

**PREACHING TO THE WHOLE CHURCH: USING THE FOUR
COMMUNICATION STYLES IDENTIFIED IN CARL JUNG'S
THEORY OF PSYCHOLOGICAL TYPES**

by Flavil R. Yeakley, Jr., Ph.D.,
Harding University, Searcy, Arkansas

There are important implications for homiletics in some recent research with the *Myers-Briggs Type Indicator*.¹ The MBTI is the most popular personality inventory in the history of psychology. Unlike clinical tests that identify mental illnesses, the MBTI simply indicates healthy differences in the way normal people prefer to use their perception and their judgment. Isabel Myers and her mother, Katherine Briggs, developed this inventory in order to identify the preferences of people on four dichotomies discussed by Carl Jung in his book *Psychological Types*.²

Extraversion or Introversion. Preferences regarding the direction of energy.

Extraversion: Directing energy mainly toward the outer world of people and objects.

Introversion: Directing energy mainly toward the inner world of experiences and ideas.

Sensing or Intuition. Preferences regarding perception.

Sensing: Focusing mainly on what can be perceived by the five senses.

Intuition: Focusing primarily on patterns, relationships, and implications.

Thinking or Feeling. Preferences regarding judgment.

Thinking: Basing decisions on logical analysis with objectivity and detachment.

Feeling: Basing decisions on personal or social values with a focus on interpersonal harmony.

Judging or Perceiving. Preferences regarding orientation toward the outer world.

Judging: Achieving closure by dealing with the world decisively through Thinking or Feeling.

Perceiving: Staying flexible by dealing with the world through Sensing or Intuition.

¹ *Myers-Briggs Type Indicator* and *MBTI* are registered trademarks of Consulting Psychologists Press, Palo Alto, California.

² Carl G. Jung, *Psychological Types* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1971). Written in German in 1921 and translated into English in 1923. This edition of the English translation also contains one earlier and two later essays of Jung on his typology.

Sensing, Intuition, Thinking, and Feeling are not only different mental functions that all normal, healthy, mature people use—they are also very different communication styles. Jung even spoke of them as being four different "languages." The MBTI can be used to identify which of these communication styles is primary, secondary, tertiary, and least preferred. Effective communication requires that two people use the same communication style, even if one or both has to shift from their most preferred style to one of their less preferred styles.

The implication for homiletics in all of this is that preachers must use all four of the communication styles, if not in one sermon at least over time, in order to preach effectively to all of the people in a congregation. This is not a totally new idea. For many years, textbooks on homiletics have stressed the need for flexibility and balance in the use of various preaching forms.³ Some teachers of homiletics have used the four learning styles identified in Neuro-Linguistic Programming (visual, tactile, auditory tonal, and auditory digital) to show the importance of using a variety of sermon forms.⁴ A few are using the MBTI to make this same point about the need to a variety of sermon forms in order to communicate effectively with people who prefer each of the Jungian communication styles.⁵

The MBTI can be very useful in teaching students of preaching to use all of the communication styles. In the past, however, there were only rough estimates about the distribution of the 16 types identified by the MBTI. But the recent development of Form M of the MBTI used a kind of scoring that requires a large random sample. Now accurate information is available about the distribution of types, as shown in Table 1 and in Figures 1 and 2.

³ For example, see: John A. Broadus, *On the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*, New Revised Edition by Jesse Burton Weatherspoon (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1944), a classic text that stresses the importance of adapting to different audiences, different biblical texts, and different purposes by using different sermon forms. See also: Fred B. Craddock, *Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1985), pp. 170-188, where Craddock shows the value of different sermon forms; Donald L. Hamilton, *Homiletical Handbook* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1992), where Hamilton devotes eight chapters to different methods and 10 chapters to appropriate ways of dealing with different kinds of texts; and, J. Randall Nichols, *Building the Word: The Dynamics of Communication and Preaching* (San Francisco: Harper & Row Publishers, 1980), pp. 58-87, where Nichols suggests several different "preaching languages" in order to adapt to different audiences.

