

**“SALVATION FROM UNHAPPINESS BY  
DOING ONE’S BEST”**

**A rhetorical analysis on Joel Osteen’s sermons in the light of  
the US culture and values**

Master’s thesis

Eeva Iivari

University of Jyväskylä  
Department of Languages  
English  
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## JYVÄSKYLÄN YLIOPISTO

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Tiivistelmä – Abstract <p>Tämä laadullinen tutkimus keskittyy Joel Osteenin saarnoihin. Hän johtaa maan suurinta seurakuntaa, Lakewood-kirkkoa Texasin Houstonissa, USA:ssa. Tutkielma pyrkii vastaamaan kahteen tutkimuskysymykseen:</p> <p>1) Mitkä ovat Osteenin eniten käyttämät retoriset keinot, ja kuinka ne näkyvät hänen saarnoissaan?</p> <p>2) Miten Osteen käyttää hyväkseen kristillisiä oppeja ja Raamatun auktoriteettia vedotakseen kuulijoidensa kulttuurillisiin arvoihin?</p> <p>Aineiston prominentit retoriset keinot ovat toisto, kielikuvat, pronominiinien käyttö sekä pronominiinien suhde neuvojen ja käskyjen antamiseen. Tarkasteltavat kolme kulttuurista pääarvoa ovat individualismi, itsehoito sekä materialismi. Näiden yhteydessä tarkasteltavat teologiset opit ovat individualismi, niin sanottu ’positiivinen tunnustus’ ja menestysteologia. Tämä retorinen analyysi ammentaa Elaboration Likelihood Model -teoriasta (ELM). Aineisto koostuu kahdeksasta saarnasta, jotka Osteen on pitänyt sunnuntain jumalanpalveluksen yhteydessä vuosina 2010 ja 2011. Saarnat on litteroitu, minkä jälkeen niistä on poimittu retorisia keinoja sekä kulttuurisia vaikuttimia retorista analyysia varten. Tutkimuksessa selvisi, että Osteen keskittyy enimmäkseen yksinkertaisiin retorisiin keinoihin, kuten toistoon. Monimutkaisia kielikuvia, kuten metaforia tai hyperbooleja, esiintyikin hänen saarnoissaan huomattavasti vähemmän. Pronominiinien käyttö vahvisti Osteenin verbaalista viestiä hyväksynnästä sekä suvaitsevaisuudesta, ja oli selvää, että hän vältteli pronominiinien syyttävää käyttöä ja pyrki ennemminkin luomaan yhtenäisyyden tuntua seurakuntansa keskelle. USA:n kulttuuriset arvot näkyivät selvästi ihmisen itsensä korostamisessa (individualismi), positiivisen tunnustuksen eteenpäin viemisessä (itsehoito), sekä menestysteologisessa opetuksessa (materialismi). Monella tapaa Osteenin sanoma muuttui perinteisestä kristillisestä sanomasta kulttuurin värittäväksi ja sekulaarisemmaksi.</p>	
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## 1 INTRODUCTION

In the land where life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness are seen as the rights of man given by their Creator, many Christian preachers have found a foothold. In the United States there are numerous supporters of the various Christian denominations, and naturally many pastors therein. One of these pastors preaching eternal life, liberty from sin and pursuit of happiness through faith in Jesus, is Joel Osteen.

Joel Osteen is the pastor of one of America's largest and fastest growing churches in Texas, and he delivers his message of 'hope and encouragement' to more than 38,000 attendees every week (Joel Osteen Ministries). His sermons are also broadcast, and according to Joel Osteen Ministries, they reach seven million Americans each week and can be viewed in almost 100 nations around the world. All this grandeur and the number of followers imply that Osteen's messages meet a need which many people feel (Baity 2011:31). Since so many people want to hear him preach Sunday after Sunday, it makes one wonder what special there is in what Osteen preaches and how he delivers his sermons.

The main question that this thesis tries to answer from the basis of Osteen's eight sermons from 2010 to 2011 is what the rhetorical means are that Joel Osteen uses to convey his message, and how much of his teachings and the different devices he uses are transmitted through the US cultural window. That is to say, what cultural or dogmatic discourses does he apply to persuade his audience? What is meant to be achieved by this thesis is a broader glimpse into the messages of the US' megachurch pastor, Joel Osteen, and into the ways he presents his messages. In other words, the present study strives to find out what rhetorical devices this preacher uses in order to be heard, liked, and relevant to his listeners.

Since persuading a group of people is more than just answering the question 'how does Osteen use language', this thesis will also look at persuasion through what is actually said. The present study will thus concentrate on

how Osteen uses Christian teachings (dogmas) and the Bible's authority in order to appeal to the audiences' cultural values. This aspect will answer the question *what* is been said.

Many have studied the content of sermons, from a point of view of a specific theological movement. For example the Puritans had a special way of preaching which has been analysed (Steele 2010). Also doing research of rhetorical devices in preaching is not completely unheard of. However, such studies have often concentrated on rhetorical devices after or in the midst of a certain catastrophe. For example Mark A. Gring (n.d.) has conducted a rhetorical analysis of sermons responding to 9/11, and Jouni Tilli (2012) recently published a study concerning the Lutheran hierocratic rhetoric in the sermons of Finnish pastors during the continuation war.

A few studies have also been conducted on Osteen's rhetoric. Nevertheless in many cases the focus of study has been a theological one as there are many who do not agree with Osteen's theology and feel the urge to express it (Fiorazo 2013). Regardless of this, there are others who take a more neutral stance, such as Laine Baity's (2011) study that looks at Osteen's rhetoric from the point of view of what changes there have been on privatization and how individualism has changed through time. Michael C. Sounders' (2011) work on the other hand goes deeper into the world of prosperity gospel, and the religious and secular methods used in order to give the audience a greater sense of agency in this time of uncertainty.

The present study does not aim to analyze Osteen's sermons in the midst of a crisis, nor does it have one single point of view, such as individualism or the prosperity gospel, rather it hopes to give a wider view of the mechanical rhetorical devices Osteen uses to persuade his listeners. In addition, this study hopes to shed light into the ways cultural values of the US can be incorporated in Christian teachings in order to better reach the audience.

The thesis is structured so that the second chapter, which deals with the contextual and cultural background of the study, explains the three core values of the US which are chosen for closer analysis in the study. The



chapter gives a short insight on Osteen himself, and also seeks to explore the religious side of persuasion. In the third chapter, the theory, persuasion is looked at from a more secular point of view, as well as rhetorical devices and the main theories from the field of persuasion. The fourth chapter explains the study in detail, before diving into the fifth chapter: the findings. Finally before drawing the conclusions, the sixth chapter discusses these findings of the study.

## **2 JOEL OSTEEN: PERSUASION THROUGH CULTURE AND CHRISTIANITY OF THE US**

This chapter will take a brief look into the US culture and its core values, and it will try to show how these values are reflected also in the Christian culture in the US. The knowledge of these aspects will make it easier to follow the analysis of the data, and it will also help understand the reasons behind the word choices that Osteen uses in his sermons. Also, this overview will help understand the origins of some of the Christian teachings that are prominent in Joel Osteen's sermons, and it will help comprehend why these teachings appeal to many, especially Americans.

The chapter at hand will also explain briefly the background of Joel Osteen himself, giving an overview of some of the teachings which have influenced his sermons the most. It will also give a short insight on different doctrinal emphases that Osteen refers to, or avoids, in his sermons. One of the movements that has influenced Osteen is the Word of Faith movement, which will be discussed in regard to its three major beliefs: the prosperity gospel, self-help, and positive confession. In addition, this section will also give a few examples on how these three major beliefs blend nicely with the core cultural values of the US thus making the teachings easier for Osteen's US audience to accept.

Lastly this chapter will explore religious persuasive language, as in how the preachers might affect their congregation. This chapter will also discuss the cultural means the preacher might use to persuade his audience. These cultural means are the US values and how they are especially visible through the three main teachings of prosperity gospel, self-help, and positive confession.

### **2.1 The Christian Values of the United States and Their Origins**

A brief look on the three of the most prominent US values is necessary in order to have a better understanding on how the American values have

shaped Osteen's message and, on the other hand, how Osteen uses these values to better reach his American audience. These three values are individual freedom, or individualism, self-help, or self-effort, and materialism. According to Beebe et al. (2012:315) understanding what one's audience values means that the speaker is able to adapt the content of one's speech to those values, and thus be able to reach the audience more successfully.

Values can be defined as a steady concept of an idea of what people have of right and wrong, or good and bad (Beebe et al. 2012:315). Also it is said that values are usually the motivational force behind our actions, and thus also form the basis of our life goals (ibid.). When regarding a set of values of a specific nation, it is important to realize that often there are as many values as there are people. By claiming a certain value as characteristic to the US citizens, it by no means suggests that everyone lives by this value; but rather, that this value is seen as typical, a sort of a stereotype, of the cultural values in the US. The three cultural values (materialism, self-help and individual freedom) of the United States that were selected in this chapter, were chosen because Osteen's sermons seem to use these as a means to persuade and appeal to his audience.

One of the central values for most Americans that can be pointed out is individual freedom or individualism. The appreciation of individual freedom begins to grow during the time of the Puritans, when several peoples escaped to the Colonial America to pursue their individual dreams. As the time of Enlightenment came, people also began to have more confidence in their own abilities. Theologically this led people to believe that they had the ability to exert control over their own destiny (Matthews 1995, as quoted by Toivanen 2011:8). Thus it can be argued that the roots of individualism lie in the shifts in Christian thought which occurred during the era of Enlightenment in the 18<sup>th</sup> century (Toivanen 2011:8).

Robert L. Kohls, the Executive Director of the Washington International Centre, states in his article "Values Americans Live By" (1984) that "Americans no longer believe in the power of fate", which contrasts the

previous prevailing idea in Christianity that the fate of men lies solely in the hands of God. This doctrine in its extreme is called predestination, and often its supporters are called Calvinist according to the French theologian John Calvin. Calvin did not come up with this doctrine, but he advocated for it as he experienced a sort of a revelation from the Scriptures concerning the matter. The sovereignty of God and man's inner depravity were some of the matters that drove him to advocate for predestination (Trueman 2000-2013).

Predestination comes from the Biblical understanding that all men are subject to original sin, and thus utterly morally depraved. Moral depravity means that our nature is corrupt and we are unable to do good. Having faith in a good God, then, is a good deed, and thus something we are unwilling and therefore unable to do on our own. Regarding this line of thought it can be concluded that faith always comes from God and is not a product of our own decision or will (Toivanen 2011:7). This being said, the unavoidable conclusion is that God has the ultimate word when it comes to who is saved and who is not.

