

MINISTERIAL QUESTIONNAIRE: RESPONSE BY STEVE HILL

Phone Interview with
Steve Hill
by Barry Simon
Thursday February 12, 1998
10:00 AM

Steve: This is Steve.

Barry: Hi Steve. This is Barry Simon in Huntsville.

Steve: Hey Brother.

Barry: Hey. I'm just calling you back to see if we can knock this thing out for you.

Steve: Let's go for it. Are you going to tape it?

Barry: Yeah, I've got it taped right now if that's OK.

Steve: That's all right.

Barry: All right. Well, basically I think the best format that will save you time is for me to just ask the questions that are...do you have the sheet in front of you?

Steve: I do, but go ahead and ask the questions and then you can add anything if you want to clarify it anymore.

Barry: OK. All right. I appreciate your time. Let me just say to start with I appreciate your time and willingness to do this and we are just honored and I'm humbled by the fact that you would even call me back.

Steve: Well brother, it's a blessing. We're in this battle together. And I'm here to serve you in anyway I can.

Barry: I appreciate that. All right. Well, the first question I want to ask is what caused you to try using visual aids in your preaching?

Steve: Well, I've been using visual aids in my preaching for the last twenty-two years since really my conversion and probably around 25 percent of my messages will have some type of visual aid and really the reason that I began to use

visual aids has to do with retention. People just don't remember everything you speak and there's got to be something to be gleaned from the Word of God when Jesus said I am the Shepherd, you are the sheep; when He talked about the seed

falling to the ground, falling on hard soil, rocky soil, and this just is a way to help us visualize the teaching and so that is a...that is what caused me to start using it but it really wasn't a super spiritual revelation from God. It just makes a whole lot of sense to illustrate a sermon.

Barry: Was there a particular preacher that you had seen using that or is that just part of your conversion?

Steve: No sir. I've never really been around a whole lot of preachers that used visual aids.

Barry: OK. All right. What responses have you received as a result of using the visuals?

Steve: Well, I've... tremendous response. We've... several of the messages here at the Brownsville revival, one entitled "White Cane Religion," where I use a...a pair of sunglasses and a white cane and I talk about the...can the blind lead the blind or they'll fall into a ditch. The response has been tremendous and that's...thousands and thousands have of course, they were here to hear it but also I remember being in Atlanta at the airport and a Methodist man walked up to me and he said "You are Steve Hill aren't you?" and I said "Yes sir." He goes "I've never been to your revival" (this was only a few months ago). He said, "I've never been to your revival," but he said "It's changed my life." And I said "What are speaking of?" He said "There was a message you preached entitled 'White Cane Religion,'" and he said "It has changed my life forever." And so that...there was a visual aid there "When the Gavel Falls" when I used a gavel, a large gavel; "Sands of Mercy" when I used a large hourglass. And so there are...the response, I guess it is because it attracts the attention and captivates the hearts and the altar calls, whether I use the visual aids or not, the altar calls have always been solid, have always been full. But I really feel that the visual aids have...have prodded people to come forward.

Barry: OK. So you would say...you had mentioned you basically have a big altar call regardless whether you use it or not. But is there any specific difference in the response of the congregation at the end after a visual sermon?

Steve: I think the only difference is the remembrance. You know people right now will call us up, write us, and ask us

for that message where "he used the big wooden hammer," you know, or the message where "he had the black glasses on" and so that...I preached a message entitled "Summer Camp" one time and it had to do with three different camps we go to...Camp Critical was one of them, Camp Conversion...and I forget the other one but it...hold on just a second...Camp Critical, and then the second one was Camp Conviction, and the third one was Camp Conversion. And I held up T-shirts, and you know like you get a camp T-shirt...one said "Camp Critical," which talks about the place people go when they're always just cutting down everybody else and I talked about the counselors in this camp. And then Camp Conviction is where you hear the gospel but...and you get convicted, but you never get changed. And then Camp Conversion is the camp that everyone needs to go to and that's where people's whole lives are changed. And so we used T-shirts and you know it's people to this day, they want the message about summer camp where "he used those T-shirts." So it... probably the remembrance part is the greatest aspect of it.

Barry: OK. All right. You want to move on to number four here? Have you received any negative criticism from other ministers or other people in the congregation?