⁴ J. Robert Hanson, Harvey F. Silver, and Richard W. Strong, *Student Styles and Strategies* (Silver Strong & Associates, 1986); Richard W. Strong, Harvey F. Silver, and Robert Hanson, *Questioning Styles and Strategies* (Silver Strong & Associates, 1995); Harvey F. Silver, J. Robert Hanson, Richard W. Strong, and Patricia B. Schwartz, *Teaching Styles and Strategies* (Silver Strong & Associates, 1996); Harvey F. Silver and J. Robert Hanson, *Learning Styles and Strategies* (Silver Strong & Associates, 1996); Harvey F. Silver, Matthew J. Perini, and Richard W. Strong, *So Each May Learn: Integrating Learning Styles and Multiple Intelligences* (Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2000); and, _____, *Teaching What Matters Most: Standards and Strategies for Raising Student Achievement* (Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2001).

⁵ Alice M. Fairhurst, and Lisa L. Fairhurst, *Effective Teaching, Effective Learning: Making the Personality Connection in Your Classroom* (Palo Alto, California: Davies-Black, 1995).

Table 1 shows the distribution of MBTI types for males and females in the national representative sample used in the development of the new Form M. The large bold letters in each cell represent the MBTI types (E=Extraversion, I=Introversion, S=Sensing, N=Intuition, T=Thinking, F=Feeling, J=Judging, P=Perceiving). The lower case underlined letters represent the primary, secondary, tertiary, and least preferred communication styles (s=Sensing, n=Intuition, t=Thinking, f=Feeling).

Table 1
Distribution of Types and Communication Style Preferences
in a National Representative Sample

ISTJ <u>tsfn</u>		ISFJ <u>fstn</u>		INFJ <u>fnts</u>		INTJ <u>tnfs</u>	
male	female	male	female	male	female	male	female
16.4%	6.9%	8.1%	19.4%	1.3%	1.6%	3.3%	0.8%
ISTP <u>stnf</u>		ISFP <u>sfnt</u>		INFP <u>nfst</u>		INTP <u>ntsf</u>	
male	female	male	female	male	female	male	female
8.5%	2.4%	7.6%	9.9%	4.1%	4.6%	4.8%	1.8%
ESTP <u>stfn</u>		ESFP <u>sftn</u>		ENFP <u>nfts</u>		ENTP <u>ntfs</u>	
male	female	male	female	male	female	male	female
5.6%	3.0%	6.9%	10.1%	6.4%	9.7%	4.0%	2.4%
ESTJ <u>tsnf</u>		ESFJ <u>fsnt</u>		ENFJ <u>fnst</u>		ENTJ <u>tnsf</u>	
male	female	male	female	male	female	male	female
11.2%	6.3%	7.5%	16.9%	1.6%	3.3%	2.7%	0.9%
males, n=1,478,				females, n=1,531			

Figure 1
Summary of the MBTI Dichotomies

	Males:	Females:	Total Population:
Extraversion	45.9%	52.5%	49.2%
Introversion	54.1%	47.5%	50.8%
Sensing	71.7%	74.9%	73.3%
Intuition	28.3%	25.1%	26.7%
Thinking	56.5%	24.5%	40.5%
Feeling	43.5%	75.5%	59.5%
Judging	52.0%	56.2%	54.1%
Perceiving	48.0%	43.8%	45.9%

Figure 2
Summary of Primary Communication Styles

	Males:	Females:	Total Population:
Sensing	28.6%	25.3%	27.0%
Intuition	19.4%	18.5%	19.0%
Thinking	33.6%	15.0%	24.3%
Feeling	18.5%	41.2%	29.9%

The percentages shown in Table 1 and in Figures 1 and 2 are not exact. There is a margin of error around each of these percentages. The percentages, however, are close to what would be found in repeated samples of the whole population. When ranked from the most frequent to the least frequent, preferences for the four communication styles are: 1st) Feeling, 29.9%; 2nd) Sensing, 27.0 %; 3rd) Thinking, 24.3%; and, 4th) Intuition, 19.0%.