Although opposing views to predestination have always existed, the era of Enlightenment encouraged believers to start believing that even fallen men, as they believe all men are, are in control of their life as well as the decision concerning their salvation (Toivanen 2011:12). This view is broadly known as Arminianism, the followers of which believe that the ability to do good comes essentially from man himself, and thus people are also morally able to choose to believe in Jesus, and thus be saved. This in turn suggests that God has not sovereignly decided the fate of each man beforehand, but that man himself holds the keys to his fate (Dabney 2001). This type of thinking also led people to see the problems of one's life being the fault of the individual instead of being just bad luck, and respectively it can be said that the achievements in one's life are also often contributed to one's own efforts (Kohls 1984).

Another value, which has its roots in individualism, is self-help or self-effort. Kohls (1984) says that in the US people often only take credit for the things they have accomplished on their own. This probably explains why in

many popular Hollywood movies the plot often includes a youngster, who is born poor, but uses his/her own talents and effort to climb the ladder of success into popularity, fame and riches, and in such a way comes to fulfil his/her dreams. Although this value is prominent in the secular world, it also has its reflection in the Christian setting, where it can be called to be belief in individual achievement or 'self-help' (Kohls 1984). Self-help is often explained in the popular American Christianity as people's own effort as the means to gain favour from God in opposition from believing that favour can be granted by grace alone. When grace and blessings became dependent on one's own works and deeds, it also gave room to another teaching, which was made popular by the Word of Faith movement, namely positive confession (see Chapter 2.2).

The third value taken into account in this study is materialism, wealth or prosperity. According to Kohls (1984), many Americans hold a "higher priority to obtaining, maintaining and protecting their material objects than they do in developing and enjoying interpersonal relationships". Beebe et al. (2012:315) also list money as being one of the core values of US citizens. Although many seem to think that Americans are very materialistic, it should be noted that Americans themselves might not see themselves as such. According to Kohls (1984), since materialism itself relates to self-effort and also to the culture's hard work ethic, Americans often see material goods as rewards of their hard work. Regardless of this, Kohls (1984) continues to state that Americans can be said to be materialistic by any standard.

Since property and wealth have such a high position among the secular people, it is only logical that the teaching often known as the 'prosperity gospel' (see Chapter 2.2) has taken wind among some Christians. Given that the US citizens often see material goods as rewards of their hard work, believers in the US also often see that owning material possessions has to mean that one is favoured by God. This is to say that the evidence of God's blessings are often interpreted in a material sense.

## **2.2 Joel Osteen: Christian Doctrine and the Word of Faith Movement**

This section will provide a brief overview and background knowledge on Joel Osteen himself. It will also discuss what Christian movements and teachings have influenced him the most when regarding the content of his sermons. Finally it will further explore the Word of Faith movement and its teachings in relation to Osteen's sermons.

Osteen is the pastor of America's largest church called Lakewood church, which has nearly 38,000 regular attendees every Sunday (Joel Osteen Ministries). In addition to his regular attendees, hundreds of millions of people tune in to listen him preach a message of 'hope and encouragement' every Sunday, as his Sunday services are broadcast all around the world (ibid.). His apparent success in ministry and preaching must mean that there is something attractive and captivating in the way he constructs his sermons that grasps his audience's attention and make people tune in just to get to listen to him preach week after week.

Although Osteen's church is said to be nondenominational, one can see influences in his sermons, for example, from a Christian movement called the Word of Faith. This movement originates within the Pentecostal circles with preachers such as E.W. Kenyon and William Branham, who then in turn have influenced preachers such as Oral Roberts, Kenneth Hagin, Kenneth Copeland and also Joel Osteen (Harrison 2005:5, as quoted by Toivanen 2011:14). John MacArthur (2013), a known American Evangelical Christian pastor, argues that E.W. Kenyon had strongly been influenced by the teachings of New Thought, which is a metaphysical cult from the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In this sense it can be argued that the Word of Faith movement borrows various elements from different movements such as Evangelicalism, neo-Pentecostalism and New Thought Metaphysics (Harrison 2005:5, as quoted by Toivanen 2011:14). It is also implied that a few of the word-faith doctrines have cultic roots that have been modified to fit into the Christian context (John MacArthur 2013).

What is interesting in Joel Osteen, though, is that unlike one would assume from a pastor, he has not studied theology. Osteen studied radio and television communications in Oral Roberts University in Tulsa, Oklahoma instead (Joel Osteen Ministries). One might deduce that maybe Osteen's studies in television communication, instead of theology, have something to do in the way his sermons have become so popular and appealing. That is to say, one might ask, if he lays more emphasis on his sermon's structure and lay-out than its doctrinal content per se.

Oral Roberts, the founder of the university Osteen attended, was one of the leading characters to 'export' the so called 'prosperity gospel'. John MacArthur (2013) defines this teaching as "the notion that God's favour is expressed mainly through physical health and material prosperity, and that these blessings are available for the claiming by anyone who has sufficient faith". One should note that this teaching encompasses two of the US core values: materialism and self-effort. Firstly, prosperity gospel advocates for wealth; this richness can be material but it can also be of physical health. Secondly, these benefits or blessings are only for those who have "sufficient faith", which in a sense means that the one who is 'blessed' by material wealth can still claim credit for his wealth for himself, since he himself did the believing in his own strength.

One can assume that Osteen has been influenced by Oral Roberts' thoughts, for example on the teaching on the prosperity gospel. Osteen's message, though, can be said to advocate a softer prosperity gospel in opposition to a so called 'hard prosperity gospel'. The hard prosperity gospel offers "miraculous and immediate health and wealth" whereas the softer version of it "challenges believers to break through to the blessed life by means of the latest pastor-prescribed technique" (Schrock 2014). In addition to the latter the soft prosperity gospel takes for granted the Gospel message and guides the listeners to concentrate on more trivial matters such as "financial planning, diet and exercise, and strategies for self-improvement" (Schrock 2014).

Another teaching, which is very popular among the Word of Faith church, is the teaching on positive confession. This teaching has also been called “name it and claim it” or “word-faith” and it concentrates on “speaking the blessing” after which the things spoken would take place. MacArthur clarifies that the “word-faith” doctrine teaches that “the words we speak determine the blessings we receive” (MacArthur 2013). This principle comes from the belief that words have creative power, which in turn comes from the belief that since God’s words have creative power (having created everything ex nihilo, out of nothing), consequently our words, as believers, would yield the same power (Spann 2009). As these doctrines are in contrast with the normative Christian doctrines (Agnew 2009), it must hint towards positive confession being more a product of culture than of the Bible. This then makes it interesting to analyse Osteen’s sermons to see what aspects of the US culture positive confession reflect within it.

Usually the Word of Faith movement instructs believers that they “can be promoted to a higher, ‘better’ life if they are only taught to alter their thinking, and expect more than mere spiritual blessings as a result from ones salvation” (Harrison 2005:7). As Harrison points out, usually this belief of positive confession goes hand in hand with the prosperity gospel, as the received blessing is often expected to come forth as material rather than spiritual prosperity (Toivanen 2011:20). Although Joel Osteen Ministries is nondenominational, one can easily find themes similar to the teachings of the Word of Faith movement in Osteen’s sermons. These similarities will be further discussed with examples in the analysis to come.

### **2.3 Preachers as Persuaders**

As a pastor in one’s home congregation, the preacher is often seen as the “shepherd” of the congregation. The task of the shepherd is not only to teach and guide, but also to discipline his ‘flock’ when needed by teaching them what is right and wrong, and thus protect them from false teachings (Willmore 2006). This means that when it comes to Christianity, the sermons of the pastors are very rarely just nice words with no agenda, but



rather the preacher wants to influence his audience in one way or the other. In other words, preachers definitely need, and want to have an impact on their audience's attitudes, beliefs, values and behaviour, whether it means reinforcing them, or changing them.

This chapter will take a closer look at religious persuasive language, and ways of affecting the congregations through sermons. It will also discuss persuasive language from a cultural point of view. In other words, what are the cultural and content means the speaker can employ in order to persuade his audience? This will be done by paying special attention to how the speaker refers to American values by using religious teachings (prosperity gospel, self-help, and positive confession).

### **2.3.1 What is Homiletics?**

'Homiletics' is a branch of theology, which is defined by the Merriam-Webster dictionary as the art of preaching, or as the art of communication (2013). Homiletics comes from the Greek word *homileo* or *homilia*, which means to converse and communicate (Rowlands n.d.). In other words homiletics is the ability to communicate the teachings of scripture in a way that is understandable to the listener. In preaching there are two aspects to consider: the divine and the human. Homiletics is the study of the human aspect of preaching (ibid.). Although one could argue that this means that Christian preachers use the same means as any other secular speaker, maybe just adjusting the message to fit their Christian audience, there are a few principles that separate the two speakers and their practices.

The Christian environment often sees that a pastor should not be motivated by greed or self-interest towards fame, money or even towards gaining followers. The motivation of the Christian preacher should be love towards the people, which can be even more persuading than the different persuasion techniques people use (Gill 2007:1). Gill points to the New Testament's 1 Corinthians 13:1, which states: "If I speak with the tongue of angels, but have not love then I am a clanging cymbal, a ringing gong", and explains

that even the Bible sees love as the primary focus (2007:1). This by no means undermines the use of persuasion, but rather places persuasiveness into the context of love. Love, in this sense, can be described as putting another's interest ahead of your own, which is what a preacher should also keep in mind.

Another important difference between a Christian preacher and a secular speaker is that often the secular speaker is elevated and adored sometimes even above the message itself. This should not be the case with the preacher whose main role is to be a messenger and not the message (Gill 2007:1). When viewing the preacher as an ambassador, it sets a tighter set of ethical expectations and rules towards the preacher, knowing that he is an ambassador from God (Gill 2007:2). Although these ethical expectations might feel pressuring for some, there is an aspect which releases the pressure off the preacher: namely, that the preacher is not responsible for the outcome of his message. In other words, although the preacher preaches and tries to sway people to Christ, it is believed that it is God who changes the hearts of men, not the preacher (ibid.).

The preacher has two types of audiences: the in-group and the out-group. The in-group consists of the converted, while the out-group includes the people who have been dragged into a meeting, those that are curious or hostile towards the Christian message, and also those who hunger to know more (Gill 2007:3). Since the preacher has such a diverse audience, and since eternal and Biblical truth can often be hard to understand, using illustrations or parables to teach something is a good, vivid and a memorable way of making a point. Gill brings out an example of how to illustrate the fact that eternal life from God comes from grace and cannot be bought from God by doing good deeds. He points out that like a man, who needs urgently a heart transplant cannot buy a heart, rather he gets it for free as a gift; similarly we cannot buy our way to heaven, but we must receive it as a gift (ibid.). These types of illustrations make eternal questions easier to understand.