Steve: No. I really haven't and I believe the reason for that...now we've had 2.2 million people come through here and I am basically going to be speaking from the last two and a half years of revival, but I think the reason I have not received any negative is because my visual aids are not...are not lengthy; they are not overpowering; they are not the meat of the message; they are just sort of an add-on and I really warn pastors and evangelists about having a sermon that is so visual that the unction is gone and people are looking at the theatrics. And so, I really haven't received any negative at all. That's not to say it's not out there. It's just I think that's the reason why--is because the visuals haven't been the bulk of the message, it's just been part of it.

Barry: OK. And you kind of went into number five there. What pitfalls would you say... if it overshadows the whole message than you've kind of missed the point of using it?

Steve: Well, yeah, the...the visual aid needs to flow with the message. It doesn't need to be set apart. You need to be able to go into it and back out of it without ever missing a step and it's not like "OK everybody I want to stop right here, flip the lights out and let's do this." It needs to be all part of the message and if not, it's a theatrical production and also you're having to deal with something if you're a pastor and evangelist. You're having to deal with something that you've got to perform everytime. And the

folks will come up and say "Wow, last week's message, pastor, sure was great" you know, "What are you going to do this week?" You know. It's like "Well I don't have anything this week but a message. Three points." And so you gotta be so careful....

Barry: Sure. Yeah. Well, have you felt that pressure between...between a week where you used one that was, you know, really rememberable and then the next week where you didn't feel like you had the same...maybe the same draw of the memory?

Steve: Well, I...I've not had to deal with that and part of the reason here is because people come so hungry and they come for the Word of God and I can go three and four weeks without using any visual aids at all here. And...just a couple weeks ago I preached on "No time to wash up" which is a message on the Second coming and...and the fact that He's gonna come suddenly and in that particular message, at the very end of it, the lights...we hit the lights, the shofar sounded, the trumpet sounded, and then my wife was dressed in a complete, spotless gown and she came in with the song "Trumpet Voluntary" playing in the background and it was majestic, I mean people just went berserk...it went on and on and on--the procession; she came up to me and when she got to me, we embraced; I grabbed her hand and we ran away together and the place went ecstatic and that was...that was several weeks ago and I haven't used, I don't believe I've used an illustration since then. But it's like that was a Thursday night service or a Wednesday night service and then the other night services went fine. I mean it's like I'm not in competition with myself or the people and you know there's another thing that...that, Barry, pastors and evangelists need to realize--we're not out to tickle ears or please people; we're out there to get the Word of God into the hearts and minds of those that are listening and once it's over we know what we're supposed to do. Here at the Brownsville revival, on any given night some of the greatest theologians in the world are sitting out there...You know I'll have tonight at the Brownsville revival there will be 200 pastors, there'll be teachers from all over the nation, some of the finest teachers have been here in the last couple of weeks; we had eighty people from the Theological Seminary from Springfield, come down and were with us for a week. I'm not here to impress anybody. I'm here to preach the pure Word of God and...like it or lump it.

Barry: Yeah. That's good. That's good. I think you've hit a lot of number six here...the benefits that you feel have been gained. Is there anything else that you, you know, can add to that?

Steve: Well, the...I remember a message I preached probably fifteen years ago, it was at a camp. I preached it and it was a boys' camp or like a royal rangers' camp and it was on a hillside and my message was entitled "Hell-bound train." And I was talking to these kids in a very simplistic way about hell and I had dug a trench on the other side of the hill, it was just a little slope behind where I preached and I dug a trench on the other side of it and filled the trench with gasoline. It was like two inches deep in gasoline and the trench was like eight feet long. And then I had people behind it...I lit that thing and the flames just shot way up in the air and I had people behind it screaming and they'd throw their heads in the air, of course it was midnight you know, it was one of those things that these little ranger kids, I mean they'll never...and I gave an altar call. I think everyone of them, there was about fifty, seventy-five; everyone of them came forward and of course half of them were probably already saved but they were scared half to death and they wanted to make sure. So the benefits, I think there are tremendous benefits in it. You know, if you ask one of those rangers if you've ever heard a message on hell, they'll go "Ohhh, man." The benefits...there have been tremendous benefits. But I don't want to be known, I don't want to be known as an illustrated preacher. I want to be known as a preacher of the gospel. And so if a man leans on illustrations all of the time, I think it's dangerous.

Barry: Sure. And again, I don't think that anyone is characterizing you that way and I certainly wouldn't either...

Steve: I understand that.

Barry: But you know this is one aspect that I'm trying to look into to see if it's worthwhile...