Using All Four Communication Styles in Preaching

Effective preachers use all four of the communication styles. This is not as difficult as it may appear. The best preachers have always had the flexibility needed to use a variety of sermon forms—they just have not had this Jungian language to explain what they were doing. One preacher asked, "How can I

be expected to preach in these other styles since my preference is for Thinking?" The answer is that all normal, healthy, mature adults use all four of the communication styles when the situation requires them to do so. Some preachers are less effective than they could be because they refuse to do this kind of style shifting. Good preachers have always known that different people prefer different kinds of sermons.

Preaching in the Languages of Sensing and Intuition

People who prefer Sensing as their primary communication style want sermons that have practical applications—specific things that they can do today. They like concrete language, vivid images. Since they are sequential learners, they prefer sermons with introductions that clearly preview the main points of the message and plenty of "signpost" language (internal review, transition, and internal preview). They are turned off by sermons that skip around and that are hard to follow. They are also turned off by sermons that are too abstract, too theoretical—sermons, for example, on "The Meaning of Human Existence and Our Place in the Universe." They like conclusions that clearly review the main points of the sermon.

People who prefer Intuition like sermons that give them insight and new ways of looking at things. They want preachers to articulate a vision for the congregation. They like to dream about possibilities for the future. They need to get oriented by seeing the big picture—the forest, not just the trees. They are turned off by too much detail. They do not need the same kind of sequential structure that Sensing types do, but it does not bother them if the "signpost" language is not too obvious.

The challenge for preachers is to communicate effectively with both groups of people. Preachers who use only the language of Sensing turn off those who prefer Intuition. Those who use Intuition as their only language, fail to communicate effectively with those who prefer Sensing. Preachers need to move up and down the ladder of abstraction. They should begin with a clear, specific, and concrete statement of a problem. They should then move up the ladder of abstraction to show the big picture—the categories to which this problem belongs. After that, they should move down the ladder of abstraction to show the specific parts of the problem and the practical things that can be done to solve the problem. Since over 70 percent of people prefer Sensing, that communication style should be used more than Intuition, but preachers need to use both in order to reach the whole church. Many preachers have a preference for Intuition, but if they use that communication style too much, they will attract people with that preference and those with a Sensing preference will leave.

Preaching in the Languages of Thinking and Feeling

People who prefer Thinking as their primary communication style like sermons that teach them something. One of their favorite complements to the preacher is "You really made me think today." They like objective logical reasoning. They expect sermons to be critical and analytical. If they tell a preacher, "You really stepped on my toes today," they regard that as high praise. They are turned off by sermons that are "all style and no substance." They want solid biblical content in the preaching. When called on to make a decision, they prefer to step out of the situation and make a judgment that is as impersonal as possible. They like sermons that call on them to make such objective decisions.

What Jung called "Feeling" is not emotionality. For Jung, both Thinking and Feeling are rational functions. The difference is that Thinking is objective and impersonal, while Feeling is subjective and based on people-centered values. Those who prefer Feeling, like sermons that are motivational and inspirational. They like sermons that leave them feeling encouraged and lifted up with hope. They want to hear sermons that help to arouse their sense of gratitude and love toward God. They are turned off by sermons that sound like the first affirmative address in a debate—and especially by those that sound like the last negative rebuttal.

The challenge for preachers is to communicate effectively with the Thinkers and the Feelers at the same time, while also communicating effectively with those who prefer Sensing and Intuition. The universe of discourse can be thought of as four circles that overlap. Most language cannot be identified specifically as Sensing, Intuition, Thinking, or Feeling. But if preachers stay in that area of overlap, their preaching will sound like the bland leading the bland. Language becomes most vivid and powerful when it moves into an area that can be identified specifically as Sensing, Intuition, Thinking, or Feeling. Preachers need to move back and forth among these four styles enough to reach the entire audience, not limit their preaching to one style, and avoid going so far in one direction that they turn off those in the audience who have the opposite preference.

