martin 2024. 17:50

<sup>148</sup> McKenzie 2017.

dress differently shortly after attending church,<sup>149</sup> and how Sean became conscious of, and felt the pressure to change his accent.<sup>150</sup>

Martin shares how, after three years in seminary he returned to find himself in a Christian bubble, detached from his council estate culture as all his unbelieving friends had either moved on, disappeared or died. His social life and ministry ended up being exclusively focussed on Christians.<sup>151</sup> Interestingly this was something Spurgeon tried to guard against by training students in the local church and giving them lodgings with a local Christian family.<sup>152</sup>

Although Martin acknowledges how his training helped him recover from the 'mania'<sup>153</sup> of his past life, he also reflects on how it negatively impacted his ability to minister to those from his people group when he explains how 'negatively, I think it really did set me on a road, I think away from council estates and just ministering in middle-class churches, because that's all that was on offer.'<sup>154</sup>

Drawing on the parallel between the class system in the UK and the caste system in India, Edwin D. Arthur (amongst others)<sup>155</sup> argues that class distinctions hold as much cultural significance within society as religion and ethnicity.<sup>156</sup> Therefore, if the UK church is to effectively reach, disciple and provide gospel training to working-class communities it must first adopt a cross-cultural missional approach,<sup>157</sup> through the utilisation of indigenous cultural traits,<sup>158</sup> which will be discussed further in the following chapter

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<sup>149</sup> Preacher Martin 2024:26:52.

<sup>150</sup> Preacher Sean 2024: 40:02.

<sup>151</sup> Preacher Martin 2024: 21:09

<sup>152</sup> Nicholls 1994: 225-226.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid: 22:13.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid: 22:43.

<sup>155</sup> McConnel, et al. 2016.

<sup>156</sup> Arthur 2020.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid.

<sup>158</sup> Lee 2023.

### 3.1.3 Isolation and Temptation

Two of the biggest challenges for working-class preachers, which start almost immediately after conversion, especially for those with chaotic lifestyles and are first-generation Christians, are isolation and temptation. All of those interviewed had either been involved in crime, drugs or both. Therefore, after becoming Christians, the interviewees not only left their old destructive behaviour behind, but some of them also had to leave their friends and family behind too.

This is a common theme for many working-class Christians, which means that only meeting for a Sunday service and a bible study once per week will leave new converts with lots of time to get lonely, bored and fall into the temptation of revisiting the sins of their past life.<sup>159</sup> Even when loved and looked after by a church, the temptation to go back to their old life can be a problem, not always because they want to sin, but often because of a deep loyalty and love for the people they have left behind.<sup>160</sup> Therefore, the church has a responsibility to provide a family and support base for those that have been forgiven much, and quite often also sacrifice much.

This method of discipleship is not to be confused with extractionism, which has negative connotations with mission amongst Muslims and Hindus.<sup>161</sup> The goal is not to remove the convert from their families, community or culture; it is, in fact, the opposite! The goal is to help support and equip the convert to remain in his natural environment and utilise his indigenous cultural traits for gospel ministry.

However, for some who have been converted whilst living a chaotic lifestyle, a period of short- or long-term extraction may be a wise option or legal obligation due to the following factors:

- A term in rehab to resolve addictions.
- Rejection from family and friends.

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<sup>159</sup> McConnel 2021.

<sup>160</sup> McConnel 2021.

<sup>161</sup> Richard 1996.

- Consequences of criminal past, i.e. threats from past associates or restrictions imposed by the law courts.

Nevertheless, the data suggests that if a working-class convert must leave his community, the tactical option for utilising his missionary power to its fullest capacity would be to locate him in a similar context. Simon shares how his cultural understanding is transferable in working-class areas across the UK.

I was living on council estates down in Wales for a long time. Long, large part of my life, you know, \_\_\_\_\_ these places. Because I'm from those ends. I've come up here, but that works up here too. The same way if someone from the scheme up here went down to, to Wales or England, whatever. It's kind of that culture comes with you. Do you know what I mean? Those ethos, those morals.<sup>162</sup>

Of those interviewed, four levels of support were received, each with differing levels of discipleship intensity and benefits for retaining their indigenous traits. When first coming to faith, Sean and Barry remained in their local community and attended council estate churches led by working-class pastors. They received lots of intensive one-to-one discipleship and investment from their pastors. After he moved to a different region of the country to join a council estate church, Simon also lived with the pastor of that church.

Martin similarly had two church members invest heavily in him, with one of the men allowing him to live in his home. However, due to Martin being homeless and the dangers associated with living on the streets, it was wiser for him to leave his community and live with a middle-class family and attended a middle-class church.

All the interviewees expressed a deep appreciation for what they see as a unique style of discipleship that God used to keep them strong in the faith and mature them for ministry. Simon explains how he needed intense discipleship.

And when I came up to \_\_\_\_\_, that's when I understood what discipleship was. And that was every day, people being willing to get involved in the mess of my life, willing to challenge me, bro, which was unheard of for me. I'd been the man around town for so long, so to have people say, listen mate, you're wrong. Was flipping hard to hear bro, but was right, you know, I don't know where I'd be if I didn't have that.<sup>163</sup>

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<sup>162</sup> Preacher Simon 2024: 12:16.

<sup>163</sup> Preacher Simon 2024: 03:30.

Sean also expressed how, without the intensive support that he received, he would have likely had 'Gone back into the world one hundred per cent'<sup>164</sup> and that 'I'd have gone back on the drugs.... and maybe be sleeping with girls.'<sup>165</sup> Even though Martin's discipleship would have reflected a typical understanding of extraction and despite him feeling alienated in the middle-class church,<sup>166</sup> he credits the security that he found living with a Christian family for three years as one of the major factors in him persevering in his faith.<sup>167</sup> Therefore, it is apparent that if any church is serious in its desire to see people from working-class communities converted, they must also be willing to invest in their long-term discipleship.

Spurgeon provided the types of relationships that were vital for Sean, Simon and Martin's personal faith and ministry development. Not only did Spurgeon personally support and disciple his students, but he also encouraged the staff of the Pastors' College and his church members to do the same.<sup>168</sup> With many of his students enjoying the same benefits that Simon and Martin valued so highly by lodging with a Christian family.<sup>169</sup>

### 3.1.4 The Testimony Dude

It can be challenging for aspiring working-class preachers to overcome the stereotype of being the 'testimony dude.'<sup>170</sup> This term refers to individuals who are expected to entertain middle-class congregations with dramatic stories of overcoming addiction, criminal pasts, suffering and sin.<sup>171</sup> This phenomenon shares similarities with the exploitative nature of poverty-focused content often seen on mainstream television<sup>172</sup> with Martin explaining how he 'was the testimony dude. Jail, drugs, on the streets, that dude, for years and years.'<sup>173</sup>

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<sup>164</sup> Preacher Sean 2024: 07:38.

<sup>165</sup> Preacher Sean 2024: 07:38.

<sup>166</sup> Preacher Martin 2024: 17:50.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid: 41:13.

<sup>168</sup> Dallimore 1988: 106.

<sup>169</sup> Mohler and Hart 1997: 225.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid: 04:52.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid.

<sup>172</sup> Patrick 2017.

<sup>173</sup> Preacher Martin 2024: 04:52.

Paul King, a working-class preacher, was frequently asked to share his testimony, which involved recounting past trauma and ongoing struggles with sin.<sup>174</sup> After sharing his testimony, Paul would often feel anxious and haunted by PTSD and at other times, he would deliberately choose to sin.<sup>175</sup> Barry shares how he is thankful for having a pastor who protected him from the dangers and exploitation from the church using working-class converts as trophies of Grace.

One of the dangers that I was protected from that I, I was really blessed, by \_\_\_\_\_, that he did protect me from, you know, because all these middle-class people particularly, and, and a lot of them. I widnae say all of them, but most of them want you as a trophy and they want you to share testimonies.<sup>176</sup>

Another danger that results from regularly sharing a dramatic testimony is that the convert is constantly recalling their past.<sup>177</sup> Therefore, the convert remains in a spiritual type of suspended animation, with the church hoping he will not backslide yet with no expectation that he will mature and achieve his leadership or pastoral potential.

This sentiment was echoed by Simon, a working-class preacher recruited to plant a church in a deprived community. He believed that if he had stayed at the middle-class church he first attended, he would have been overlooked for ministry training.

if I'd stayed there, I would have been rolled out for a testimony once every few weeks. Do you know what I mean? Do you know what annoys me the most, bro? I probably would have thought that I was doing good Lord's work, but that was it for me.<sup>178</sup>

Therefore, the best strategy for discipling working-class converts would be to limit and at times discourage them from sharing their testimony, whilst also equipping them with theological training. This method would not only protect the working-class convert it would also prepare them to better serve the church in the future.

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<sup>174</sup> Williamson and King 2022: 20:55.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid.

<sup>176</sup> Preacher Barry 2024: 18:55.

<sup>177</sup> Williamson and King 2022: 19:30.

<sup>178</sup> Preacher Simon 2024: 24:12.