Steve: It's a very valid part of our ministry and it needs to be used.

Barry: Yeah. When preparing a message, do you think about the attention of the congregation or their memory ability or anything like that?

Steve: Well, I...I am aware of the fact that every night in my particular situation we'll have thousands of visitors; we'll have everyone from millionaires--we've had top executives of major corporations in our congregation; we've had two billionaires; we've had congressmen, senators, government leaders; and then we'll have dirt, poor, drug addicts. So we'll have smart people; intelligent, brilliant people; we have folks who dropped out of high school, you know, when they were thirteen. And so we have such a vast

array of people that when I prepare my messages I do keep that in mind at all times. My messages are very clear. And if...to me if a seven-year-old child, or an eight-year-old child, can not understand my message, then I have failed as an evangelist. And so...of course if an eight-year-old can understand it, then an eighty-year-old can understand it. And so that's something I take into consideration. And another thing...this is sort of off the path...but I am very careful at the wording in my messages. When I...I've got dictionaries and thesauruses and you name it just like anybody else, and I can change words to make my sermons a little bit more lofty; but if a person out there, if anyone is gonna have to wonder what that word meant, I've missed God. I'm just...and there are some pastors that would cringe at what I'm saying cause they love to weave these things in there, but what good is that if 30 percent of your congregation knew what esoteric, or whatever, meant and the other 70 percent are going "what does that mean?". So what have you accomplished?

Barry: I agree.

Steve: All you've accomplished is you've confused 70 percent; 30 percent think you're a hotshot. Why not use a word like "hidden" instead of esoteric. Why not use a word that is just...the simplistic English language. That is what I choose to do everyday and I'll be working along a message and I'll come across a word and I'll use that word but I'll define it right afterwards so no one out there feels like an idiot.

Barry: Sure. I think that's great and I've heard a couple of your messages, like the gavel one, and I think you're right on with what you're saying. You're doing what you're saying.

Steve: Well, it's gotta be that way.

Barry: Yeah. I really appreciate that. Do you consciously attempt to develop like "memory hooks" in your sermons, like maybe using pneumatic, you know, ABC, or...?

Steve: Well, I've done that...acrostics...I've used those. But I try to in every message...I believe a good teacher and a good preacher needs to tell them what they're gonna tell them, then they tell them, then they tell them what they told them. OK. Those are..."Class, today we're gonna discuss Christopher Columbus." Then you discuss Christopher Columbus, and then you have a review. And so in every message I try my very best to cover the subject several times. And so that's basically because people are to use a very simplistic term--are dense--and you know they come into

a service carrying all kinds of baggage; they've been out on the go all day, and they come in and you want their attention for forty-five minutes. Well you'll be lucky to get it for ten. And so you've gotta be aware of that so you gotta make the best of the situation. That's why weaving visual aids and telling them what you're gonna tell them, and then telling them, then telling them what you told them is so important. That's why my altar calls, when I give an altar call, are so lengthy cause I want to make sure everyone understands wholly that if they're backslidden, they need to run to Jesus; if they're not in love with Jesus, there is something wrong with their spiritual life. You know, we just hammer it over that you can go to hell with baptismal waters on your face. You can go to hell with a communion cup in your hand and a wafer in your mouth. And you know we make it so clear and I'll touch on the religion two or three times in the evening service cause we're dealing in a nation...I don't know, Barry, if you know these statistics, but I'm looking right now at a Birmingham newspaper. The headline, the front of the paper, is called "God's Last Call." This is the Birmingham News. "God's Last Call". This was just a few months ago and it says 75 percent of southerners, 74 percent, excuse me, of southerners believe that Jesus Christ is going to return. And 84 percent believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. Eighty percent believe that we're gonna stand before God on judgment day and be held accountable for our sins. Well, if all these people believe that, why on earth is this nation in the condition that it's in? Because nobody's living it. So, I said all that to say that's...I keep hammering it over and over...the problem is the simplicity of the gospel. The problem is not deep teaching; I mean we've got all the teaching, we've got it coming out our ears. But people haven't gotten the fundamentals like get the sin out.

Barry: Sure. I think you've answered this earlier too, but how often do you incorporate visual elements in your sermons?