Some biblical texts and some subjects call for a development in one communication style. A sermon on "The Nature of Sin," for example, might need to be preached primarily in the language of Intuition. But to be effective, such a sermon should begin with reasons for some in the congregation to shift to a less preferred communication style: a practical reason for those who prefer Sensing, a logical reason for the Thinkers, and a people-oriented value as the reason for the Feelers. Preachers should start in other styles and persuade listeners to shift into the style needed for that sermon.

Other Implications of the MBTI

The two middle letters of the four-letter MBTI type indicate the primary and secondary communication styles. The letters that are *not* used in the second and third positions indicate the tertiary and least preferred communication styles. But the full pattern of communication style preferences cannot be determined without using the first and the last letters. The last letter, J or P, indicates whether a person prefers to deal with the external world through a Judging function (Thinking or Feeling) or through a Perceiving function (Sensing or Intuition). The first letter, E or I, tells whether the extraverted function is the dominant or the auxiliary in regard to type dynamics. Extraverts prefer to use their dominant function for dealing with the external world. Introverts prefer to use their dominant function for dealing with the inner world.

When addressing Extraverts, preachers need to use a lot of energy, plenty of volume, animated gestures and facial expression. These nonverbal cues may communicate more than the words the preachers speak. Long pauses are a major source of distraction to Extraverts. They may see long pauses as a sign of dishonesty—that the preachers are using the long pauses to cover the truth about what they really think and feel. To communicate effectively with Extraverts, preachers should be transparent and communicate openly. They should talk about the external world of people and things. Extraverts are not always good listeners. They do their mental processing by talking things out. The structure of the sermon as monologue can be a problem for Extraverts. Sermons, however, can be preached in a spirit of dialogue. Some preachers very effectively use imagined conversations as a part of their sermons. They ask the questions they think the audience would want to ask and then they answer them. That approach is not a distraction for Introverts and it can be an aid for Extraverts.

Introverts are usually good listeners. They "go inside" to do their mental processing. But they are not likely to respond as quickly as Extraverts. Preachers tend to establish eye contact with people who show by their body language that they are listening. They may, therefore, tend to avoid eye contact with Introverts since they are not as expressive and may seem to be uninterested. But preachers should not assume that Introverts are uninterested. They may just be taking time to process the information. When addressing Introverts, preachers need to allow time to build a relationship of trust. An appropriate level of self-disclosure helps.

When addressing people who prefer a Judging orientation, preachers should remember that these people prefer a very clear organization. They should preview the message and then stick to the outline.

If the sermon is going to be longer than usual, they should tell the audience in advance. They should present a timetable and follow it. Judging types are distracted by preachers who change subjects without advance warning. They are turned off by preachers who raise questions that they do not answer. They want closure. By the end of the sermon, they want to know exactly where the preacher stands.

People who prefer a Perceiving orientation resist closure. They prefer sermons that show them the arguments for and against various positions and that encourage the listeners to decide for themselves. It is difficult to communicate effectively with Judging and Perceiving types at the same time, but that is the challenge preachers face. The best approach is for preachers to remember that they have both Judging and Perceiving types in the congregation and therefore strive for balance.

Preaching is just one area of church life where the MBTI can be useful. When I do diagnostic church growth studies, I almost always give the MBTI to all of the leaders and to a representative sample of the members. Each congregation has its own unique personality and this is an effective way of learning about the corporate personality of the congregation. In addition to implications for preaching, an understanding of a congregation's personality has many important implications. Leadership styles, teaching/learning styles, worship styles, and different methods of outreach—all of these are areas where it helps to understand the personality of the congregation. Conflict within congregations is usually a personality difference more than a theological difference. Understanding the personalities involved can be an important contribution to conflict management.