### 3.1.5 Thrown in at the Deep End

Shortly after their conversion, Barry, Simon and Sean all attended churches that were on council estates/schemes and led by working-class pastors. They were all given opportunities to preach with Simon preaching within a year of joining his church, and Sean within two years and Barry describing his first time preaching as though he was 'thrown in at the deep end'.<sup>179</sup> However, Barry also recalls at how he was discouraged from applying for theological training:

Well, I asked a couple of times whilst I was at the mission, but I was told that wasn't really for me, and I just took that. Aye. Remember these guys are older, they know, they know better than me. And here I am, a sixty-one-year-old starting a Masters.<sup>180</sup>

Unlike Barry, Martin, who attended a middle-class church with a middle-class pastor, shared how the idea of him preaching was never discussed because 'There's no drive for someone like me to preach. I wasn't invited to preach anywhere.'<sup>181</sup> Martin did not get an opportunity to preach until he had left bible college and started working as a youth pastor. He was only then encouraged to preach and given an opportunity to preach once a month.<sup>182</sup>

The speed at which the working-class are trained to preach and the frequency of preaching opportunities appear to vastly increase for the interviewees in working-class churches led by working-class pastors. Therefore, it could be argued that this is due to several unique factors. Firstly, the working-class pastors intentionally equip working-class converts to handle the bible and to preach as part of their discipleship. Secondly, working-class pastors appreciate the need and recognise giftings in those that middle-class pastors might overlook. Thirdly, like in the time of Spurgeon, there is a lack of full-time and lay preachers in working-class communities, so preachers get more opportunities to preach than they would if they were attending a larger middle-class church.

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<sup>179</sup> Preacher Barry 2024: 13:54.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid: 10:23.

<sup>181</sup> Preacher Martin 2024: 4:48

<sup>182</sup> Ibid: 5:39.

### 3.1.6 Prejudice and Bias

Martin shares how the middle-class members of his church were trying to eradicate his culture by 'trying to almost craft the streetness out of me'<sup>183</sup> by verbally<sup>184</sup> and non-verbally disapproving of how he spoke, dressed and behaved.<sup>185</sup> Barry is also of the opinion that the church attempts to remove the working-class culture from preachers by trying to make them middle-class.<sup>186</sup> He suggested that one of the biggest obstacles he faced was people in the church failing to take his preaching seriously because of his lack of education.<sup>187</sup>

Similarly, Martin describes how because of 'Intellectual snobbery'<sup>188</sup> people judged his intellect by how he spoke, and that how 'people think, because you don't speak like some Anglican priest, that you're thick'.<sup>189</sup> When reflecting on his sermon feedback, Sean is saddened that the comments rarely address the content of his sermons and will instead focus on his style of delivery, with the comments often asking, 'am I being irreverent and are people uncomfortable with it?'<sup>190</sup>

Rather than judging the adverse reaction of the middle-class hearers to working-class preaching styles as lacking generosity, it would be more accurate to describe it as culture shock and a reflection of how many of the working-class preachers felt when first attending church. Moreover, the middle-class response to working-class preaching further demonstrates that training working-class preachers is cross-cultural work.

The current dominance of academic, middle-class preachers in the UK pulpits and the eradication of working-class traits in preachers has created a monocultural preaching style that gives the impression that the pulpit isn't a place for the working-class or their culture. This not only discourages working-class Christians from aspiring to preach, but also justifies

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<sup>183</sup> Ibid: 26:16.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid: 26:52.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid: 30:38.

<sup>186</sup> Preacher Barry 2024: 22:15.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid: 24:17.

<sup>188</sup> Preacher Martin 2024: 23:32.

<sup>189</sup> Preacher Martin 2024: 23:32.

<sup>190</sup> Preacher Sean 2024: 28:09

the exclusion of those who do, and perpetuates ethnocentrism in both the pulpit and the pews.

Three areas that would bring a change in the status quo would be for:

- The UK church and Christian organisations to invite working-class preachers to speak at national and regional events.
- To recruit working-class preachers to teach in bible colleges and seminaries.
- To send people to working-class churches to be trained to preach.

### **3.2 Researcher's Reflection**

I found the narratives presented by the interviewees provocative as they echoed my own ministry journey. However, it was a good reminder that even though there are injustices in the church, there are also many middle-class Christians who do care. Martin<sup>191</sup> and Simon<sup>192</sup> were at pains to express their love and gratitude for those who first shared the gospel with them and persevered in their discipleship. This reminded me of the many middle-class Christians who provided the much-needed friendship and community that helped protect and comfort me as I navigated my early spiritual walk.

### **3.3 Summary**

This research has shown similarities between the challenges of 21st Century working-class preachers and those of their 19th Century counterparts. Similarities include the lack of gospel witness in working-class communities, culture shock, isolation, temptation, being thrown in at the deep end and cultural bias/prejudice. Being the testimony dude appears to be a relatively recent issue that was not prevalent in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century.

All the challenges faced by those interviewed are compounded by the failure of the UK church to acknowledge that ministry to and with the working-class is cross-cultural and as a result, working-class preachers are often walking a fine line between being accepted by the

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<sup>191</sup> Preacher Martin 2024: 41:10

<sup>192</sup> Preacher Simon 2024: 23:54.

church and losing their missionary power. Navigating these cross-cultural rule sets is like having at least two sets of behaviours from which to choose — one set for the streets, and one set for school and work.<sup>193</sup>

Spurgeon's recognition of these cross-cultural challenges in the 19th Century was a crucial insight. However, the 21st-century UK church is still in need of similar recognition, as evidenced by the lack of meaningful ministry amongst working-class communities. The data in this chapter, which shows that both middle- and working-class congregations struggle with culture shock when hearing preachers from a different class, is a compelling validation of the need for the church to consider these cross-cultural challenges.

However, despite the cross-cultural failures of the middle-class dominated UK church, all the working-class preachers and the researcher spoke fondly about the relationships and discipleship they have with the middle-class Christians who were integral in their early conversion and discipleship.

The following chapter will continue to explore the data gathered from interviews with working-class preachers, whilst also bringing in the voices of working-class church members to provide an overview of working-class culture and communication styles.

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<sup>193</sup> Payne 2003.

## Chapter 4: Preaching Like the Working-Class

Through the analysis of the data gathered from interviews of working-class church members and preachers, this chapter aims to provide an overview of working-class culture and communication styles. We will also explore the gap between working-class congregations and middle-class preaching and attempt to support Spurgeon's assertion that working-class preachers are more effective in reaching their own communities.<sup>194</sup> The chapter will conclude with the researcher's reflection on his experiences in both the pulpit and the pew.

Like the previous chapter, all interviews are confidential, and pseudonyms have been used to protect the interviewees' identities. The interview questions have been carefully designed to address the following question:

- How can working-class culture and communication styles enhance preaching approaches within working-class communities?

### 4.1 Relational Community

When the interviewees were asked about working-class culture and communication styles, the importance of relationships within the local community was a central theme. Josiah described how, despite the poverty and its associated problems on his estate, that people want to remain in the community even when they have the option to move home:

I've got money but I am not wanting to leave the place because it's very, um, you stay where you grew up, kind of round here<sup>195</sup> .....Everybody knows everybody. Yeah, like you know your neighbours. You have to work with everyone.<sup>196</sup>

June also shares how she has experienced 'a lot more generosity and hospitality'<sup>197</sup> now that she is living on a council estate, and how living alongside people fosters trust because they

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<sup>194</sup> Di Prima 2023: 121.

<sup>195</sup> Congregation Josiah 2024: 01:57.

<sup>196</sup> Ibid: 02:39.

<sup>197</sup> Congregation June 2024: 04:35.

'don't see that you see them as a project kind of thing.'<sup>198</sup> Another key feature of working-class relationships is that they are often defined by loyalty. Simon shared how:

if you're in and if you're theirs, and they're yours, there's a loyalty there, and they'll have your back big time. It is just how we're brought up. You know, that's why we hate, we hate backstabbing and all so much.<sup>199</sup>

Therefore, since loyalty, community, and friendship are cultural traits of the working-class, it is unsurprising that Spurgeon chose to foster these characteristics within the Pastors' College when training working-class preachers.

#### **4.1.1 Honesty and Openness**

Stemming from the relational community in which many of the working-class live and work, honesty and openness appeared to be the most valued characteristic amongst working-class church members and preachers. From being honest about personal struggles and vulnerabilities to truthfully speaking into the lives of others and sharing personal opinions, honesty and openness is key to building trust in working-class communities.

However, all those interviewed are aware of how, because of cross-cultural differences, the middle-class can often be shocked and offended by the directness of working-class communication and perceive it as being rude. Mez Mc Connell argues:

In the schemes we value straight talking; it is a sign of respect in our relationships. Middle-class people tend to place higher value on not giving offence; it's how they communicate they care about the relationship. As a result, one side looks rude and aggressive to the other, whereas the other looks wishy-washy and superficial.<sup>200</sup>

Spurgeon was very direct in his communication, in writing, in speech and when preaching and because of this he appealed to the masses and often drew criticism from the more refined middle-class.<sup>201</sup>

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<sup>198</sup> Ibid: 15:00.

<sup>199</sup> Preacher Simon 2024: 46:02.

<sup>200</sup> McConnell and McKinley 2016:163-164.