In addition to drawing illustrations, faith is actually something quite hands-on and applicable in everyday life. Christianity is not about rules, philosophies and fancy thoughts, rather it is quite practical. Often people have the false belief that if they just act good, go to church and perform religious rituals, they can buy their way to God (Gill 2007:3). Because of this, the preachers are often faced with the challenge to explain how to make the Scriptural truths applicable into the everyday lives of the congregation.

Although these aspects which are mentioned can be said to be some of the cornerstones of pastoring a church, it must be said that it does not mean all pastors abide in obeying them. Love and humility are only aspects that guide the Christian preaching and persuasion and it is up to each pastor to decide for him/herself how they conduct their sermons, and how they react to fame or criticism.

### **2.3.2 Religious Persuasion**

Rowlands (1980:2) states that there are two aspects to preaching: the divine and the human. Since Joel Osteen Ministries state in the “What We Believe” section, that they believe that “the entire Bible is inspired by God, without error...” it can be safe to say that they also view preaching as a means of communicating the divine truth through human personality. It is hard to study the divine aspect of preaching, thus there are more studies on the rhetoric of a preacher from the secular point of view.

In the following, four studies on rhetorics will be described, three of which deal with Joel Osteen and his teachings. Since Osteen has been listed as the most watched inspirational figure in America by the Nielsen Media Research, and also received the title of “10 Most Fascinating People of 2006” and “Most Influential Christian in 2006”, it is no wonder his ways of delivering a sermon have been scrutinized in order to see what makes him so successful (Joel Osteen Ministries 2014).

Laine Baity's (2011:3) study on Joel Osteen named: *A Rhetorical Analysis of Joel Osteen: How America's Most Popular Pastor has Gained Influence in a Time of Increasing Privatization*, explores Osteen's rhetoric to find out what the main metaphors, themes and strategies are which have led to his success. Her main focus, in addition to Osteen's key metaphors, is on individualism and the rhetorical situation (ibid.). Baity's study takes the approach of a rhetorical critic, and it is also shaped by the notion that "cultural values and ideologies influence an audiences' perception of a message", which is also one aspects of the present study (2011:8, 82). Baity (2011:80) discovered that Osteen employs cultural messages to add significance to his metaphor the 'victor'. She continues to assert that Osteen's message "affirms the individual's self-worth and encourages listeners to pursue their true destinies, with the promise that it will bring about uncharted happiness and material gain" (2011:80). Baity also noticed Osteen advocating for positive confession, and adds that Osteen advocates for a reality in which this positive thinking as well as faithful expectancy can "unlock a person's spiritual and material goals" (ibid.). Baity concludes that although Osteen's message may take the edge away from the tensions his congregation suffer from for a moment, his message lacks the quality, which "engages the hurts and hardships of life in a way that not only postpones their effects, but also equips followers to embrace the pain that so often defines the human experience" (2011:90).

Michael C. Souders (2011) researched prosperity gospel in a more deeper level in his dissertation: *A God of Wealth: Religion, Modernity, and the Rhetoric of the Christian Prosperity Gospel* in which Joel Osteen's book, *Become a Better You*, received a short chapter. Souders relies on Kenneth Burke's idea about rhetoric lying in identification. In regard to Osteen, Souders (2011:354) treats him as a figure reacting to, and creating contemporary culture via radical interpretation. Souders argues that Osteen engages his audience in a way which "provides broad psychological appeal by adopting and adapting a secular idiom for religious purposes" (ibid.). Souders (2011:363) argues that rhetoric being a kind of cultural awareness, Osteen's main gifting is seen in his awareness of the contemporary audience and what it desires to hear. Souders describes Osteen as having the ability to

describe the different problems his audience face in a manner which is understandable. Osteen's focus is on the inner struggles of peoples, and getting right with God, which according to Osteen is also only a matter of inner struggle with personal doubt as Souders paraphrases it (2011:401). After overcoming this inner struggle, people will experience immediate outer benefits (Souders 2011:401). This also goes hand in hand with Souders' notion that Osteen "challenges the audience to affirm their unique place in the universe, encourages them to succeed more and do more of what they already want to do, and does not ask the audience to sacrifice their existing or desired material comforts" (ibid.).

In 2010 Helje Kringlebotn Sødal wrote an article, "*Victor, not victim*": *Joel Osteen's Rhetoric of Hope*. In it Kringlebotn Sødal (2010:37) argues that the key to understanding the growth of Lakewood church lies in Osteen's continuous preaching on hope. She continues to note how due to this rhetoric of hope conservative teachings about dogma and ethics are often downplayed; also while the human potential for victory is celebrated, the potential for sin on the other hand is barely mentioned (2010:39). Simply said, Osteen concentrates on selective aspects of Christian faith (ibid.). The article also sees the use of not only prosperity gospel and positive confession, but also the use of the US culture as a means to reach the audience. Kringlebotn Sødal (2010:42) especially speaks of the use of the well-known cultural phenomenon of 'the American Dream' about social and economic success which is defined as the idea of the possibility that with enough determination one can advance from rags to riches. In the conclusion, Kringlebotn Sødal states that Osteen's rhetoric of hope has indeed been successful regarding the growth of the Lakewood church. She continues to say that partly the growth can be explained by Osteen's unique rhetoric of hope, which is derived from Osteen's use of relational prosperous theology, the prosperity gospel (2010:48).

In his study *The Continuation War as a Metanoic Moment: A Burkean Reading of Lutheran Hierocratic Rhetoric*, Tilli (2012) addresses the rhetorical problem of how Lutheran priests applied religious and biblical typologies in order to support the war effort of the Finnish state. Tilli's

(2012:4) main focus is on the six different themes that dominate the sermons of the Lutheran pastors during the different phases of the continuation war in Finland: apocalypse, holy war & crusade, election & mission, jeremiad, the war within, obedience & mortification. The theory behind Tilli's text analysis is Kenneth Burke's theory on symbolic action (2012:176). Tilli discovered that at the beginning of the war, the situation in Finland was explained as a part of an eschatological narrative. Yet, as the war drew on the eschatological view point had to be abandoned since the Soviet Union did not collapse as fast as was proclaimed it would. The next step was to focus on how the Finnish nation had sinned, and how the war was a consequence of the decline of the morals of Finnish people. As phases of the war changed, so did the typologies the priests employed concerning the relation of the war and faith (Tilli 2012:176-178). In summary, the priests interpreted the war in their sermons by rhetorical means to the normal folk, in order to legitimize what was done from the point of view of Christianity (Tilli 2012:178).

### 3 PERSUASIVE LANGUAGE AND RHETORICAL DEVICES

In this chapter I will introduce two prominent theories in the field of persuasion, after which I will answer the question of what is the reason of using persuasive language, that is, what is the goal of persuasion. Persuasive language will be discussed from a cultural point of view. In other words, what are the means the speaker can do content-wise in order to persuade his audience? Next I will cover how to be persuasive after which this chapter will explore the various rhetorical devices used in oral communication. However, the study does not intend to explain every rhetorical device Osteen uses, but it rather focuses on four of the most prominent ways that are present in almost all of his sermons, and explores them more deeply. The chosen devices are repetition, figures of speech, and the use of personal pronouns in making the audience feel more involved combined with different ways of giving advice.

#### 3.1. The Study of Persuasion – Theories

The study of persuasion, still called rhetoric in academic circles, is often regarded as a branch of humanities located in social sciences (Simons 2001:20). The study of persuasion was first devised by the Greek philosopher Aristotle; and, as the primary mode of communication of the ancient Greeks was verbal communication, they strove for effective ways of communicating which in turn facilitated the development of this branch of study (Simons 2001:14). In this section the two main theories from the field of persuasive language on which the present study is based will be introduced.

##### *The Elaboration Likelihood Model*

Maybe one of the most known cognitive models of persuasion is the elaboration likelihood model, or ELM, by Petty and Cacioppo in 1986 (Dainton 2005:109). According to cognitive models, as people process a persuasive message, they are also capable of recalling and evaluating

previously acquired information. As people combine their previously held information with the persuasive characteristics of the new information, they will be more able to evaluate the actual message and create an opinion about it (Stiff et al. 2003:214-215). The ELM sees that the audience of a persuasive message use mental processes of motivation and reasoning to accept or reject the message delivered (Dainton 2005:109). It thus concentrates on how the audience members interpret and make sense of persuasive messages on a cognitive level (Beebe et al. 2012:317). In this sense, to elaborate means to think critically about the information that has been laid out for the listener. When one elaborates on something, one evaluates the arguments and evidence the speaker is using.

It is believed that not everyone is persuaded the same way, thus elaboration varies from person to person, and also depends on the topic of the message (Beebe et al. 2012:318). Because of this, ELM highlights the importance of understanding audience members, so that the speaker can modify and create a message suited for that particular audience and choose a proper route to approach them (Dainton 2005:109). The present study takes this into consideration, and sees that Osteen's way of applying the cultural values of the US into his sermons, for example through theological teachings, is just what ELM highlights. In other words, Osteen's message is modified to suit his US audience, and thus the way Osteen takes advantage of cultural values in order to appeal to his listeners is relevant.

According to the model, the success of persuasion depends mainly on how the listeners understand the message (Dainton 2005:109). Thus there are two routes to persuasion: the direct persuasion route and indirect persuasion route. The direct, or central, persuasion route happens when one scrutinizes and elaborates on the message, whereas in the indirect, or peripheral, persuasion route, in which one does not elaborate, one is influenced by the peripheral factors, such as one's emotions, the speaker's charisma or the attractiveness of the source (Beebe et al. 2012:318). The change which occurs in the person through the direct route of persuasion is more likely to be long term, than the change that happens due to the indirect route. In



regard to Osteen, in the light of his sermons it can be said that he seems to prefer the indirect route of persuasion to the direct one.

Elaborated arguments can be strong, neutral or weak, and these are also the different ways the audience can respond to such arguments; meaning they can react either strongly, neutrally or weakly. That is, strong arguments generate a positive cognitive response, neutral arguments produce a noncommittal cognitive response, and weak arguments create a negative cognitive response (Dainton 2005:110).