Conclusion

Preachers should understand and use the communication styles preferred by the people in their congregations. That requires a balance in using the languages of Sensing, Intuition, Thinking, and Feeling. When preachers do most of their preaching in the communication style that they prefer, they tend to attract members who are similar to the preacher in type—but lose members who are different.⁶ Research that I did 20 years ago found that adult members who affiliate with a congregation during the tenure of a preacher, either by transfer of membership or by conversion, tend to be similar to the preacher in communication style preferences. Preachers who prefer Thinking tend to attract an over-representation

⁶ Flavil R. Yeakley, Jr., "Communication Style Preferences and Adjustments as an Approach to Studying Effects of Similarity in Psychological Type," *Journal of Psychological Type* (1982), 5, 19-28. See also: _____, "Implications of Communication Style Research for Psychological Type Theory," *Journal of Psychological Type*, (1982), 6, 2-13.

of members who also prefer Thinking, but they tend to have an under-representation of new members who prefer Feeling. Churches thus tend to become more and more inbred. When I first discovered this, I was very critical of preachers who built their congregations around their own personalities. Later, as I started doing church growth studies, I found that the congregation was already like that before they hired that preacher. Thinker type churches hire Thinker type preachers who attract Thinker type members. The result is a congregation that has one important gift, but not the others.

In some congregations, the eldership functions as a self-perpetuating body. When new elders are selected, it is the present elders who select them. Some allow the members to "nominate" new elders, but the present elders decide which "nominations" to accept. Most congregations allow members to raise "scriptural objections," but it is the present elders who decide whether to sustain those objections. Whenever the present elders play a major role in the selection of new elders, there is a tendency for the present elders to select new elders who are similar in psychological type to the present elders. In many congregations, the eldership is far more inbred than the congregation.

Congregations that become inbred have a limited growth potential. Furthermore, they fall short of the New Testament goal of being a whole body. A body has many different parts that perform many different functions in many different ways. A congregation needs a diversity of gifts.⁷ Psychological inbreeding is bad, whether it is caused by preachers who use only one communication style, by elders who function as a self-perpetuating body, or both.

Preachers and other church leaders who want to learn more about applications of the MBTI in congregational life should start by learning their own type. They should find a qualified professional to administer and interpret the MBTI. They should then start studying the literature on psychological type.⁸ The next step would be to have a qualified professional conduct a study of the congregation. All of the leaders should be included along with the spouse of each leader. Then a representative sample of the members (preferably at least 50) should also be given the MBTI. The type distribution in the congregation should be compared with the national norms listed in Table 1. This will show the degree to

⁷ Ephesians 4:15-16; Romans 12:4-8; 1 Corinthians 12:4-30; 1 Peter 4:10-11; 1 Corinthians 7:7.

⁸ A good place to start is a booklet by Isabel Briggs Myers, revised by Linda K. Kirby and Katharine D. Myers, *Introduction to Type, Sixth Edition* (Palo Alto, California: Consulting Psychologists Press, 1998). A good second step is a booklet by Katharine D. Myers and Linda K. Kirby, *Introduction to Type Dynamics and Development: Exploring the Next Level of Type* (Palo Alto, California: Consulting Psychologists Press, 1998). With this background, one should be ready for Isabel Briggs Myers with Peter B. Myers, *Gifts Differing* (Palo Alto, California, 1995).

which the congregation is likely to appeal to only a limited group of people. The leadership group should be compared with the membership. This will show any potential for leader-member communication problems. The type literature includes several useful sources that can be applied to the study of congregational development.⁹

Some people have trouble accepting diversity. The study of Jung's typology helps people *celebrate* diversity. Preaching is just one area where it is important to seek the constructive use of these personality differences. But preaching is a good place to start.

⁹ Gary L. Harbaugh, *God's Gifted People* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1990)—written by a Lutheran pastor, seminary professor, and type expert. W. Harold Grant, Magdala Thompson, and Thomas E. Clarke, *From Image to Likeness: A Jungian Path in the Gospel Journey* (New York: Paulist Press, 1983)—written from a Roman Catholic perspective by one of the early MBTI researchers. Christopher Bryant, *Jung and the Christian Way* (Minneapolis: The Seabury Press, 1983)—written from an Anglican perspective [includes a section on "Prayer and Different Types of People"]. Gordon Lawrence, *People Types and Tiger Stripes* (Gainesville, Florida: Center for the Application of Psychological Type