<sup>201</sup> Ray 1903: 157-181

### 4.1.2 Emotional and Passionate

Being perceived as confrontational and aggressive is something that several of the interviewees related to working-class culture, with June explaining how she initially found 'it quite confrontational and aggressive'<sup>202</sup> and that 'in working-class areas, people are much more um... Yeah, maybe open about their feelings and so people are more, maybe... confrontational.'<sup>203</sup>

Simon when describing the working-class style of communication uses the terms blunt, passionate, and emotional,<sup>204</sup> which can be positive, when channelled rightly. However, Robin shares how there are some within working-class communities who struggle to regulate their emotions and articulate how they are feeling helpfully. They may respond to situations by swearing, waving their arms about and being verbally abusive: 'I feel like often we communicate in emotions we don't even know the words for.'<sup>205</sup>

Josiah also links emotion to swearing and he describes how a combination of poverty, a lack of opportunities<sup>206</sup> and the cultural trait of 'calling a spade a spade'<sup>207</sup> makes it more likely for the working-class to swear when looking for the 'words that they need to convey the emotions they are feeling.'<sup>208</sup>

### 4.1.3 Fighters and Survivors

The life experiences of those interviewed have been tough, and despite fondly talking about the positives of living in a working-class community, they have all experienced struggles, trauma and pain associated with living in such places. Poverty, abandonment, divorce,

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<sup>202</sup> Congregation June 2024: 05:22.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid: 06:02.

<sup>204</sup> Preacher Simon 2024: 44:57.

<sup>205</sup> Congregation Robin 2024: 06:08.

<sup>206</sup> Congregation Josiah 2024: 10:33.

<sup>207</sup> Ibid: 10:23.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid: 10:33.

abuse, mental health, crime, prison and addictions are familiar issues for those interviewed and many spoke in terms of having to fight or survive.<sup>209</sup>

Since authority is viewed with suspicion,<sup>210</sup> people within working-class communities will often 'sort it out themselves rather than going to the police.'<sup>211</sup> Violence can be a daily threat for those living in working-class communities and the ambition for many is to survive each day. Such thinking can negatively affect the life of a working-class convert as they struggle, and at times fail, to handle conflict without using their fists<sup>212</sup> or positively fight with a dogged determination to see people converted and disciplined.<sup>213</sup>

#### 4.1.4 Dark Humour and Banter

Often a distraction from, or a reflection of their circumstances, the humour of the working-class can be quite dark<sup>214</sup> and the banter between friends, to the uninitiated, could be interpreted as insulting. However, June describes it as a sign of affection,<sup>215</sup> as does Simon, who also describes humour as being an essential quality<sup>216</sup> for those ministering to council estates:

if you're rigid and have no sense of humour. Yeah, going into preaching on council estates, you'll just break mate. You'll just get broken up, brother.... People from council states will notice. Banter and humour is a sign of affection and appreciation for a person. I mean, if someone's having a laugh and a joke with you, it's because they like you.<sup>217</sup>

Humour was another feature of both the Pastors' College and Spurgeon's personality and the students all looked forward to Friday afternoons where they would be taught and entertained by Spurgeon.

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<sup>209</sup> Congregation Robin 2024: 05:13.

<sup>210</sup> Preacher Sean 2024: 56:41.

<sup>211</sup> Congregation Josiah: 02:39.

<sup>212</sup> Preacher Martin 2024: 09:14.

<sup>213</sup> Preacher Simon 2024: 48:44.

<sup>214</sup> Congregation June 2024: 06:54.

<sup>215</sup> Ibid: 07:15.

<sup>216</sup> Preacher Simon 2024: 40:30

<sup>217</sup> Ibid: 40:39.

#### 4.1.5 Natural Story Tellers

Heavily linked with working-class humour is story telling. The working-class are natural story tellers who love telling and listening to stories.<sup>218</sup> Spurgeon did likewise and encouraged his students to do the same, teaching them how storytelling can illustrate their sermons.<sup>219</sup>

Sean is keen to tell stories when he is preaching and studies comedians like Dave Chappelle and Michael McIntyre and how their story telling can engage audiences for over an hour at a time.<sup>220</sup> When invited to speak about preaching to the working-class I once shared how story telling helped shape my life:

The working-class storytellers that I grew up with always captured my attention. Even the swearing helped to paint the picture, and their mastery of tone meant they rarely caused offence and could even sound poetic. The artistry of the storytellers provoked all kinds of emotions – anger, sympathy, sadness and laughter. The working-class storytellers that I grew up with always captured my heart. Through these stories, I was taught how to live, love and survive on a council estate.<sup>221</sup>

#### 4.2 Excluded and Alienated

This of section investigates the interviewees experiences of the culture and communication styles that are dominant in the UK church and their responses were less enthusiastic. They shared that being part of a minority working-class culture within the church, meant they had encountered segregation, alienation, the feeling of shame and at times being treat like projects rather than as equal members.

Those interviewed spoke of how there was lack of diversity and how it is dominated by the white, middle-class. Even though there was an acknowledgement that the church was becoming diverse, the consensus was ethnic diversity rather than cultural diversity, and much less cultural diversity as it pertains to class.

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<sup>218</sup> 20schemes 2020: 16:36.

<sup>219</sup> Ray 1903: 235-237.

<sup>220</sup> Preacher Sean 2024: 43:36.

<sup>221</sup> Williamson 2017.

As the interviewees continued their narrative, the stories of how they had been hurt by middle-class church members developed into how they had faced similar experiences with middle-class preachers. June recalls how:

It was definitely the pastor who was like up there on a pedestal... He was academic; he was middle-class. He had grown up in the church, and, and you were kind of, you just felt like inferior.<sup>222</sup>

#### **4.2.1 Academia over Character**

All those interviewed suggested that the church appointed the preachers based on academic qualifications and preaching style. However, the working-class interviewees are unimpressed by the academic qualifications of a preacher, with Connie explaining:

... the qualifications mean absolutely zip. It's the... it's the quality of the character that makes the difference, not the quality of the qualifications.<sup>223</sup>

Moreover, Josiah adds that the church should prioritise godly character and the biblical qualifications of a preacher rather than academic qualifications.<sup>224</sup> This mirrors Ruby K. Payne's description of how the working-classes value relationships and the middle-classes value achievement.<sup>225</sup>

#### **4.2.2 Overcomplicated and Irrelevant**

Not only were interviewees unimpressed with the academic qualifications of middle-class preachers, but they were equally unimpressed with the preaching style of many of the middle-class preachers they have heard. From being highbrow,<sup>226</sup> long-winded,<sup>227</sup> and needing more relevant illustrations and application,<sup>228</sup> the interviewees often felt disengaged

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<sup>222</sup> Congregation June 2024: 13:01.

<sup>223</sup> Congregation Connie 2024: 18:00.

<sup>224</sup> Congregation Josiah 2024: 26:09.

<sup>225</sup> Payne 2003.

<sup>226</sup> Congregation Connie 2024: 08:50.

<sup>227</sup> Congregation June 2024: 10:16.

<sup>228</sup> Congregation June 2024: 11:18.

and zoned out<sup>229</sup> of complicated and sermons that failed to speak into the realities of their lives and context. Josiah explains:

I think quite often when you hear preaching, it can, especially in like a nice middle-class church where everyone's a bit, up to do. They're a lot more likely to just kind of explain the history or it's like, explain the history of the passage and kind of go into a lot more academics and, and sometimes you just get a bit confused and you're just like, I don't really know what you're saying here.<sup>230</sup>

Spurgeon saw this same issue in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. The language of the pulpit is poisoning the 'wells of English undefiled' and worse still, it is alienating the working-classes from public worship.<sup>231</sup>

### 4.2.3 Superiority Complex

The interviewees also described how the personality and preaching style of the middle-class preachers that they have listened to, gave the impression that they were unapproachable, guarded, and superior. Bosch describes it as exhibiting a crusader mind rather than a crucified mind whilst also suffering from a teacher complex.<sup>232</sup>

Whether intentional or not, the preaching style of the middle-class preachers was interpreted by the working-class listeners as if the preacher thought he was free from sin and temptation and that the sermon was directed at the congregation instead of being a universal message. June described some of the preachers she has heard as:

It's almost like they've got it all right, they've got it all sorted and they're doing this and they're doing that and they're doing the other. And then you come away and you just think, am I even a Christian?<sup>233</sup>

### 4.2.4 Clothing & Symbolism

Along with the preaching style, the attire of the preacher has a huge impact on how the working-class will relate to his preaching, especially if dressed in a formal suit and tie. For

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<sup>229</sup> Congregation Josiah 2024: 25:46.

<sup>230</sup> *ibid*: 13:49.

<sup>231</sup> Spurgeon 1871: 218.

<sup>232</sup> Bosch 2018: 213.

<sup>233</sup> Congregation June 2024: 30:01.

those interviewed, suits and ties symbolise their negative experiences with middle-class professionals, both in the church and in their communities.