The two factors that contribute to the success of persuasion through the central route are motivation and ability to understand the message (Dainton 2005:190). If one has no motivation to sit and listen to a complicated message, although one could have the ability to understand it, one cannot hope that the message will truly be heard and the receiver persuaded. Then again, if one lacks the ability to decode complex jargon, or follow the arguments given, then, although one might have the motivation to listen, the person cannot truly understand the message, and thus be persuaded. In summary, if one has these two qualities, motivation and ability to understand, then the persuader should rely and use well presented rational arguments. Then again, if the audience lacks in these two qualities, the persuader should focus on emotionally based peripheral messages (Dainton 2005:114).

Although Osteen's messages can be said to be peripheral, he does take motivation and the audience's ability to understand into consideration. As Osteen focuses on everyday issues in his sermons, such as self-confidence or getting by financially, these everyday issues are the motivation to listen for many of his listeners. Osteen's audience are drawn in by his down-to-earth themes and approach, not to mention that Osteen's language use is very simple, upbeat and easy to follow, such as his example stories are.

Since everyone is not as motivated or able to understand a message endorsed with logical and rational arguments, the persuader can also use the peripheral route to persuasion (Dainton 2005:111). As explained earlier, the

peripheral route relies on superficial means, such as feel-good images or celebrity endorsements to achieve its goal in persuading.

It can be said that there are seven common cues, which point to a peripheral message. These are authority, commitment, contrast, liking, reciprocity, scarcity, and social proof (Dainton 2005:111). A mother might use authority on her child when ordering him to clean up his room. The only reason she might give the child is “because I said so!” This probably will not change the child’s attitude towards cleaning the room, but it might work for a while. Relying on commitment means that the speaker emphasizes the importance of belonging to a certain group, or dedication to a certain cause or product (ibid.). Using contrast as a means to influence someone requires the speaker to draw an uneven comparison of things so that the persuader’s point of view will seem more favourable (Dainton 2005:112). An example of this might be when a salesperson shows the client one of the most expensive products first, before showing the actual product. By showing the expensive product first, anything will seem cheap in comparison to that.

Liking refers to linking the message to a likeable person, place or object (Dainton 2005:112). The argument is, if one likes the person, place or object selling the product, one will also like the product. This is also the reason why one might see celebrities speaking for a product. Messages of reciprocity, on the other hand, put emphasis on a give-and-take-relationship. The idea is, if you give something, you get something else in return. This is visible in many advertisements where the sales pitch is similar to: “Buy two, get the third for free!” Scarcity is also a peripheral message used by the advertisers, when they claim either scarceness of time (“If you order within ten minutes!”), or scarcity of products (“Only limited amount of products left. Be quick, only the first 100 will get them!”) (Dainton 2005:112). This kind of persuasion creates a sense of urgency to make decisions fast. The last peripheral cue, social proof, gets its authority from peer pressure. The basis of this cue is: “everyone’s doing it”, and even adults will succumb to believing it (Dainton 2005:113). All in all it could be said that the main purpose of ELM is to “identify the conditions under which message receivers engage in central and peripheral processing” (Stiff et al.

2003:217). Although not mentioned separately in the analysis nearly all of these seven factors do appear in Osteen's preaching.

### *The cognitive Dissonance Theory*

The cognitive dissonance theory (CDT) states that although one might receive all the evidence required to change one's mind, it does not mean that one will do so. This is because influence is often seen as an intrapersonal event, which occurs when one's attitudes and behaviour create an imbalance, which can only be solved by altering either one's beliefs or one's behaviour (Dainton 2005:115). In other words, this imbalance, or dissonance is created when we receive new information which is not in agreement with our previously established beliefs (Dainton 2005:116).

This imbalance is what people are uncomfortable with, thus they will try to find a way to reach that balance again. For example if someone who has just become a Christian finds out that his lifestyle contradicts his faith, the person has to either correct his lifestyle to fit his beliefs, or find a way to justify and accommodate his lifestyle to fit his new worldview. A way of justifying a lifestyle which is regarded as sinful in Christianity could be to change one's view on the Bible's authority. For example, living with someone without being married is regarded as sin in the Bible, and thus a Christian should not engage in that. If, though, one becomes a Christian and has this type of a situation and wants to hold onto it, one might simply adjust his/her views of the Bible. This is done by convincing oneself for instance that the Bible is not the Word of God, or that if it is the Word of God, it is outdated and thus does not apply to his situation. In this way the person has either adjusted his lifestyle to fit his beliefs, or adjusted his beliefs to justify and fit his lifestyle.

As can be seen, either beliefs or behaviour has to change. There is a third option, though, which occurs especially when the imbalance is far too great. When too much dissonance is created, the receivers might just decide that they do not like the persuader, which often justifies not changing their attitudes nor their behaviour (Dainton 2005:120).

In regard to Osteen and the cognitive dissonance theory, the megachurch pastor opts to use language and themes in his sermons that are the least likely to offend anyone, and the least likely to create an imbalance. This means, as Katie Couric proposes, that Osteen does not “spend a lot of time in (his) sermons talking about good and evil, sin and redemption” but rather that his message is a more positive one (Menzie 2013). Even though one would assume that not many would have anything against such positive sermons, Osteen has been criticized for just that. Some have condemned him for the notion that he is more likely to give his congregation motivational pep talks on Sunday mornings than teaching what the Bible says about hot topics such as abortion, homosexuality or pornography (Fiorazo 2013). Thus it can be said that some might find an imbalance between their beliefs and Osteen’s teaching, through him avoiding preaching on the more difficult issues, and only concentrating on the positive.

The smiling pastor himself says that he believes that preaching on hot topics is not his main gifting, but he rather feels that he is called to “encourage people, give them hope, and help them live their everyday life” (Fiorazo 2013). Then again, it has been suggested that the reason why he is now the pastor of America’s largest congregation is in fact due to his Sunday messages being on personal growth and positive thinking and not about the hot topics mentioned above (ibid.).

From these two theories, ELM and CDT, the present study draws more from the Elaboration Likelihood model, as it has more to give to the study. The central route and the indirect route of persuasion are easier to analyze from the sermons, than trying to consider whether Osteen’s audience are in a state of imbalance or not. CDT, on the other hand, does give insight to the possible reasons why Osteen’s choice of words are often vague and affirming, leaving a lot of room for interpretation to one direction or the other.

### 3.2 Persuasion and its Goal

Persuasion is said to be human communication which is meant to sway the “autonomous judgements and actions of others” (Simons 2001:7). Beebe et al. (2012:314) continue this thought by saying that persuasion can be defined as the process of reinforcing or changing one’s attitudes, beliefs, values or behaviour. Although external cues are an important aspect of persuasion, it should be noted that the thoughts that the persuadees generate in response to these cues also affects how one is persuaded (Simons 2001:35).

Stiff et al. (2003:4) limit persuasive activity to intentional behaviour, and they list three aspects of influence this intentional behaviour might evoke. These aspects of persuasion are 1) response shaping, 2) response reinforcing, and 3) response changing (Stiff et al. 2003:4). Response shaping means that the topic or issue is new to the person, or s/he has not yet formed an opinion on the subject. This type of persuasion is often used with the mass media, which introduces new issues almost daily, and thus also has a huge say on how it presents the case (Stiff et al. 2003:5). Stiff et al. (2003:6) continue that response shaping is an intentional way to lead people to form certain opinions and impressions on products or people, for example through advertisements or job interviews, where one intentionally tries to market oneself.

Response reinforcing, on the other hand, suggests that different means are used to reinforce the position, decision or opinion already held by the persuadee. An example of such persuasion is a self-help group in which the decision to remain sober is reinforced (Stiff et al. 2003:6). Another example of this type of reinforcement is religious institutions and Sunday services, where the preacher and the community often strive to reinforce the belief in a “prescribed doctrine and (also) maintain lifestyles consistent with that doctrine” (Stiff et al. 2003:7).

Response changing can be said to be the most radical form of persuasion of the three. Changing one’s response means literally what it implies, that is

that one tries to change one's existing response into another, in opposition to no response into some response (Stiff et al. 2003:9).

As these descriptions strive to state what persuasion is, it is also as important to state what it is not. According to Simons (2001:7-8), persuasion is not coercion, bribing or pressuring someone, it rather predisposes others while it does not impose. Schmidt et al. (1986:2) agree with this definition by pointing out that the aim of persuasion is to bring about a voluntary change in the attitudes of the listeners, in contrast to using violent or coercive measures. That is to say persuasion is not a matter of brainwashing people, but rather, it is appealing to the listener through such means which engender a voluntary reaction from the listener. But although Simons (2001:7-8) insists that persuasion is not coercive nor manipulation, Stiff et al. (2003:8) see that the speaker might use coercive measures or even manipulation in order to achieve a change in the recipient's response. As an example of such measures they point to a cult leader whose 'subjects' might often undergo extreme and sudden response-alternations experiences.

Persuading the listeners, then, is not coercive, but it uses other means to have an impact on the audience. For example, it benefits the speaker to understand what his listener's value, so that he can adapt the content of his speech to those values, and thus make a stronger impact on his audience (Beebe et al. 2012:315). It is also good to notice that a persuasive message is not dependent on the level of its success in the act of persuading someone. That is to say that one might succeed or fail in influencing the listeners, but that is not the measure stick of stating whether the message itself is persuasive or not (Simons 2001:8).

When looking at the definition of persuasion by Beebe et al. (2012) one needs to understand what is meant by attitudes, beliefs, values and behaviour. Attitudes can be described as the likes and dislikes of people, while they can also be said to be learnt dispositions to respond in a certain way towards something (Beebe et al. 2012:314-315). Stiff et al. quote Rokeach when describing attitudes as a "relatively enduring organization of beliefs around an object or situation predisposing one to respond in some

preferential manner” (2003:12). Often attitudes are the easiest to change, although they might not be directly observable and thus difficult to measure (Stiff et al. 2003:4).

Beliefs, on the other hand, are described as what people understand to be true or false, and they can either be based on pure faith, or maybe more commonly on past experiences (Beebe et al. 2012:315). Stiff et al. also give their definition on beliefs as being the “single proposition or statement about an object or situation” (2003:12). They continue that the proposition or statement often refers to the object or situation being good or bad, correct or incorrect, moral or immoral and so on. These beliefs can be divided into three types: 1) descriptive, 2) prescriptive and 3) evaluative (Stiff et al. 2003:12). Descriptive beliefs are verifiable statements, that is, statements the validity of which can be established; for example “his student received detention”. Prescriptive statements, then again, reflect the person’s values and morals, which mean that the statements are often subjective; for example “the student sets a bad example on other students”. The third statement, evaluative statement, demonstrates general evaluation on a topic; for example “detention is good”. Changing one’s beliefs is not as simple as changing ones attitude, and usually requires evidence to prove matters otherwise.