Steve: Twenty-five percent. About a fourth of the sermons will have a visual aid. Tonight I'm preaching a message entitled "The Day of His Coming." And I'll be holding up when it comes to...the point of the message is "the day of His coming will be confusing, the day of His coming will be chaotic" and I'm gonna talk about the chaos that's gonna take place in America and I'm gonna be holding up some of the things that are going on...wars and rumors of wars--I'll be holding up magazine covers. The day of His coming is close--I'll be holding up pictures of famines in the land...the magazine covers talking about the technology of today and that's just to help people understand...for example, yesterday, last night, somebody gave me a sheet of

paper--a government employee gave me a sheet of paper--that shows a picture of Einstein pointing at a blackboard, and it says "What you must do" and from now on, starting this year, all government employees, all veterans, everyone who receives a check from the government, will never receive the paper anymore. It goes automatically into an account; you have no choice. And so, brother, we are right at the verge of the mark of the beast. I'm telling you by the end of this year a government employee will never go to the bank. They'll never have to go the bank because it's all automated and they have no choice. This is not "I'll opt for this or I'll opt not for that." This is "If you want money, you're gonna have to have a number." And so, brother, it's serious. So I'll be holding that up tonight. So those are all visual aids.

Barry: Yeah. Number ten here, the reason I'm putting this in is because I go to Oral Roberts University--we also have to show the Holy Spirit's involvement in the process and I'm glad that ORU does that. I was just wondering...I'm asking you and several other Assembly of God pastors, a Methodist pastor, and then another pastor who's Baptist, and I know they're all gonna probably have a little bit different view on this, but I'd be interested to hear how you feel the Holy Spirit prepares you for that visual message, if you think He's involved in that and how He's involved in that.

Steve: Oh absolutely. The Holy Spirit from the beginning to the end of every message that I preach and prepare is 100% in control. And I'll even...I'll take a message with a visual aid to the church and before I preach the message I'll say "Holy Spirit, if you want me to preach this, I'll preach it; if you want me to use this visual aid, I will." And I've got staff members that will tell you that we've gotten the visual aid...we've got it to the church, got it all ready, and I never used it cause the Holy Spirit wasn't in it. And so the Holy Spirit doesn't play a role--He is the message. He is the message as far as my messages are concerned; I'll get up there and every night if I don't feel a quickening from the Spirit of God, then I won't preach with all my heart. Even if I feel He gave it to me that morning, I know God is sovereign over this revival and over every place, not just the revival--every service, every church service every pastor preaches--if he doesn't take that solemn look at the service and crawl in there on his belly and say "Jesus, you know these people, I don't. You know what's gonna happen tonight, I don't. You know what they need to hear, I don't. Get me out of the way. Flow through me. I don't want to be a vessel that you pour clear water through and by the time it comes out my mouth, it's tainted. I don't want it to be yellow when it came in pure." And so that's...this subject scares me to death, Barry, this

subject of sermon preparation and deliverance... because anyone who stands behind that sacred pulpit is handling the eternal Word of God and you'd better be careful. So the Holy Spirit is everything in these visuals.

Barry: Sure. I guess a follow-up question of that is have you ever, at the point of either displaying the visual object or having a visual demonstration, have you ever felt like the anointing kind of fell at that point in the message?

Steve: Yes, I've had several occasions where that's happened and it's not that that's the only place that the anointing fell in the service but you feel just a thrust of the Holy Spirit. It's almost like the arrow was in flight and it was heading towards the people's hearts and then when the visual aid came out, it pierced it. And so absolutely, I've sensed it. And a lot of times I'll use a visual aid at the beginning, other times half way through, sometimes all the way through, it'll just be lying on the pulpit, and then there's other times it'll be the climax.

Barry: So really the climax times would be the times when it would be most noticeable to you or it's happened at different times?

Steve: As far as the most visible, yes. And that's not to say that that meant, because you know God sees the inward part, man sees the outward, that's not to say that that wasn't... another message with a visual aid wasn't more effective at the beginning and the Holy Spirit didn't fall. It's a very personal thing. Amen.

Barry: Sure. All right. I know this is gonna be tough for you cause you've got years of doing this, but do you have one visual message that you think was the most effective or the one that you would say is...is the one that's your favorite?