For many middle-class people, suits and ties are symbols of authority that can be trusted and respected. But for others, the suit and tie can symbolise oppressive authority and is something to be feared. As Robin notes:

I would associate suits and stuff with like, social workers and stuff and like that. Like I said that education, which to me, I had like a negative effect when I was younger because of education and social workers in my life.<sup>234</sup>

Because of the cultural barriers and experiences that many working-class people have faced among the middle-classes, it is not surprising that even the most well-meaning middle-class preacher will be viewed with suspicion and potentially dismissed. This suspicion that the working-class on council estates have towards middle-class preachers reflects how because of colonialism, a similar barrier has been created for well-intentioned missionaries from the West. David J. Bosch explains:

So, even if the missionaries themselves were innocent, they could not help but carry something of the atmosphere of Western colonialism with them, just as the smell of stale cigarettes clings to the clothes even of a non-smoker coming out of a room full of people smoking.<sup>235</sup>

Spurgeon was also aware that clothing could be a cultural barrier and taught that the preacher should always dress in a way that avoids distracting the congregation from the sermon.<sup>236</sup>

### **4.3 Anthropological Studies and the Working-Class**

When researching for a list of working-class cultural traits to compare with the list compiled from the data, I was struck by how little research had been done regarding the positive aspects of working-class culture. Much of the published work is decades old and politically motivated, either dismissing working-class culture as a reactionary means of escaping victimhood or vilifying the working-class as a subordinate, racist, hedonistic, and sexist

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<sup>234</sup> Congregation Robin 2024: 22:50.

<sup>235</sup> Bosch 2018: 212.

<sup>236</sup> Spurgeon 2013: 17-20.

community governed by shop stewards and trade unions.<sup>237</sup> More recent work focusses on issues like Brexit and how working-class voting habits are becoming far-right and populist.<sup>238</sup>

However, the indigenous traits and values found in 4.2 share some similarities with work by Paul Willis, who conducted an ethnographic study on twelve working-class white boys at a secondary school in Birmingham in the 1970s. The study by Willis catalogues how the boys (or 'lads')<sup>239</sup> and their parents, like the subjects in our study, valued or identified with traits discussed in the following sections:

- Honesty and Openness.<sup>240</sup>
- Emotional and Passionate.<sup>241</sup>
- Fighters and Survivors.<sup>242</sup>
- Dark Humour and Banter.<sup>243</sup>
- Clothing and Symbolism.<sup>244</sup>

A more recent study on working-class values was conducted by Beverley Skeggs who interviewed a group of young white working-class women. The data showed similar results to that found in the following sections of our study:

- Relational Community.<sup>245</sup>
- Fighters and Survivors.<sup>246</sup>
- Dark Humour and Banter.<sup>247</sup>
- Excluded and Alienated.<sup>248</sup>

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<sup>237</sup> Willis 2017: 43-49.

<sup>238</sup> Mondon and Winter 2019.

<sup>239</sup> Willis 2017: 3.

<sup>240</sup> Ibid 96.

<sup>241</sup> Ibid 15-16

<sup>242</sup> Ibid 34-37, 108, 123.

<sup>243</sup> Ibid: 29-34.

<sup>244</sup> Ibid 77.

<sup>245</sup> Skeggs 2011:19.

<sup>246</sup> Ibid: 16-17.

<sup>247</sup> Ibid: 21.

<sup>248</sup> Ibid: 20.

## 4.4 Preaching Plain and Simply

Working-class preachers are free from the negative associations many working-class people have of the middle-class church. However, the cultural barriers that middle-class preachers bring are only part the reason why the interviewees prefer listening to working-class preachers. The data suggests that, like Spurgeon said of working-class preachers in his day, they 'have a superiority'<sup>249</sup> in engaging working-class audiences with their 'ability to speak the common language, the plain blunt Saxon of the crowd.'<sup>250</sup> Josiah concurs with Spurgeon as he explains how:

I'm a lot more drawn to a working-class preacher now that I've experienced that, because. It just feels a lot more... they are a lot more relatable, and it's a lot easier to understand what they're saying and how that applies to me<sup>251</sup>

The data further shows that when a preacher speaks the same language as the interviewees and specifically applies the word of God to their life and situations, this counters the exclusion and alienation that they had felt in the past.<sup>252</sup>

### 4.4.1 Preaching with Vulnerability

Other than preaching clearly and being easy to listen to and understand, the interviewees described several other vital qualities that draw them to working-class preachers. Traits such as honesty, openness and relatability were important to them. Their previous experience of middle-class churches and preaching left them feeling like projects and inferior, but when the preacher is honest and open about his weaknesses and struggles, the interviewees not only related to him, they saw that they share in his weakness so can also share in the hope that he has in the gospel.

Like obviously sharing their weaknesses but sharing where they take that weakness. Do you know what I mean, they take them to the cross. They're forgiven, they're, you know, uh, their, their hope is in Jesus, and that's where their help comes from.<sup>253</sup>

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<sup>249</sup> DiPrima 2023: 121.

<sup>250</sup> Spurgeon 1899: 129.

<sup>251</sup> Congregation Josiah 2024: 28:23.

<sup>252</sup> Congregation June 2024: 21:54.

<sup>253</sup> Ibid: 22:19.

#### 4.4.2 Relational Preaching

Spurgeon understood the importance of relationships and it was the reason why he proactively recruited students from working-class communities. Spurgeon was convinced that 'the more our hearts beat in unison with the masses, the more likely will they be to receive the gospel kindly from our lips.'<sup>254</sup>

That's what the working-class preacher does, especially because they see that every day need don't, they, with the drugs, with the deaths, the suicides, the abortions. You know, the town's literally getting crushed by the council.<sup>255</sup>

Not only are relationships essential in working-class communities, but this also holds true for preaching. Preaching is relational - first between the preacher and God, then between the preacher and the congregation. However, preaching is ultimately concerned with the relationship between God and the listeners.<sup>256</sup> Anthony T. Selvaggio, when explaining about relational preaching of the author of the New Testament book of Hebrews says:

He preached to people he knew and loved. He displays his understanding of his people and his connection to them in a variety of ways throughout his sermon.<sup>257</sup>

Robin also shares how working-class preachers often show their connection to the congregation by using local illustrations:

It's the storytelling as well. You know, it's... it's when a preacher goes...does anyone remember the bongo? Or does anyone. Do you know what I mean? It's always familiar stuff from the local area.<sup>258</sup>

#### 4.4.3 Native Agency

The findings in this dissertation are not novel. During Spurgeon's time, the use of local converts for church planting and evangelism was a common missional approach and was often termed 'native agency'. Henry Venn, an Anglican missionary, is credited with

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<sup>254</sup> Spurgeon 1889: 217

<sup>255</sup> Congregation Robin 2024: 15:34.

<sup>256</sup> Selvaggio 2019.

<sup>257</sup> Ibid.

<sup>258</sup> Congregation Robin 2024: 15:34.

pioneering the missionary practice of training and releasing local converts to preach the gospel and plant local churches that respected and reflected the local culture.<sup>259</sup>

Rufus Anderson and John Ross are two other missionaries who championed native agency or Indigenous ministry as it is also known. Anderson and Venn collaborated to develop a strategy known as the Venn-Anderson Tradition,<sup>260</sup> and in 1875, during his time as a missionary in China, John Ross developed a similar approach.

Ross encouraged a Chinese convert called Wang to oversee the ministry of a local church, and under the leadership of Wang and other indigenous converts, the church grew exponentially<sup>261</sup> thereby convincing Ross that indigenous preachers and church planters were vital in seeing the church grow in China.<sup>262</sup>

#### **4.5 Researcher's Reflection**

Like the interviewees, I have been alienated by middle-class preaching and preachers whose sermons, attire, and attitudes have failed to engage, encourage or edify me. Many of the sermons I heard were helpful as far as biblical knowledge was concerned; however, very few gave me an understanding of how their teaching related to my daily walk with God in my particular culture and context.

I had been a Christian for four years and had only met two working-class preachers: Mark Scott, a missionary with Pioneers<sup>263</sup> and Gram Seed, the founder of Sowing Seeds Ministries.<sup>264</sup> It was another six years before I met another working-class preacher, Duncan Forbes, and I was blown away by hearing someone preach who was just like me, dressed like me, was a pastor of a council estate church<sup>265</sup> like me, and (despite his cockney accent) spoke like me and to the issues that were real to me.

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<sup>259</sup> Ross 2022: 90.

<sup>260</sup> Ibid: 91.

<sup>261</sup> Ibid: 97.

<sup>262</sup> Ibid.

<sup>263</sup> Pioneers 2024.

<sup>264</sup> Sowing Seeds Ministries 2024.

<sup>265</sup> New Life Church Roehampton 2024.

Although I now listen to an eclectic mix of preachers, working-class preachers have a unique and God-ordained gift over preachers from other cultures: That is their first-hand knowledge of working-class struggles, idols, and fears and how to speak the truth of God's word into working-class needs by using a language that will clearly bring hope to working-class people and glorify God.

#### **4.6 Summary**

The findings concur with Spurgeon's belief that working-class preachers are best placed for reaching the masses if they are theologically trained and retain their indigenous cultural traits. The evidence also highlights the importance of implementing the principles of indigenous ministry when planting churches, preaching and training the working-class for ministry in a way that respects and reflects working-class culture.

Interestingly, the data also indicates how the cultural traits of the working-class are deeply engrained in relationships and community and this in turn relates to the natural communication styles and preferred preaching styles of those interviewed. The data also suggest that for preachers to be taken seriously by the working-classes they must be willing to invest in relationships with them, whilst also being able to contextualise the word of God so that it can be applied to their lives.