Values, then, are harder to change due to their more stable nature. They are understood to be the enduring concept of what is right and wrong, or good and bad. Usually people label something which they value as good and desirable, whereas the opposite of what they value is often seen as bad or wrong (Beebe et al. 2012:315).

### **3.3 How to Be Persuasive**

When wanting to persuade someone, one can choose a direct path, or an indirect one; or as Simons calls them: the central route and the peripheral route to persuasion (2001:35). Direct persuasion hints towards using logic, reasoning, arguments, and evidence to convince others (Beebe et al.

2012:318). In regard to indirect persuasion, it includes more peripheral factors, such as the speaker's charisma, appealing to emotions, or even attractive music, which is meant to sway the listeners (Beebe et al. 2012:318). (See chapter 3.1 for further details.)

These peripheral factors might be able to reinforce already existing attitudes, beliefs, values and behaviour, but if a Christian preacher wants to change some of those, s/he usually has to appeal to the Bible. Although it can be said that nowadays not all Christian people hold the Bible as their highest authority, nevertheless most Christians still often regard the Bible as the infallible Word of God. For example in Joel Osteen ministries they state on their website that they believe that “the entire Bible is inspired by God, without error and (is) the authority on which we base our faith, conduct and doctrine” (n.d.). Regarding this belief of many Christians one can conclude that the Bible can thus be used as evidence in order to change some of the beliefs people might have; but this obviously only works for those Christians who see that the Bible has a Godly authority.

The great Greek rhetorician, Aristotle, speaks of three aspects, which, according to him, impact the success of persuasion. These are ethos, logos and pathos (Beebe et al. 2012:316). Ethos denotes the speaker's credibility, or how believable he is, and the more credible the speaker is, the more likely it is that the listeners will believe his words, trust him, and respond positively to his message (Stiff et al. 2003:104, Beebe et al. 2012:316). Aristotle claims that a credible person is such who is ethical, has a good character, uses common sense, and also cares for the well-being of his audience (Beebe et al. 2012:316), whereas Stiff et al. (2003:104) point out that although credibility is an important element of persuasion in every culture, the particular characteristics that inspire credibility are probably different across cultures. An example of such could be given when, for example, comparing Finnish culture to the US culture. In Finland often being demure and modest is seen as a virtue even in job interviews, whereas in the US it might be quite common to market oneself by openly elaborating on one's positive qualities. In the light of this example, a too modest Finn might not be regarded as credible in the US as his fellow US citizen,



whereas if the same US citizen tried to market himself too boastfully in a Finnish job interview, his approach might not be regarded as believable either.

This example only brought out one aspect of the speaker's credibility, but since scholars generally agree that source credibility is multidimensional, there are several other aspects that might affect the way the speaker is viewed in relation to his ethos (Stiff et al. 2003:104). Especially two perceptual variables have been brought up, a perceptual variable being the audience's perception of the source. These variables are a combination of the following two factors: source expertise and source trustworthiness (Stiff et al. 2003:105). Source expertise is characterized as the "extent to which a communicator is perceived to be a source of valid assertions" or, in other words, the "extent to which the audience member perceives the source as being well-informed on the topic" (ibid.). Source trustworthiness, in turn, is seen as the audience member's "degree of confidence in the communicator's intent to communicate the assertions he considers most valid", which means that source trustworthiness represent the perceptions of the audience member that "the source will tell the truth as he/she knows it" (ibid.). Often the source's expertise and trustworthiness depend on the perceiver, since, for example, an elementary school teacher might seem very credible to the students, while the teacher's colleagues might hold a different opinion on his/her trustworthiness (Stiff et al. 2003:105).

Source similarity is also an excellent way to appeal to one's audience. This can be authentic or perceived similarity, which is often emphasized by the speaker in order to appear credible. A TV evangelist, for instance, usually often expresses values and opinions that are held by his listeners, so that it would thus boost his perceived trustworthiness in the eyes of his audience (Stiff et al. 2003:120).

Aristotle's second aspect, logos, on the other hand, refers to how rational, and logical arguments the speaker succeeds to present; that is to say how he reasons his case (Beebe et al. 2012:317). The persuasiveness of rational arguments comes from sound reasoning and quality of evidence (Stiff et al.

2003:129). The success of this Aristotle's second aspect relies heavily on the assumption that people have a common understanding of the formal rules of logic, and that they actually use these rules when making judgements on the source's arguments (Stiff et al. 2003:128). What is more likely, though, is that people let their already existing opinions on the topic affect the way they scrutinize the logical validity of the arguments and evidence presented on the case (Stiff et al. 2003:133).

When presenting arguments on a topic, one should pay attention to how much recognition should be given to opposing viewpoints. This message sidedness is the extent the message tries to refute opposing viewpoints (Stiff et al. 2003:139-140). Studies show that two-sided messages, where opposing viewpoints were refuted were perceived as more persuasive than one-sided messages (Stiff et al. 2003:141).

Another aspect which motivates the listeners to analyse the content of the message more thoroughly is the message's relevance to their lives. The argument is that if the topic is relevant to the listeners' lives they will be more concerned of the outcome of the message, and thus pay more attention to the message itself (Stiff et al. 2003:131). This said, if the speaker manages to make his audience feel involved in the message, they are more likely to listen and analyse what is been said. In regard to rational appeals, they are an effective persuasive technique, especially when people are motivated and able to process the arguments given in the content of the message (Stiff et al. 2003:143).

The third aspect of Aristotle's list is pathos, and it describes how the speaker appeals to emotions. Arousing stories and concrete examples have a way to touch people's emotions, and thus they have the ability to persuade them (Beebe et al. 2012:317). Stiff et al. (2003:146) explain the process more in detail, and begin by dissecting emotional appeal into four different components: cognitive component, positive or negative feeling component, physiological component, and behavioural component.

The cognitive component stands for the person's interpretation of the change in the environment either because of a new event or because of something that was said. An example of this could be a bear that suddenly appears, thus the environment changes. Next comes either a positive or a negative feeling component, which tells whether the change in the environment was good or bad. Thirdly the physiological component is the bodily reaction to the previous two components. This could be respiration, adrenaline, or pupil dilation just to mention a few examples. The last component is the most relevant to persuasion, which is the behavioural component. An example of these components working together within the bear example could be as follows: When the bear comes and changes the environment the first response is "this is a dangerous animal". Since the animal is regarded as dangerous it is likely that what follows next is a negative feeling, instead of a positive one, saying "this is not good". After this the physiological component takes over, which might mean a heightened heart rate, respiration and an adrenaline rush. Lastly the behavioural component kicks in and says: "run!" (Stiff et al. 2003:146). The main assumption of appealing to emotions is that "if particular emotions generate a characteristic behavioural response, then persuasive messages might be able to exploit this effect" (Stiff et al. 2003:146).

Beebe et al. (2012:322) present another way to reach the persuadees. This way of persuasion works through stimulating the needs of the audience in order to win them over. Maslow has developed a hierarchy of needs, in which he categorizes these needs into five different hierarchical levels, as shown in Figure 1. Maslow argues that there is a hierarchy of needs which motivates the behaviour of everyone (ibid.). The first level is physiological needs (e.g. food, drink, air), the second safety needs (e.g. security in money, protection), the third social needs (e.g. feeling loved and valued, a sense of belonging), up fourth comes self-esteem needs (e.g. thinking well of ourselves), and finally self-actualization needs (e.g. fully realizing one's potential).

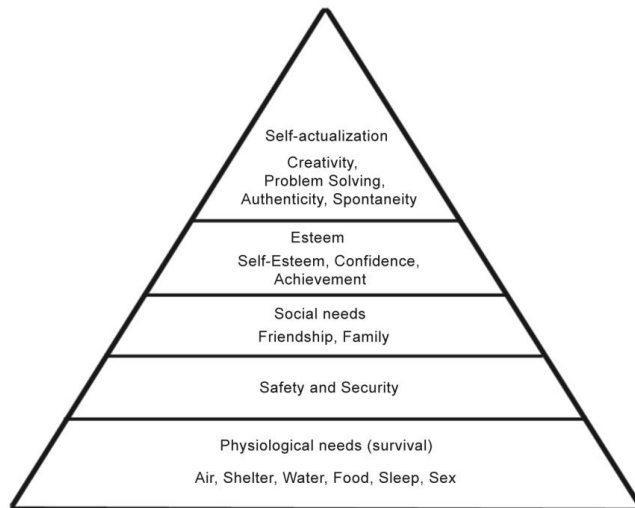


Figure 1. Maslow's hierarchy of needs, adapted from <http://www.ejolt.org/2012/12/needs/maslows-hierarchy-of-needs/>

Maslow's theory states that in order to persuade the listeners to satisfy their needs on the very top of the pyramid, the needs on the bottom need to be met (Beebe et al. 2012:322). In simple terms, if the listeners are thirsty, tired or hungry (physiological needs), it will be harder to persuade them to support your candidate, or sign your petition for a specific cause (ibid.). The same principle applies for all categories; one could argue that if the speaker wants to encourage, and move his audience to pursue their inner fulfilment, he needs to make sure the audience feels safe, loved, and that their self-esteem is in place.

### **3.4 Rhetorical Devices**

When it comes to rhetorics, and rhetorical devices it can be said that they are very intertwined with persuasive language. Aristotle defines rhetoric as the process of discovering the available means of persuasion in any particular case (Beebe et al. 2012:316). In this sense, in spoken persuasion the speaker needs to be very aware of his audience; their beliefs, attitudes,

values, and their mood. As the speaker ‘reads’ his audience, he is also able to decide which rhetorical devices suit his cause the best at a given moment.

Language is a diverse resource and it can be used in many ways in persuasion. One might accentuate certain features of the topic and de-emphasize others (Simons 2001:95). In other words, the speaker might want to say some things in a way that conceals, minimizes, degrades, blurs, divides or simplifies a topic. On the other hand, one might also want to use words to reveal, magnify, elevate, sharpen, link or complexify some aspects. These all work to make the topic either to look good, bad or neutral (ibid.).

There are several ways to intensify one’s message. Beebe et al. (2012:119, 221, 223) list three key points to keep in mind in relation to effective oral communication. Firstly they advise to use words effectively, secondly to adapt one’s language style to diverse listeners, and lastly to craft memorable word structures.