Steve: Well, probably the one that is most remembered and the most...the most requested is "White Cane Religion." And that is with the sunglasses and the cane because I tap the cane all over the platform. And I talk about how in times past...the message is for Christians and for sinners. It's...everyone's following somebody and make sure the one you're following knows where they're going was the second point and the last point is there's a ditch. It's a hole called hell. And so everybody's following somebody. If you're a sinner, make sure the one you're following knows where they're going and...I talk a lot about revivals. Some of the greatest revivals of church history were blasted by some of the greatest leaders in church history during that

time. You know G. Campbell Morgan was a great Bible expositor. He said that William Seymour and the Azusa Street Revival was the last vomit of hell. And he missed God. He's a great teacher, but he missed God totally. And so make sure the one you're following knows where they're going; so...and the whole time I'm preaching that, the glasses will be on and I'll be tapping it. Is that to say G. Campbell Morgan went to hell? No. I'm telling you when it came to that revival, he was blinded. The devil had him blinded. So that's probably the message that comes to mind.

Barry: Is that one available on video? I know we have the "Gavel".

Steve: Yeah. "White Cane Religion". You can call my office and they'll send it to you.

Barry: OK. All right. I may use some parts of that as well, since that's your favorite and you think is the most effective.

Steve: Let me...just a second.

Barry: OK.

(a brief time of several seconds passes)

Steve: Yes, it is available. It's on video. And also there's one entitled "Quenching and Grieving the Holy Spirit" where all the lights are out and I walk around the congregation with a candle and that one skipped my mind but that one probably has had just as much effect. OK.

Barry: OK. All right. I know a little bit about your background here in Huntsville and, you know, the years preceding Jim Summers and all that, but is there anything you could just summarize in a few sentences as to how you are where you are, ...?

Steve: Well in just a synopsis...My wife and I were both drug addicts and she was saved up in Michigan, went through Teen Challenge. I was saved in Alabama, went through Jim Summers' program, then went through Teen Challenge. We both met at David Wilkerson's Twin Oaks Academy in Texas; graduated from there; worked at Outreach Ministries in Alabama for a couple years; then went to Florida, worked for three years in churches as youth pastors and evangelists; took a group to Mexico; in Mexico, God called me to missions; came back and resigned the church; moved to Argentina after learning the Spanish language in Costa Rica for a year; stayed in the Argentine revival from 1984 to 1992, about seven years; from there, started evangelizing in

Columbia, Paraguay, Uruguay, Columbia, Spain, Russia--church planting in different areas of the world; and then, in 1995, I was between...I was on my way back to Russia when I gave John Kilpatrick a call to remind that he had pledged \$5,000 to our church planting effort and...and to ask where it was, but we never got to talking about money; all we started to talk about was revival, and that's when he asked me if I would come preach before I went back to Russia. And the only date that was open was Father's Day and that was the only date open on my calendar, the only one on his. And so I came down and the rest is history. I've been preaching here...we've had 2.2 million people come through the church...been having services from Tuesday to Sunday for the last two and a half years; and it's more intense now than it's ever been. The crowds are phenomenal. People just keep coming from all over the world...this week we've had them come from 112 nations of the world; they're here from Korea, Japan, Malaysia, Laos, Africa, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and all over the United States and they come the rich and the poor, the saved and the unsaved; last night a woman testified from Canada. She's here with her daughter, brought her daughter down to Pensacola, didn't know anything about...as a matter of fact, she had heard from somebody that God was moving in Pensacola. So she came down to Pensacola and asked...checked into a hotel and asked the person at the hotel "Is there anything religious going on in this city?" This woman didn't know anything about the revival. And the man said "Yeah, there's a great revival going on in Brownsville. [She] Came over, the daughter got saved, and baptized last Friday night, and so it's non-stop, Barry. The power of God just continues to come down. There's a tremendous anointing and people are taking it back to their churches.

Barry: Wow. Well, I'm hoping to...most of my free time that I have off from work I've been going to school. And I'm hoping to get down there this semester sometime.

Steve: Well, come on...When you do come down, just give us a call here at the office and I'll make sure you don't have to wait in line, OK?

Barry: I appreciate that.

Steve: OK.

Barry: You've been very helpful. Again I'm very thankful for you doing this.

Steve: You're very welcome, brother. Anytime.

Barry: And you are an inspiration to all of us up here.

Steve: Well, thank you so much, brother. We love you guys.

Barry: Yeah. The one last question. Would you like a copy of the final project?

Steve: I would love a copy of the final project.

Barry: OK. All right. Some of it may not be fun to read but parts of it will be.

Steve: It doesn't matter.

Barry: OK.

Steve: Bless you.

Barry: All right. Have a good afternoon.

Steve: You too.

Barry: OK. Bye Bye.