Sadly, the data also shows that, because there is a lack of preachers who are from or understand working-class communities, alienation and fractured relationships are a common theme for working-class Christians in the UK church.

The next chapter will use the evidence gathered from the research in chapters two to four to develop a set of principles that can be used to develop a framework for training preachers from working-class communities in Northern England.

## **Chapter 5: Discussion, Framework, Analysis, and Application**

This chapter will use the evidence gathered from the research found in chapters two to four to develop and set out six principles to be used in developing a framework for training preachers from working-class communities in Northern England. It will first do this by answering the following questions:

- How do today's working-class preachers relate to Spurgeon's approach to preaching and training preachers?
- Can Spurgeon's principles be conceptualised within a framework for training preachers from working-class communities in Northern England?

And in answering the preceding questions we will also be able to answer the main research question:

- What lessons can be learned from C. H. Spurgeon's teaching approaches that could help train preachers from working-class communities in 21st century Northern England?

### **5.1 Spurgeon and 21<sup>st</sup> Century Working-Class Preachers**

As part of the process to develop a framework for training working-class preachers we engaged with the group of working-class preachers who were asked how they would relate to Spurgeon's methods of preaching and training preachers from working-class communities. All of those interviewed had a knowledge of Spurgeon, with some being well read and others less so. However, all of them spoke fondly of Spurgeon, especially in terms of his preaching and teaching, with his humour, bluntness and passion striking a cultural chord.

#### **5.1.1 Spurgeon Respects and Reflects the Working-Class Culture**

Although not familiar with Spurgeon's sermons Simon has read several of Spurgeon's Lectures, with one standing out:

I read something once about his lecture notes about he told his students to lift dumbbells. You know what I mean? To get big chests, to be strong men in like stature, in ministry. So, I thought, well, no, it's no coincidence that Lord brought me to that one lan, cos I've got a pigeon chest, (laughs) anyway.<sup>266</sup>

Simon also appreciates Spurgeon's humour and can relate to how Spurgeon created a camaraderie with his students:

Anyway, banter and humour is very important. But I think, think, think it's good, man. I actually would go as far to say I think laughter is, is, is good for the brotherhood. You know Psalm 133. Great is when brothers dwell in unity. Brothers are never more united when they're laughing over a pint in the pub, speaking about the gospel.<sup>267</sup>

Barry is also an admirer of Spurgeon and admits that he is 'biased' when it comes to talking about him because he thinks that Spurgeon is 'spot on'<sup>268</sup> and that he values his preaching for its simplicity and illustrations and how it reminds him of how Jesus preached with parables in the New Testament.<sup>269</sup>

Despite engaging 19<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> Century working-class Christians, Spurgeon's preaching was met with contempt by classist elites<sup>270</sup> of his day, who derided his preaching and insulted those who valued his passion as 'less thoughtful' and 'lovers of excitement more than devotion'.<sup>271</sup> The data shows a similar disconnect between the values of the working-class and the elites of today, with Martin explaining how passion is linked with sincerity for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century working-class Christian.

I would say most preaching, not all, but most preaching here is a calm, logical, what I would call forensic... I think there's a real emotional difference between the working-class and I would say most middle-class evangelical preaching today. That's not to say that some people aren't brilliant expositors... they are first rate when it comes to handling the word, and so you don't want to sort of denigrate, everybody. But I always think, how are you going to expect people to believe a message if they don't believe that you believe it?<sup>272</sup>

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<sup>266</sup> Preacher Simon 2024: 42:53.

<sup>267</sup> Preacher Simon 2024: 41:26.

<sup>268</sup> Preacher Barry: 38:06.

<sup>269</sup> Preacher Barry 2024: 38:06.

<sup>270</sup> Joslin 1987: 33-36.

<sup>271</sup> Gatewood 2019.

<sup>272</sup> Preacher Martin 2024:

The data from the literature review in Chapter 2 provides insight into Spurgeon's character and personality. It shows that whether in the pulpit, the classroom, or at home, Spurgeon was consistently bold, direct, generous, hospitable, relational, humorous, and passionate about God, the church, and the lost.<sup>273</sup> Therefore, it is unsurprising that working-class preachers are attracted to Spurgeon's preaching and teaching style when his traits reflect the data on working-class culture's most valued character traits found in Chapter 4.

### **5.1.2 A Place for Experienced**

Spurgeon's motive for the Pastors' College was never to train people to preach, it was always to equip those already preaching and he developed a training model for working-class preachers with at least two years of practical experience in preaching and soul-winning. If this model was followed in the local churches that our interviewees attended, it would likely have been detrimental to at least two of those interviewed. That is because those interviewed expressed their need for immediate and intense discipleship when they came to faith and like Simon, would advocate calculated risk taking as an opportunity to seek out those who might ordinarily be overlooked:

If you like, you know, maybe didn't do well at school or who were involved with crime and things like that, but who, you know, who, who most churches will really not give a chance. But actually, there may be some absolute gems in there, you know what I mean?<sup>274</sup>

For the 21st Century working-class converts, a more effective approach would be to immediately implement the training principles of Spurgeon to develop and disciple all new believers, particularly those from chaotic backgrounds, who need to leave their local community, or who lack Christian family or friends. For many this initial training and discipleship will set them up for a fruitful Christian life and for others who show potential to preach their initial training would be expanded to give them opportunities to do so.

### **5.1.3 The Local Church**

All the interviewees advocated Spurgeon's approach to training working-class preachers in a local church, and they gave the following reasons for doing so:

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<sup>273</sup> Nicholls 1994: 47-48.

<sup>274</sup> Ibid: 10:50.

- Working-class students who leave their context to train might not return<sup>275</sup>
- Training in a local church gives students practical experience as they 'learn on the job.'<sup>276</sup>
- It keeps the student on the mission field.<sup>277</sup>
- It is the best place for the student to train in character and holiness.<sup>278</sup>
- It helps them to retain their indigenous traits.<sup>279</sup>

#### 5.1.4 Local Christian Hosts

For those students who are indigenous to the community and are recovering from a chaotic background or for those who must relocate for training purposes the preferred model would be to provide accommodation with a local Christian family. Martin gives three reasons why this model was beneficial for him as a new convert and for the students he now trains as pastor:

One, stability. Two, to keep them clean, that those who need to keep clean are away from trouble. And three. It's good for most of the guys and girls that we train who come from broken homes and have never experienced family, for them to be able to see the ups and downs of a real-life family. A Christian family and that action, sort of warts and all. So that's why we encourage that as much as we can. And then for those who progress from there, we offer supported housing. You know, they move into a flat together or a house and, you know, they're offered support that way.<sup>280</sup>

This model not only provides extra accountability and discipleship for the student, but it also serves as a practical source of training whilst also keeping the student within the culture they are familiar with. Simon recalls how he benefitted from living with a Christian family during his training because 'you don't just get to find out about your own character in those situations, but the character of godly families'.<sup>281</sup> Simon continues to share how he learned about what a 'godly family looks like' and witnessed a godly husband disciple his family,<sup>282</sup>

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<sup>275</sup> Preacher Sean 2024: 51:42.

<sup>276</sup> Preacher Simon 2024: 08:32.

<sup>277</sup> Preacher Martin 2024: 36:00.

<sup>278</sup> Ibid: 33:50.

<sup>279</sup> Preacher Sean 2024: 53:05.

<sup>280</sup> Ibid: 37:52.

<sup>281</sup> Preacher Simon 2024: 31:35.

<sup>282</sup> Ibid: 34:57.

and how living with the host family allowed him to grow as a Christian and a gospel worker whilst 'being in the world, but not part of the world.'<sup>283</sup>

### 5.1.5 Accessible Training for All

All of those interviewed wanted to see theological training that was accessible to all regardless of financial and academic circumstances, therefore opening up opportunities for the working-class. However, there was recognition that training comes with a financial cost for the training provider, and that money still needs to be raised to run this type of training. This would ideally mean charging fees for those who can afford whilst providing bursaries for those who cannot.<sup>284</sup> However all agreed that lack of academic qualifications should not be a barrier with Barry, Simon and the researcher all entering full-time ministry before attaining any academic qualifications.

### 5.1.6 Taught by Experienced Pastors

Like the students at The Pastor's College, the interviewees have all benefited from being taught deep theological truths from their pastors and value the teaching and preaching that has shaped their faith and ministry. Martin reflects on the teaching he received from his pastor:

Exegete the text, the authority of the Bible, trust the Word of God completely. That, that was, that was drummed into me, not by anybody at Moorlands. That was drummed into me by my local pastor who is still alive today, whom I reflect, and so positively they gave me a real love for the Bible. They helped me to grow and develop a real love for Christian doctrine and understanding the word.<sup>285</sup>

Despite valuing the training that he received from his pastor, Barry acknowledges that not all churches are equipped to train people to preach<sup>286</sup> and recalls how he struggled in the early phases of his ministry because his pastor was ill equipped to train people in preaching and only had limited training himself.<sup>287</sup>

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<sup>283</sup> Ibid: 31:54.

<sup>284</sup> Preacher Martin 2024: 37:52.

<sup>285</sup> Ibid: 16:17.