One way to craft memorable word structures is repetition. Repetition is a simple but effective way to intensify one’s message, and it is more broad of a device than it might seem at first since it can refer not only to the regular repetition of the same word or a sentence structure (Simons 2001:96-97), but also to the repetition of sounds. An example of repeating a word is an antistrophe, in which a word or phrase is repeated at the close of successive clauses: “If you’re a plumber, don’t be an okay plumber, be a great plumber.” (JO3<sup>1</sup>). If, however, the word is repeated in the beginning of successive phrases, the method is called an anaphora. Repetition does not have to mean that a word is repeated as such, but it can also denote that a point is repeated with a different wording for emphasis. Commoratio does this, and an example of it is: “No obstacle is too big for me. I know I’m more than a conqueror” (JO4).

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<sup>1</sup> The acronym JO refers to the data of the present study (Joel Osteen’s sermons) and they will be introduced in chapter 4.2

Some rhetorical devices can appeal to the heart, some to the mind and some to the ear (Tomlinson n.d.). A type of repetition that appeals to the ear is, for instance, assonance. This occurs when same vowel sounds are repeated in words close to each other that start with different consonant sounds: “Men sell the wedding bells” (Literary Devices n.d.). Alliteration, on the other hand, repeats the initial consonant sounds in several words in sequences. A common example of this is a tongue twister: “Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers” (ibid.).

Knowing what words to use and when to use them is also a talent. Simons (2001:35) points out that if one feels involved in the issue at hand it makes one think about it more thoroughly. In order to let the audience feel that they are involved one might cultivate the use of personal pronouns. For example the way one presents oneself in one’s speech, by the way of how one refers to oneself, their audience and also their opposition, can be used as a means of persuasion (Håkansson 2012:1).

Knowing what words to use also contributes to the talent of knowing how to adapt one’s language style to the language style common to one’s audience. The speaker is more successful as a persuader when he steps into the shoes of the persuadees. This does not only mean a skilful use of personal pronouns in order to create a unanimous atmosphere, but also a skilful use of terms. For example, is one speaking of freedom fighters or terrorists depends on whose side one wants to take on the agenda (Simons 2001:13). It is also effective to recognize one’s own position in relation to the speaker. As a pastor, leader, or a teacher it is normal to give out commands, and to exhort people into taking a certain action, but if the speaker is a student, giving commands to the teacher might not have the same effect.

When speaking about memorable word structures figurative images, or figures of speech provide an excellent way to make one’s point more lifelike and impressive. According to Beebe et al. (2012:224), figures of speech often deviate from the original meaning of the words, thus creating a distinctive, memorable and vivid illustration or comparison. Examples of figures of speech are metaphors, similes and personifications (ibid.), but

then again examples, stories and funny jokes can all as well be as memorable. A metaphor is “an implied comparison of two things that are similar in some vital way”, whereas a simile connects the two comparable items more directly, often with the word ‘like’ (Beebe et al. 2012:224). Personification occurs when one attributes some human qualities to inanimate things or ideas (ibid.).

Rhetorical devices for some might suggest that the persuader is beating around the bush, and not clearly stating the obvious: You need to think like me. If one has authority enough and the courage to exhort people to act or think a certain way it is also an acceptable rhetorical device. Dehortatio is an imperative advice about how not to act, whereas diatyposis simply means advice. Preachers are, in a way, expected to give advice, and in this sense one would suppose the sermons of any preacher do probably include some sort of exhortation or advice.

## **4 JOEL OSTEEN – THE STUDY**

This chapter will describe how the study proceeds in the light of the method. The first section will present the research questions and thus the purpose of the study after which the data will be introduced. Lastly the methods of analysis are presented in chapter 4.3.

### **4.1 Research Questions**

This study is a qualitative research on the sermons of the famous ‘televangelist’ Joel Osteen. The theoretical framework is based on the Elaboration Likelihood Model, a prominent persuasion theory, and on rhetorical analysis. The study aims to find out the various ways Osteen tries to persuade his audience with his sermons. The research questions are:

1. What are the most prominent rhetorical devices Osteen uses in his sermons, and how are they visible in them?
2. How does Osteen use Christian teachings and the Bible’s authority to appeal to the audience through their cultural values?

In essence, the present study identifies the most prominent rhetorical devices Osteen uses and explores how Osteen aims to impact his audience through the three major cultural values of the US, individualism, self-help and materialism. In other words, it will explore how Osteen’s sermons manifest these values via Christian teachings such as positive-confession, self-help and materialism. What is meant to be achieved by the study is a broader glimpse into the messages of one of the most successful preachers in the US, and into the methods he uses in order to be heard, liked, and relevant to his listeners.

### **4.2 The Data**

For the study I randomly selected eight sermons from a one and a half year (2010–2011) time period and listened to them from various sources



(podfeed.net, youtube.com, myspace.com), on which the sermons from Osteen's homepage have been uploaded. The reason why there are many sources is that some of the eight sermons were not available from one source so another source has been used. Also the reason why these sermons have been selected from one and a half year time period (2010–2011) is that I used some of these sermons as data for my Bachelor's thesis in 2011 (Toivanen 2011). The focus of my Bachelor's thesis was to analyze Christianity in the United States as it is presented by the popular televangelist Joel Osteen, and to compare what he preaches with the historical context provided in order to find out how Christianity has changed over time and adapted to the changing cultural values. In the present study I wanted to approach Osteen's sermons from a more rhetorical point of view though still including the study of cultural effects on his sermons. Also I wanted to see if Osteen advocated for the three popular teachings of the mainstream Christianity (self-help, positive confession and materialism), and if he does, then how do these teachings correlate with the US core values.

The sermons selected are from Osteen's weekly Sunday Service, which are also broadcast on TV. In addition to Osteen's TV viewers the auditorium itself is filled with thousands of his regular congregation attendance. Sermons that have been given during any major Christian holiday (e.g. Easter and Christmas) have been excluded from the data in order to get a clearer representation of Osteen's regular type of preaching. The sermons have been viewed and listened to, and also transcribed in order to be able to analyse what is said.

In analysing transcriptions one can also take into account nonverbal behaviours, such as body position and hand gestures, or tones of voice and pauses in speech (Jordan & Henderson 1995:48). Nevertheless it is impossible to include every aspect of interaction into a transcript, which means that decisions must be made regarding what is included and taken into account in the analysis. In other words: each transcript is already modified to reflect the categories the analyst has found relevant to her or his analysis (ibid.).

This said, the transcriptions of Osteen’s sermons contains only what is said, and not how it is said. What has been written down in brackets in the midst of the sermons, though, is the occasional applause and/or laughter from the audience. This has been done mainly in order to indicate the situations which seem to invoke a positive response from the audience, which is an interesting aspect from the point of view of the analysis. It is believed that not only is selectivity of the transcript practical and theoretically necessary, but that in each study the selectivity of the transcript should be acknowledged and explained (Davidson 2009:38). Since the focus of analysis is on rhetorical devices in speech and not the nonverbal side of communication, it was not deemed necessary to transcribe anything else than the speech itself.

When referring to a particular sermon, the abbreviation JO (Joel Osteen) and a number will be used in chronological order. Therefore JO1 refers to the sermon delivered in January of 2010, JO2 refers to the one delivered in March and so on. The full list of sermons, their titles, numbers, duration, as well as the time they have been preached is given below.

**2010**

JO1 – 08.01.2010	29min 15s	Have a Good Opinion of Yourself
JO2 – 04.03.2010	31min 39s	Living Life Happy
JO3 – 28.05.2010	30min 11s	Being Excellent in the Workplace
JO4 – 08.07.2010	27min 46s	Programming Your Mind for Victory
JO5 – 12.08.2010	32min 09s	Speaking the Blessing
JO6 – 02.09.2010	31min 48s	Having the Right Perspective

**2011**

JO7 – 17.02.2011	31min 37s	Heaven is Cheering You On
JO8 – 03.04.2011	31min 47s	Help Others to Win

### 4.3 Method of Analysis

Since this study is a qualitative case study on persuasive language, the methods of analysis used is rhetorical analysis. In addition discourse analysis is also used, but mainly to help contextualize the study. As discourse analysis examines language as a social activity its main focus is on how language is used during different times, in different situations, and in different places (Pietikäinen 2009:11). This suggests that the meaning of the words used depend very much on the context they are used in. Often different situations define how language is used, and what kind of meanings the language used obtains. This also applies to a sermon. There are certain, partly unspoken, rules on how to construct a sermon, or what it should include in order to be called a sermon. Harris (2013) states that the purpose of preaching is to communicate biblical truths. Therefore it is logical to assume that a sermon should include Scriptures, the meanings of which are often explained or gone through during the sermon.

Discourse analysis suggests that the actual meaning of the words is understood through the context they are uttered in (Saaranen-Kauppinen et al. 2006). This means that in order to understand pastor Joel Osteen's words in an effective way, one needs to have an idea of the context the words are spoken in. This is why the background section of the study concentrated mainly on explaining different Christian teachings, ideas as well as the core cultural aspects so that the reader might have a better idea of the socio-cultural context the sermons are delivered in. This also explains why the reader also needs knowledge on the three main American values, which were also explained in the background section. In order to be able to reflect the Christian teachings with the American values, one naturally needs to know what these values are.

In a more specific sense I conducted a rhetorical analysis, in which I applied the principles of rhetoric in order to explore the interactions between the sermon, the author and the audience. In practice this means that the sermons were read thoroughly, and during the process I underlined those pieces of speech that reflected the use of a rhetorical device. The different devices

were initially colour coded, after which they were rewritten on a separate document for further categorizing and specification. These prominent devices which stood out in the process were repetition, figures of speech, the use of personal pronouns in making the audience feel more involved combined with different ways of giving advice, and the cultural aspect. This categorizing answered the first research question of what the most prominent rhetorical devices in Osteen's sermons are and how he uses them.

Next I will explain briefly my main reasons in regard to why these specific categories were chosen. Repetition was a clear choice of analysis, because as I listened to Osteen's sermons it was the first device that caught my attention. As pastors, preachers are often expected to command or give advice to one's congregation, so this too was an obvious aspect of study. But the idea to connect pronouns with advice came only as I began the analysis and realized how intertwined these aspect are, and what kind of an impact the choice of the pronouns used in giving advice has on how one might receive the command. When it comes to figures of speech, I wanted to see if Osteen uses these more commonly known basic rhetorical devices such as personification or alliteration, and if he does, how does he use them and how frequently.

## **5 THE FINDINGS**

The analysis focuses on describing four rhetorical devices that the famous ‘smiling pastor’ Joel Osteen employs in his sermons: 1) repetition, 2) figures of speech and 3) personal pronouns together with 4) advice (chapter 5.1). I chose to discuss pronouns and advice together because in many cases the advice Osteen gives are linked to the pronouns he uses.

In addition to these devices this study also takes a look at how the three cultural values of the US, individualism, self-help and materialism and their corresponding Christian doctrines: self-help, positive confession and prosperity gospel, appear in Osteen’s sermons (chapter 5.2). Furthermore this section also discusses what the role of US culture and values is within Osteen’s message of persuasion through the doctrines mentioned above.

### **5.1 The Rhetorical Devices used in Osteen’s sermons**

The section at hand discusses in detail the four rhetorical devices mentioned above, which have further been narrowed down into smaller segments. Repetition is looked at from four points of view: the rule of three, similar semantic field, antonyms and repetition of chunks of four or more. Figures of speech, on the other hand, encompasses five different devices: similes, metaphors, alliterations, hyperboles and personifications. The last section of pronouns and giving advice goes through Osteen’s sermons through four pronouns: we, they, you and I.

#### **5.1.1 Repetition**

The three key points of effective oral communication listed by Beebe et al. (2012:119, 221, 223) are memorable word structures, effective word use, and the ability to adapt one’s language style to diverse listeners. These three characteristics seem to be encompassed in Osteen’s use of repetition. Repetition is by far one of the most prominent rhetorical devices Osteen uses, and the items repeated happen in different levels: in lexicon,

grammatical sentence structures and in speech acts. Speech acts are divided into five different categories: assertive, commissives, directives, declaratives, and expressives (Johannesson et al.1996). Assertives convey information from the speaker to another. For example: “It is raining” is an assertive speech act. A commissive speech act suggests that the speaker commits to carry out some action or bring about some state of affairs: “I promise I will be back at nine o’clock.” Directives on the other hand are the opposite of commissives, where the speaker requests the hearer to carry out some action or bring about some state of affairs; an example of this is “Please close the window.” In a declarative speech act the speaker brings about some state of affairs by just performing the speech act itself. For example “I hereby pronounce you man and wife” is a declarative speech act. Lastly the purpose of an expressive speech act is to express the speaker’s attitude about some state of affairs, an example of such is “I like cats” (Johannesson et al. 1996).

Roughly it can be said that Osteen’s use of repetition can be divided into the following four categories: 1) the rule of three, 2) synonyms, 3) opposites and 4) repetition of chunks of words or phrases of four or more. Each of these categories will be explored in detail in the following by describing what is meant by them, how Osteen uses these categories, and what their implications are in persuasion.

### *The Rule of Three*

The biggest category of repetition is by far the rule of three -category, which overlaps with the other three categories. The rule of three declares that “concepts or ideas presented in threes are inherently more interesting, more enjoyable and more memorable” (Marshall 2013). Also it is claimed that things that come in threes are more persuasive (Mawter 2013). Interestingly it should be noted that the rule of three does not necessarily mean that something is repeated thrice. The three items can also be different words or phrases (see section on *Synonyms* below). What is more, it is believed that humans often process information by using patterns (Mawter 2013). Although seven items have been regarded as a number that one can retain in

one's short-term memory, contemporary scientists have realized that the items one can easily recall is closer to three or four chunks of information (Gallo 2012). Three is also the smallest number of elements that are required to create a pattern (Mawter 2013). In other words, if the speaker wants to leave the audience with something, it is best he divides it into three items, as being brief and having patterns makes the content more memorable (ibid.). After all, longer lists are "complex, confusing and convoluted" (Gallo 2012).

Considering that this is a study on a Christian preacher it is good to note that the number three has symbolic value in many cultures (Cleveland n.d.). If Christianity is taken as an example, one can find the three persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, in the trinity. It has even been suggested that this subconscious reference to Christianity the rule of three has would have a higher impact on people with religious backgrounds (ibid.).

It is said that the goal of repeating something thrice is to create a rhythm so that one can plant suggestions (Cleveland n.d.). Chunking ideas and concepts into threes inevitably creates patterns, rhythm and pace. In other words, repetition can give a sentence rhythm and beat, which in turn can make it catchy and memorable, and thus make the message more persuasive. When it comes to rhythm in Osteen's sermons, he uses structures where the rhythm is evident. Osteen says:

(1) Here's a challenge, whatever you do, *get better at it*. If you're a carpenter, *get better at it*. If you're a doctor, *get better at it*. If you're in sales, *get better at it*. (JO3, emphasis added)

In this example Osteen repeats the directive speech act "get better at it" three times creating rhythm. Even though one only reads this quotation one can still almost hear the Texan pastor lower the tones of his voice at the end of every cluster in the emphasized phrase creating a memorable rhythmic whole. The point of the exhortation given above is just that: an encouragement to be a better person even at work because, as Osteen claims

at the beginning of the same sermon: “God doesn’t bless mediocrity, he blesses excellence” (JO3).

A similar kind of a rhythmic whole is visible in the next quotation:

(2) Sometimes we have to say, God, I don’t feel like doing this, *but I’m gonna do it unto you*. God, I don’t agree on what my boss is telling me, *but I’m gonna do it unto you*. I didn’t make the mess, I shouldn’t have to clean it up, *but I’m gonna do it unto you*. (JO3, emphasis added)

Here Osteen repeats the constructed phrase “but I’m gonna do it unto you” (JO3), but the repetition is not only for rhythm, but also for added emphasis. Clearly the megachurch pastor wants to get his point of helping others sacrificially across, and one way to do so is to change the different general situations that might come across in life, in which one might use this repeated principle of doing something, not to ourselves, but unto God.

The rule of three is a simple and effective method of persuasion. In the following example the item repeated is a directive speech act of encouragement:

(3) Now don’t settle where you are. *Keep going, keep growing, keep making a difference*. (JO7, emphasis added)

If this quote was to say: “Go, grow and make a difference” although chunked in three, it would not have the desired effect. The repetition of the word ‘keep’ not only brings a beat to the message, but it also implies that the congregation is already doing these required actions: going, growing and making a difference. This in turn does not then feel like a direct and demanding command towards the listeners, but rather an encouragement as it recognizes the good the listeners are already doing. A similar kind of a structure is visible when Osteen says: “You can be happy, you can cheer up, you can enjoy your life” (JO2). A simple set of three repeating the words “you can”, which gives emphasis to the listeners’ own ability. When the audience walks out of the church after hearing this message, they will probably remember the fact that they *can* be happy.



The rule of three can also be used to add a twist at the third element. This is often used in jokes, as a so called ‘punch line’. In other words “the first two items in the triplet set the pattern (the "straight" line) and the third item breaks the pattern (the curve/the twist/the derailment). Breaking the pattern heightens the tension and creates the surprise, usually resulting in laughter” (Kinde 2006). Although Osteen is not a stand-up comedian that would need or use punch lines, there are cases in his use of repetition in which he applies this type of repetition where the third item is the odd one out:

(4) Instead of looking at what’s wrong, start thanking God on what’s right. Instead of complaining about what you don’t have, start thanking God on what you do have. Instead of dwelling on how far you’ve gotta go, take a look back and thank God on how far He’s already brought you. (JO6)

In the example given above Osteen has a similar sentence structure in the first two items: “Instead of...start...”. But when it comes to the third item, although it also begins with the word “instead”, it continues with a more elaborate command as it continues the advice with “and thank God on how far He’s already brought you”. In a way one could say the third line summarizes the other two, and brings that section to a neat close. Another example of such a third line method is when Osteen says:

(5) I’m gonna help my co-worker finish their project. I’m gonna organize these files for another colleague. I’m gonna keep giving it my best, because I’m working under God. (JO3)

In this quote Osteen repeats the beginning of the sentence structure: “I’m gonna”, and then summarizes the lesson he wants to give within that third line: “I’m working under God”. Thus he gives his audience the reason why one would think and act the way he describes in the previous two items.

Altogether it is evident that Osteen, with many great men before him, is a fond user of the rule of three within his sermons especially when it comes to repetition. This type of chunking items into threes makes it easier for the audience to recall the items in their memory. Furthermore, another aspect which might make the items easier to retain is the fact that often this type of chunking creates rhythm, pace and patterns into the message thus making it more memorable, and thereby more persuasive.

## *Synonyms*

The second category which stands out from the sermons is a similar semantic field. Semantic field can refer to a set of words which are related in their meaning (Nordquist 2014) or it can be defined as “a set of lexemes which cover a certain conceptual domain and which bear certain specifiable relations to one another” (Adrienne Lehrer 1985, as quoted by Nordquist 2014). Nordquist (2014) continues that fields are often defined by subject matter, such as foods or colours for example.

In this section the term ‘semantic field’ is used to refer to the repetition of an idea, instead of repeating the same words. A repetition of a similar idea is thus a wider concept than a repetition of words in the same field. For example one could say that a banana and an apple are two words from the same field (fruits), but Osteen’s example (6) portrays well the repetition of an idea from the same semantic field. This example conveys the same idea, but with different wording.

(6) If you’re not growing, you’re at a disadvantage. If you’re at the same skill-level as you are five years from now, then you are falling behind. (JO3)

In a way one could say that such repetition is synonymous, although the term synonym is narrower than the concept of the same semantic field. Nevertheless in this section when referring to the concept that the words, phrases or ideas belong to the same semantic field I will refer to them as ‘synonyms’ or ‘synonymous’.

The function of a synonymous repetition is the same as the function of repetition: emphasis. But repeating something with a different wording is a more elaborate, expressive and memorable way of doing so. For example, Osteen often says a thought, word, or structure after which he adds another item or even a few other items which emphasise, clarify and repeat the first item. An example of such a repetitious structure is the following:

(7) Even with that slingshot, when he slung that stone, that defeated Goliath; that was not an accident. That wasn't a lucky break. (JO3)

As an 'accident' and a 'lucky break' are used to denote a similar line of thought, Osteen emphasizes that David killing Goliath was not good luck, but rather it was pure talent. In order to be able to convey this point, Osteen uses synonymous repetition to emphasize that David was very talented in using his slingshot. Another example where Osteen uses this type of a structure is found in the same sermon in the example already mentioned:

(6) If you're not growing, you're at a disadvantage. If you're at the same skill-level as you are five years from now, then you are falling behind. (JO3)

In this example Osteen tries to highlight the thought and idea that if you are not going forward, you must be going backward. In these two cases the repetition of that same idea with a different wording is very clear. This gives the audience time to absorb that same fundamental meaning because they hear it again.