<sup>286</sup> Preacher Barry 2024: 19:30.

<sup>287</sup> Ibid: 09:07.

Although those interviewed believe that being taught by experienced pastors in a local church context was the best initial route for training working-class preachers, they were also keen that academic training should be an option in the future. Barry said:

...if I see a young laddie now, I would say to him now, get yourself, get yourself educated in the Bible there, you know? You know, a bachelor's, master's or something.<sup>288</sup>

Therefore, the data is clear that despite their rejection of traditional options for ministry training the working-class preachers place a high value on academic training with Barry, Simon and Martin all engaged in post graduate study. Simon explains how he is enjoying studying on a master's degree:

I'm not going to lie. It's hard. Yeah, it's graft. But bro, it's amazing. And I'm learning stuff now and I'm like, I thought I knew um... like I knew nothing, man. Know what I mean?<sup>289</sup>

## 5.2 Middle-Class Teachers of Preaching

For balance, we also interviewed four middle-class pastors who are involved in training preachers, and all agreed with much of what was said by those interviewed from the groups of working-class preachers and church members, including how:

- The UK church is mono-cultural and dominated by a white middle-class culture.<sup>290</sup>
- Current UK preaching is generic, sterile, academic and lacking personality.<sup>291</sup>
- Current training models create unnecessary barriers for the working-class.<sup>292</sup>
- Secular middle-class values influence recruitment, training and preaching styles.<sup>293</sup>
- Christian maturity and godly leadership potential are often falsely attributed to those who display traits valued by the middle- and upper-classes.<sup>294</sup>

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<sup>288</sup> Preacher Barry 2024: 13:08.

<sup>289</sup> Preacher Simon 2024: 23:14.

<sup>290</sup> Teacher Jack 2024: 03:38.

<sup>291</sup> Teacher Jim 2024: 43:22.

<sup>292</sup> Teacher Dave 2024: 10:33.

<sup>293</sup> Teacher Warren 2024: 03:30.

<sup>294</sup> Ibid: 09:15.

- Training provided in the local church by an experienced pastor is often the best way to equip future pastors and preachers.<sup>295</sup>
- If we are to see more diversity in the pulpits, alternative means of training pastors and preachers are needed.<sup>296</sup>
- There is much that the church can learn from the working-class culture and preaching style.<sup>297</sup>
- Due to the small pool of working-class Christians within the church, it will take time to see working-class preachers called and equipped to preach.<sup>298</sup>

Therefore, the evidence suggests that the 21st-century church needs to drastically change how it evangelises, disciples, and trains working-class Christians. Moreover, there is much to learn from Spurgeon's methods of training working-class preachers when making these changes, and these findings have been used to develop a six-point set of principles that Medhurst Ministries can use to develop a framework for training working-class preachers living in council estates and areas of deprivation in Northern England.

### **5.3 Developing a Theoretical Framework for Training Working-Class Preachers**

After reflecting on this research, it became clear that I had made two mistakes, which led me to conduct an unfair critical analysis of Spurgeon's decision to limit the admission to the Pastors' College to experienced preachers.

The first mistake was viewing the evidence from the perspective of a 21st-century working-class pastor who had been converted in a church that provided inadequate discipleship and ministry training. This led to the assumption that my 19th-century counterparts had a similar experience.

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<sup>295</sup> Teacher Dave 2024: 59:27.

<sup>296</sup> Teacher Warren: 36:23.

<sup>297</sup> Teacher Jim 2024: 46:02.

<sup>298</sup> Teacher Dave: 00:37.

The second mistake was failing to consider how Spurgeon, through his philanthropy<sup>299</sup> and his role as a pastor,<sup>300</sup> provided extensive practical support and discipleship to working-class people. Many of those he assisted eventually gained experience in his church and were then admitted to the Pastors' College.<sup>301</sup> Therefore, after reassessing the evidence, we can see how Spurgeon offered structured support and discipleship to working-class converts, preparing them for Christian life and service while offering those showing preaching potential a route into formal training.

After considering the data surrounding Spurgeon's methods for discipleship and teaching, I have highlighted six principles with relationships at the centre that can be used to develop a theoretical framework for training working-class preachers in 21st-century Northern England. However, it bears saying that the model would likely only be transferable among deprived communities throughout the UK.

Figure 1: Six Principles for Training Working-Class Preachers.



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<sup>299</sup> DiPrima 2023: 129-146.

<sup>300</sup> Chang 2022: 123-133.

<sup>301</sup> Nicholls 1987: 78.

### **5.3.1 Relationships**

This research has shown that relationships and community are a key theme in working-class culture and therefore need to be at the centre of the six principles for training working-class preachers. With each principle emphasising the importance of a preacher's relationship with God, the local church, and his indigenous community.

### **5.3.2 A Local Church with Local People**

The first principle is focussed on the local church context, with a curriculum designed and delivered by experienced working-class pastors who have ministered in deprived communities in Northern England for many years. The aim of this principle to provide the student with a relational community and keep the student as close to his natural environment as possible. To achieve this, the student will be required to:

- Serve in an internship at a local church in a deprived community.
- Live within the community that he is ministering to.
- Be disciplined and supported by a local family or mentor.
- Be trained by an experienced working-class pastor.

### **5.3.3 Accessible**

Accessibility is the second principle for training, and like the Pastors' College, there should be no entrance requirements for the students other than a personal reference from their pastor, a personal statement that describes how they came to faith and their willingness to commit to serving their local church and complete the workload of the training course.

Again, like the Pastors' College, there will be an annual cost for training; however, like Spurgeon, efforts to find funding to provide bursaries for students with the greatest need should be encouraged. Churches should work alongside the students to apply to Christian trusts and individuals to help raise the required funding to limit exclusion for those experiencing financial and academic disadvantages.

### **5.3.4 Discipleship**

Structured discipleship is the third principle for training. It stands out from most ministry training routes by encouraging churches to offer phase one of its training to a broader audience. Inspired by how many of Spurgeon's students originated from the local church that he pastored, structured discipleship should be offered to individuals who have yet to sense God's calling or have had that calling recognised by the local church and will be of particular benefit to those from chaotic backgrounds who are at risk of falling back into destructive behaviours. However, these risks should be calculated, and clear evidence of fruit in line with repentance must be visible in the trainee's life.

Phase one can be designed to serve as a comprehensive internship that can be undertaken full-time or part-time, depending on the student's availability and commitment. The program should also cover the fundamentals of the Christian faith and serve as the foundation for the student's faith journey and the call that God has on every believer's life, which is to make disciples who make disciples.

The rationale for this method is twofold. Firstly, it will provide the structure, stability, and discipleship needed for those from chaotic backgrounds to establish a solid foundation for their faith. Secondly, it can unearth the untapped ministry potential of those who may have ordinarily been overlooked.

### **5.3.5 Service**

Principle four is helping the student to develop a servant heart. The specific duties during the internship will vary depending on whether the student is undertaking a full-time or part-time internship. However, the internship should not only be concerned about the practical responsibilities of the student; it should also involve receiving guidance and support from pastors who will act as mentors and supervisors in local church environments.

### **5.3.6 Theologically Robust**

Principle five emphasises the importance of a preacher having a deep understanding of God's word. This necessitates the preacher being a theologian, effectively explaining the Bible and

delivering Christ-centred sermons. As a result, students must learn to accurately study and interpret the Bible. This learning process should commence with basic Bible study skills and progress to more advanced, genre-specific methods, cross-referencing, the use of commentaries, and the study of biblical and systematic theology.

### **5.3.7 Assessment**

Just as it is advised that the training is to be led by experienced pastors serving in underprivileged communities, principle six recommends that the assessments should also be conducted by them. We also recommend that as part of the internship, students will have the choice to use presentations or written to demonstrate their ministry activities, which will then be used for assessment. It is at this point that the student will be assessed on both his character and preaching ability and if successful will be recommended to move onto phase two. Phase two, in line with Spurgeon's assertion that preachers learn how to preach by preaching<sup>302</sup> will bring opportunities to preach and cover pulpits in his local and other partner churches.

### **5.4 Researchers Reflection**

My obsession with developing a framework for training working-class preachers meant that I almost ignored a significant theme of this research: the importance of discipleship. This oversight has reminded me of the danger of valuing the practical over the spiritual and the need to show grace to the middle-class training routes I have accused of doing the same.

### **5.5 Summary**

The working-class preachers relate well to Spurgeon's preaching, writings, and teaching methods and have been encouraged by what they learned about him. Some benefit from similar training styles that Spurgeon offered, and others replicate similar training and support models for others.

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<sup>302</sup> Mohler and Hart 1997: 224.

Several lessons have also been learned from C. H. Spurgeon's teaching approaches, and they have been encapsulated into the six principles for training working-class preachers, which could be used to develop a theoretical framework for training working-class preachers from Northern England. Following the example of Spurgeon and combining the experience of the working-class preachers we have learned that relationships are essential for these six principles to be fully effective.

In the final concluding chapter, the main research question is answered, the hypothesis is assessed, and limitations and suggestions for further study are given.

## Chapter 6: Conclusions

The main research question aimed to identify what lessons can be learned from C. H. Spurgeon's teaching approaches that could help train preachers from working-class communities in 21st-century Northern England. Based on a literature review, gathering qualitative data through semi-structured interviews, and drawing on autoethnographic principles through personal reflection, we have learned that much would be gained by mirroring Spurgeon's approach to teaching, equipping 21<sup>st</sup> Century working-class preachers by providing them with cross-cultural theological training that is financially and academically accessible, local church-based, and immersed in relational community.

### 6.1 Review of the Hypothesis

This research also hypothesised that Spurgeon's approach to recruiting and training working-class preachers can be applied to working-class communities in 21st-century Northern England. It suggests that lessons can be conceptualised within a biblical and missiological framework for Medhurst Ministries to empower preachers from these communities across the UK. Providing academically and financially accessible training that is local church based and is taught and assessed by experienced pastors who have ministered in areas of deprivation.

The data from the literature review, compared with the results of interviews with working-class pastors in chapter three, shows that ministry by the middle-class-dominated church to the working-class is cross-cultural and that many social and structural obstacles, such as alienation, cultural bias and financial and academic constraints, to working-class Christians fulfilling their ministry potential, are as apparent today as they were in Spurgeon's time.

The interviews with working-class pastors are complemented by interviews with working-class church members who attend churches in areas of deprivation (Chapter Four) and middle-class pastors who train preachers in both a local church and a bible college setting (Chapter Five). The resulting data from these interviews confirm the obstacles facing working-class pastors and the cross-cultural nature of ministry to the working-class.

However, the data has also shown that for working-class preachers who can navigate the social and structural obstacles to access training, a lack of appreciation for the cross-cultural nature of ministry to the working-class, assimilation to middle-class culture, and the more recent phenomenon of being pigeonholed as the 'testimony dude' are three other issues that prevent those trained to preach from doing it effectively. This lack of appreciation is a significant gap that needs to be addressed to ensure effective ministry by and for the working-class.

Nevertheless, combining the data from chapters two and three with chapters four and five, we see a clear pattern: the problems for working-class preachers have remained consistent since Spurgeon's time, and so have the solutions. The evidence, particularly the successful application of the six principles from Spurgeon's teaching methods in chapter five, demonstrates (at least theoretically) the transferability of Spurgeon's training model from the 19th to the 21st Century.

The evidence also highlights the importance of discipleship and relationships in the process of training working-class preachers with particular emphasis on the importance of the preacher's relationship with God, the local church, and his indigenous community.

## **6.2 Limitations and Further Study**

Due to the limited scope of this dissertation, several themes arose from the interviews that I was unable to investigate further. These included: what a redeemed working-class culture looks like: common grace and working-class culture: and, training middle-class preachers for cross-cultural ministry to the working-class. These themes may provide subjects for future research.

## **6.3 Researchers Reflection**

I pray that Medhurst Ministries and the wider church within the UK can use this research and the six principles for developing a theoretical framework for training working-class preachers to reach working-class communities with the gospel more effectively. Firstly, by acknowledging the need for a cross-cultural ministry mindset to reach the working-classes; and secondly, by working collaboratively to provide affordable and culturally appropriate support and resources for churches in deprived areas. This collective effort will enable us to

first disciple and then train indigenous converts in their local context to preach and, where necessary, provide those who need to leave their local context with opportunities to access discipleship, training and support in churches that minister in similar communities.

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## Appendices

## Appendix 1: Informed Consent Form



### RESEARCH INFORMED CONSENT FORM

(to be completed after Research Participant Information Sheet/Privacy Notice has been read)

*Preaching Like the Working Class: A critical investigation into C H Spurgeon's teaching approaches and their relevance for training preachers from working-class communities in 21st Century Northern England.*

The purpose and details of this study have been explained to me.

I have:

- understood that this study is designed to further academic knowledge, is part of a recognised qualification and that all procedures have been approved by All Nations.
- read and understood the Participant Information sheet and privacy notice and this consent form.
- had an opportunity to ask questions about my participation.
- understood that I am under no obligation to take part in the study.
- understood that I have the right to withdraw from this study at any stage for any reason, and that I will not be required to explain my reasons for withdrawing.
- understood that all the information I provide will be treated in strict confidence and will be kept anonymous and confidential to the researcher unless it is judged that confidentiality will have to be breached for the safety of the participant or others in accordance with legal/statutory obligations.

I agree to participate in this study and consent to information that I provide being used as stated in the Research Participant Information Sheet/Privacy Notice

Your name\*

---

Your signature\*

---

\*If the participant prefers, they may give verbal consent by stating aloud the sentence above, starting “I agree to participate...” and the researcher must sign this paper to indicate that this has occurred and the time and the date.

Signature of researcher

---

Date and Time:

---

## Appendix 2: Participant Information Sheet


<b>RESEARCH PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET/PRIVACY NOTICE</b>
<b>Research Title:</b> Preaching Like the Working Class: A critical investigation into C H Spurgeon's teaching approaches and their relevance for training preachers from working-class communities in 21st Century Northern England.
<b>Researcher:</b> Ian Williamson
Thank you for considering participating in a research exercise run by a student or member of staff of All Nations Christian College. This sheet seeks to provide you with all the information you might wish to know regarding participating in the research. Since the College is committed to protecting your privacy and to meeting our data protection obligations, this notice is also intended to give you an understanding of how and why we use the information you provide.
<b>What is the purpose of this research?</b> The purpose of this research is to ring together the principles that emerge from the research in a biblical and missiological framework for use by Medhurst Ministries to empower preachers from working class communities in Northern England and other parts of the UK.  This Postgraduate Dissertation forms part of an Open University validated programme.
<b>How will the information be used?</b> Information provided will be analysed and used by the researcher to help answer the following questions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What opportunities and challenges do working class preachers experience that impact their ability to fulfil their calling and how could these be addressed?</li><li>• How do today's working-class preachers relate to Spurgeon's approaches to preaching and training preachers?</li><li>• How can working-class culture and communication styles enhance preaching approaches within working class communities?</li></ul>
<b>What is involved?</b>

1. What am I being asked to do?	To take part in a semi structured interview conducted and recorded on Zoom.
2. What will it involve?	It will involve answering questions about: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The lack of representation of, and the challenges facing potential preachers from a working-class background.</li> <li>• What are bible colleges doing to address this problem.</li> <li>• What can be learned from Spurgeon's approaches to training preachers from a working-class background.</li> </ul>
3. What do I need to do beforehand?	Nothing
4. What do I need to bring?	Nothing
<p><b>What happens if I do not want to answer all the questions?</b></p> <p>You are totally at liberty not to answer any questions and do not have to provide information if you do not wish to do so.</p>	
<p><b>After I have agreed to participate in the research can I change my mind?</b></p> <p>After we have supplied you with this information about this research exercise and before taking part in it, you will be asked to give written or verbal consent saying that you understand what is involved and are happy to participate in the research.</p> <p>If at any time, before, during or after the sessions you wish to withdraw from the study you may do so, without giving a reason. In this case, please contact the researcher at the earliest opportunity so that they can exclude you from the study.</p>	
<p><b>Are there any risks in participating?</b></p> <p>This study has received ethical clearance from All Nations and any potential risks have been considered along with how those risks will be managed.</p> <p><i>[State here if there are any specific risks to participating in the research and how they will be managed OR state that there are considered to be no risks with this research]</i></p>	
<p><b>Will anyone know my identity?</b></p> <p>Your right to anonymity will be totally respected. If your identity is known to the researcher, for example in the case of interviews, it will not be revealed to anyone else. The researcher's findings will appear in a report/paper/dissertation but no one individual could be identified from such a paper without their explicit consent. Whilst your words may be quoted, your identity or any organisation you represent will not be disclosed without your explicit consent.</p>	
<p><b>What personal information does the researcher collect and why?</b></p> <p>Only information that you choose to provide will be used, and only within the confines of this particular study. It will not be passed on to any third parties.</p>	

**What will happen to the completed report?**

All assignments for assessment are generally made available only to markers and external examiners, however Dissertations are made available in the College library. Extracts or articles based on the research may be posted on the College website for a limited period

**How will the information I provide be recorded?**

The information provided will be recorded on Zoom and transcribed.

**Who will have access to the information that I provide?**

The researcher will generally be the only person who has access to the information you choose to share with them. No information that you share (personal or otherwise) will be kept on any All Nations database, network or computer. Research undertaken by an All Nations employee in the context of their employment is likely to store data on the College network/computer. In this case IT support staff would technically be able to access the information in addition to the researcher but they are legally bound not to breach anyone's privacy in performing their duties.

**How will the data be protected?**

Researchers have a responsibility to ensure that all information is recorded and stored securely, either in a lockable filing cabinet or room or electronically using appropriate security mechanisms such as encryption.

If for some reason a breach in the security of information is suspected, the College will be informed. For data provided in the context of official All Nations' research projects i.e. undertaken by an employee of the College (see above) we will fulfil our legal obligation to inform the data protection supervisory authority, The UK Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) within 72 hours.

**For how long will the research data be kept?**

The data will be retained for any legally specified period and otherwise for the following number of years from the end of the project: *3 years*.

After that, the data will be destroyed completely. Paper documents will be shredded and digital copies deleted.

**What are my rights?**

You have the right to :

- refuse to take part in the research and/or to withdraw at any point from the project
- retract information provided at any point
- obtain a copy of any recording of an interview in which you participate, or interview transcript
- access and obtain a copy of the personal information held by the researcher, on request;
- require the researcher to change incorrect or incomplete data;
- require the researcher to delete or stop processing your data

**Who should I contact if I have more questions or wish to make a complaint?**

In the first instance please contact:

Ian Williamson

Email: [ian@medhurstministries.org](mailto:ian@medhurstministries.org)

Mobile Phone: 07734722307

If you have questions regarding All Nations' research policies and practices or you are not happy with how the research is being or was conducted, please contact:

Vice Principal (Academic)

All Nations

Easneye

WARE

Herts

SG12 8LX

Tel +44 1920 443500

## Appendix 3: Interview Questions for Teachers

### Interview Questions for Teachers

#### Observation

Although working-class musicians, authors, actors, social commentators, and comedians have similar struggles to working-class Christians, they tend to have more influence in secular society than they do in the church, with many from the middle class who will engage with and enjoy elements of working-class culture, whether it be fashion, music, or the arts.

**Q.** Why do you think the working-class are celebrated more by secular society than they are within the church?

**Q.** If diversity in the church is described as Gods manifold wisdom, why does the UK church fail so badly at representing diversity in the pulpit, especially when representing class diversity?

**Q.** What do you think are the greatest challenges in recruiting and training preachers from working class backgrounds?

**Q.** What do you think are the greatest personal challenges for working class Christians who want to access training to preach?

#### Observation

During the time of Spurgeon many churches in areas of deprivation were struggling to recruit pastors, and due to social uplift, many other churches were moving their congregations to more affluent areas meaning that the working class and poor couldn't access good gospel preaching churches. This was one of the reasons Spurgeon chose to specifically recruit and train the working class, so that he could have preachers from the masses to reach the masses.

**Q.** Why do you think this model has been lost and what changes would be needed to resurrect it?

**Q.** Do you think that if the church and seminaries invested in this model it could help to redress the current shortage of pastors and preachers within the UK?

#### Observation

Spurgeon removed financial barriers from those wanting to train for ministry by providing free training, accommodation and even a small stipend for the most disadvantaged students.

**Q.** Are you aware of any similar opportunities for financially disadvantaged students today?

**Q.** Do you see any problems with that approach?

#### Observation

Spurgeon also removed academic barriers by admitting students based on their zeal and piety rather than on their educational merits.

**Q.** Are you aware of any training courses for preachers that would equip students with little or no educational background?

**Observation**

I first started ministry training with the Yorkshire School of Christian Ministry, it was accessible financially and there was no academic requirement for the students. However, the marking scheme was based on degree level marking, and therefore required the student to be able to set out their assignments in an academic way or they would either fail/or receive a lower grade.

**Q.** Why do you think that ministry training follows this model?

**Q.** What are some of the dangers of this model?

**Observation**

Spurgeon believed that this model of training discriminated against uneducated yet godly, spiritually, and practically gifted preachers whilst also enabling those who may be educated, yet ungodly, spiritually, and practically unqualified preachers.

**Q.** Would you agree and why/why not?

**Observations**

On the other hand, Spurgeon's methods also protected against tokenism and making do with preachers who were practically and spiritually unqualified. Everyone regardless of finances or academic standing had a strict interview process and references and evidence of the candidate's piety and suitability was also required, and because of these standards there was many, both rich and poor being refused a place.

**Q.** How can we today. Like Spurgeon, actively recruit and train people from working class backgrounds without making do or displaying tokenism.

**Observation**

One of my tutors once told me to take all the good that I am learning but to never lose who I am. I didn't understand what he meant until a few years later and I had changed the way I dressed, spoke, and preached. I had assimilated to be like those who were training me and who I was preaching to, and I had lost my connection to those I was trying to evangelise and preach to from my community. It was only then that I realised what my tutor meant by not losing who I am.

**Q.** How can colleges and those training preachers better prepare and encourage preachers not to assimilate or to lose their cultural identity?

**Observation**

Spurgeon helped avoid assimilation and social detachment by avoiding an academic bubble and placing those he trained as lodgers in the homes of regular families.

**Q.** Do you see any benefits of this model and how realistic would it be to replicate this model for today's bible colleges?

**Observation**

Spurgeon's personality and humour shined through in his teaching and preaching, and he encouraged his students to do the same, this type of preaching attracts the working class yet much of the UK preaching today has been accused of lacking personality and being sterile.

Why do you think that is?

**Observation**

The working-class preachers that I am familiar with often preach with a personal vulnerability, they tell a story, they use personal/local illustrations, are often self-deprecating, humorous, emotional, and passionate.

- Q.** Would you say this type of preaching is typical across British cultures in the church?
- Q.** What could the wider church learn from the preaching of the working class.
- Q.** What is the wider church losing by having such a homogenous preaching style?

## **Appendix 4: Interview Questions for Preachers**

### **Working Class Preacher Questions**

#### **Conversion**

- Q. How/when did you get saved?
- Q. Did you have a church background?
- Q. What did your discipleship look like?

#### **Ministry Training**

- Q. How long was it before being saved and you being trained to preach?
- Q. Where and with who did you train for ministry?
- Q. What was the context of your training?
- Q. What class/culture was the person who trained you for preaching?
- Q. What class/culture was the preacher who you listened to or who inspired you the most?
- Q. How did the influences, contexts and type of training positive/negatively shape your preaching style?

#### **Opportunities and Challenges for Working Class Preachers**

- Q. What are the unique opportunities (compared to middle class preachers) that you have found when preaching in a working-class community?
- Q. How often were you given opportunities to preach in your local church?
- Q. What challenges have you encountered in your training as a working-class preacher?
- Q. What challenges do you find being a working-class preacher?
- Q. Did you ever find yourself under pressure to change your:
  - Accent
  - Dress
  - Language

#### **How do working-class preachers relate to Spurgeon's approaches to preaching and training preachers?**

- Q. Spurgeon focussed on holiness and zeal rather than academia, do you think this is important?

- Q.** Spurgeon made training free for those who couldn't afford it, do you think this is important?
- Q.** Spurgeon provided accommodation for students with Christian families to keep the preachers close to the real world rather than being kept in an academic bubble. Do you think this would be helpful when training preachers today?
- Q.** Spurgeon encouraged students to retain their cultural identity do you think this is important and why?
- Q.** Spurgeon encouraged humour and banter amongst his students, do you think this is important?
- Q.** Spurgeon was blunt and to the point, passionate, humorous, loved people and loved the lord. This was evident in his preaching. What do you think of this preaching style?
- Q.** How would you describe working-class culture and its communication styles?
- Q.** What do you think that the church can learn from working-class culture and communication styles?
- Q.** What do you think that those who train preachers can learn from working class culture and communication styles to enhance preaching approaches within working class communities?

## **Appendix 5: Interview Questions for Church Members**

### **Questions for Members Council Estate Churches**

How long have you been a Christian?

Please describe the context where you live.

What social class would you describe yourself as?

Do you think the working class are represented in the church?

Do you think the UK church is diverse?

Why do you think that is?

Please describe what you see as the main characteristics of the working-class culture and their communication style.

When was the 1<sup>st</sup> time you heard a working-class preacher?

Was this something unusual or was it a regular occurrence?

Approximately, how many working-class preachers have you heard preach?

How would you describe the communication style of a working-class preacher?

Do you think the wider church suffers by not regularly hearing working class preachers?

What do you think the church needs to do to encourage more working-class people into the church?

What would you say are the main differences (if any) between working- and middle-class preachers that you have heard?

What ways are you positively or negatively affected by the preachers...

- Clothes
- Accent
- Social Class
- Qualifications

What are the main qualities that attracts you to a preacher?

## Appendix 6: Medhurst Ministries Information Sheet



Medhurst Ministries is a network of churches and exists to take the gospel to the forgotten places of the United Kingdom. The board of Medhurst Ministries consists of experienced pastors and gospel workers who are ministering to communities in areas of deprivation with a vision to see at least 50 local churches that serve in areas of economic and spiritual poverty planted, revitalised and supported through the provision of training, grants, mentoring and resources.

It takes its name from Thomas Medhurst, the first student of Charles Spurgeon. Medhurst was a working-class convert of the ministry of Charles Spurgeon. Almost immediately after his conversion Medhurst took to the streets to preach the gospel. Sadly, rather than encouraging the largely middle-class members of Spurgeon's church, the sight of this recently converted, uneducated, working-class man caused great concern and anger.

The church members told Spurgeon that he must stop the preaching of Medhurst as his uneducated preaching would disgrace the gospel. Spurgeon spoke with Medhurst about the concerns of the church, to which Medhurst responded, *"If you want to stop me preaching, you will have to chop my head off!"* On hearing this Spurgeon, decided that it would be better to train Medhurst than to chop his head off, and the Pastors' College was born.

Medhurst ministries want to emulate the work of Spurgeon by supporting gospel work to and with those who, like Thomas Medhurst, are often overlooked, undervalued, and forgotten by the church. Providing support, training and resources to churches pastors and Christians living in areas of deprivation it is our prayer to see working-class communities across the UK evangelised, disciplined and equipped for gospel ministry.