The following example is quite interesting because in addition to repeating the same idea, it also applies the rule of three as well as a longer list of repetition:

(8) When you get up in the morning, no matter how you feel, you need to say: 'I'm getting thinner! This weight is coming off of me! I'm strong, healthy, energetic. (applauses) I have discipline and self-control. I look good. I feel good. I think good. I smell good (laughter). (JO4)

This excerpt has rhythm and beat. It begins with synonymous phrases: "I'm getting thinner! This weight is coming off of me!" after which comes the beat of three ("I'm strong, healthy, energetic") followed by another synonymous phrase of discipline and self-control. The excerpt is then finished off with a catchy set of four similar rhythmic and positive assertives: "I look good. I feel good. I think good. I smell good". If one takes a closer look at the excerpt, it is easy to realize that what he is saying is a matter of appealing to emotions rather than logic or reasoning. Another example of synonymous repetition is the following:

(9) See sometimes you have to give up winning so somebody else can win (applause). Sometimes you have to make sacrifices to let someone else get ahead. Sometimes you have to put your own dreams on hold temporarily so you can help release a dream in somebody else. (JO8)

In quote (9) Osteen chooses to give three examples to illustrate his point of being unselfish in order to help someone else. He does this by beginning all his three phrases with the same sentence structure, and although the end of the phrases is different, the message remains the same. This is what the same semantic field is about: it is the repetition of an idea. Here Osteen has combined the synonymous structure with the rule of three as he uses the wording 'sometimes you have to-' to create a repetitive chunk of threes. This makes the lesson given not only memorable, but also impressive and rhythmic.

Another example of synonymous repetition, which also includes the rule of three, is the following excerpt:

(10) But Joseph stands before you and says don't give up, [1] I've seen the faithfulness of God. I've seen God turn it around. [2] I've seen God vindicate me. I've seen God bring justice. [3] I'm a living witness. A testimony of God's goodness (applause). If God did it for me, he can do it for you. Joseph is cheering us on today (applause). (JO7)

The different wording of the same content might help some listeners to be able to grasp the underlying thought better. In the example given above Osteen repeats synonymously three ideas. First he says he has seen the faithfulness of God, and that he has seen God turn things around. These two ideas can be understood to be similar in their meaning. In other words Osteen says that because God is faithful, He can turn things around. Secondly Osteen continues to assert that he has seen God vindicate him, and he has seen God bring justice. If someone is vindicated, then from his point of view justice has happened, and thus these two phrase pairs are also synonymous. Lastly Osteen states that he is a living witness and a testimony of God's goodness, which essentially can be seen to mean the same thing. In this sense Osteen's three ideas: 1) God is faithful and can turn things around, 2) God can vindicating you and bring justice, and 3) being a living witness is being a testimony of God's goodness, which are repeated but with a different wording is a fine way to get his point across.

Repetition is the mother of all learning, or so it is said, and thus repeating the same idea in a different way makes the primary thought more memorable. Thus it can be understood that this type of synonymous repetition emphasizes the key idea by clarifying it and making it easier to comprehend.

Next, to illustrate Osteen's style of using grand, agreeable and pleasant words from the same positive semantic field, are the following quotes:

(11) No, your report should be: 'I am free, I am victorious, I am blessed, I am healthy, I am prosperous (applauses)'. (JO4)

(12) When we go around thinking: 'I'm well-able, I'm anointed, I'm equipped, I'm empowered,' your mind goes to work saying: 'let me make sure they're at the top of their game. I've gotta make sure their smart, they're intelligent, they're creative, they're strong, they're confident'. (JO4)

(13) The moment you speak it, the blessing releases Gods favour into their future. Just like you pull back a bow and shoot an arrow, you release wisdom, protection, favour, God's abundance. (JO5)

As repetition is a form of emphasis, repeating something with a different wording is a more elaborate, expressive and memorable way of doing so. The first two quotations have clear structures as Osteen chooses to repeat the words 'I', 'I'm' and 'they're' as an anchor to which he can hook other words for synonymous repetition. The common factor of the words he uses, which make them belong to the same semantic field, is that they are very inspiring, positive, encouraging, and yet vague. Apparently, though, his words get to his listeners because not only do the congregation applaud for him, but Osteen cultivates these kinds of motivational declarations often in his sermons proclaiming to his congregation who they are in God, or what they have in Him through these types of positive words.

### *Antonyms*

The third category of repetition is 'antonyms'. The word antonym is defined in the Merriam-Webster dictionary as follows: "a word with a meaning that is opposite to the meaning of another word" (n.d.). The category 'antonyms' portray the use of repetition in different kinds of situations. In the most

common type Osteen repeats, something negative after which he turns it around and repeats something positive. An example of this is the following excerpt:

(14) And no, he didn't put condemnation. He didn't put low self-esteem. He didn't put fear and anxiety. He put a crown of favour. He put a robe of righteousness. He put a shield of faith (JO4).

Here Osteen highlights to the audience what was *not* put on in order to bring contrast to what then *was* put on instead. The repetition here is on the sentence structure of "he didn't put" and its contrastive pair of "he put". It should be noticed how the rule of three is also applied in this excerpt in both repetitional cases, and how it makes the declaration more powerful through the contrast of three.

A similar kind of a structure can be found in the same sermon, which follows the same structure as the example above. The only exception is that after the negative items have been repeated it has a short phrase to mark the beginning of something new:

(15) Don't send out anymore defeat. No more sickness. No more crazy hormones. This is a new day. Send out health. Send out healing. Send out strength, vitality, victory. You gotta get your command centre [brain] to send out the right instructions. (JO4)

Here Osteen uses a contrastive pair beginning with the negative structure of "No more" and then switching to the affirming side of "Send out." The phrase: "This is a new day," marks that what was said before has to be left behind, and what should be focused on are the items he lists after that phrase. It is visible in this quotation that Osteen's main emphasis is to make the audience feel good about themselves. If then the audience receive a good feeling from Osteen, it is likely that the emotion is the one they will remember when they leave the church to go home. It is also likely that the same positive emotion contributes to the fact that they come to hear Osteen preach the next Sunday or they tune in via the media time after time. After all, Stiff et al. (2003:146) state that certain emotions bring about certain behavioural responses, and if positive emotions can generate the behavioural response of attending Osteen's church, or even donating some

money to it, then surely evoking such emotions are worth the trouble for Osteen.

As was seen earlier with how Osteen combines the rule of three with synonyms, this also happens in other categories. In the next excerpt Osteen combines the use of synonyms with antonyms:

(16) I've never seen a little child holding a grudge. Never seen a toddler walking around with bitterness and unforgiveness. Never seen a 4-year-old worried about his future; thinking that his not gonna make it. No. Children are happy. They enjoy the simple things in life. They forgive quickly. They are excited about each day. (JO2)

Osteen begins his example by drawing parallels between holding a grudge and being bitter, which is the synonymous part of the phrase. He does this by connecting the synonymous items with the repetition of "never seen". The middle part of the structure is meant to stop the line of thought and turn it around to create a contrast. Osteen uses a simple "No," after which comes the positive side of the story. It is interesting to note that usually when Osteen uses antonyms, the first items of the structure are used to create an atmosphere of something undesirable, that deals with emotions, characteristics or situations. The second items of the structure are positive ones, and are used to create a vast contrast to the first items. In this way the positive qualities of the second set of elements appear even more desirable and bright than they would have without this contrast being made.

Another interesting aspect to note is that when Osteen uses a structure with antonyms, often there is a word or a phrase in between to mark the upcoming contrast. In the example above the part is "no" as it is also in the excerpt below from JO7:

(17) Nobody is throwing popcorn at you. Nobody's heckling you. No, these people are 100% for you. They think you're amazing, they know you've got what it takes. They are standing up right now cheering you on. (JO7)

This example begins with the comforting repeated note that nobody is out to get you. Notice how this pair is constructed as a negative, by using the word 'nobody'. The example ends with assertive speech acts of encouragement, which do not have a negative word (no-) in them, and thus are constructed

as positive. Osteen separates these two sets from one another to create a turn of air from negative to positive. Thus it can be said that sometimes it benefits to create a phrase in between the antonyms because it signals to the listeners the upcoming change. This does not always have to be the case, though, as the example below shows:

(18) But instead he [Abraham] chose to believe what God said about him. Even though it looked impossible, his attitude was: ‘God if you say I’m a father, I’m not gonna question it; I’m not gonna worry about it; I’m not gonna try to figure it out; I’m just gonna come into agreement with you [God]. Twenty years later, at the age of a hundred, he had that child. (JO4)

Here Osteen begins by paraphrasing the same idea from the story of Abraham three times. The bottom line of what Osteen wants to say is that Abraham believed God’s promise for a child. However, in order to emphasize that, Osteen does not say it in such simple terms, but instead he says what Abraham did *not* do so that what he *did* do would be highlighted. Osteen also uses all the three different categories, the rule of three, synonyms and antonyms, to bring his point across. He begins by using the rule of three by paraphrasing his first item thrice through a negative aspect (same semantic field and the rule of three): “I’m not gonna question it...worry about it... [or] try to figure it out” (JO4). Then he brings in the contrast (antonym) by proclaiming to the congregation what Abraham is going to do instead: “I’m just gonna come into agreement with you [God]”. This motivates the listeners to agree, and think that they too should not hesitate but also come into agreement with God as Abraham did.

In other words, Osteen chooses to accentuate certain features of his message by using contrast as a means to bring forth the desirable qualities, aspects or characteristics of whatever he is advocating for. In order to do so, often the negative items are placed first, followed by the positive items. He does this in order to leave the audience lingering in the more positive characteristics. Also often, but not always, Osteen uses a word or a phrase to mark the shift in the structure. This signals to the congregation to leave behind the unfavourable items and focus on what he is about to tell them next.



### *Repetition of Chunks of four or more*

The last category to be discussed is the repetition of chunks of four or more, which is the smallest of the categories because many rules that apply to the previous three categories, apply to this one as well.

(19) Well how do you tap in, into what God has already done? It's very simple, just start acting like you're blessed, talking like you're blessed, walking like you're blessed, thinking like you're blessed, smiling like you're blessed, dressing like you're blessed. (JO4)

In this excerpt Osteen reminds the congregation of how to receive God's blessings, and that he truly desires them to remember it. As one looks at the quotation it is clear that Osteen does not intend to argue his case with facts, but he rather wills to use the indirect route of persuasion and create a pleasant atmosphere of positive items presented in a memorable, and almost in a poetical way. This excerpt is also very rhythmical, and having the rhythm combined with repetition the commands given do not seem harsh at all. Also what is worth noting is that it is only the verb which is substituted with a different one leaving the rest of the phrase remaining the same, so the repetition is on the level of the sentence structure: "...like you're blessed". This implies to the listener that whatever one does, one should do it believing that one is already blessed.

All this said, repetition creates rhythm, beat and interesting word structures. It can be used in multiple ways, either by repeating words, phrases or even just an idea. Yet, whether repetition comes in threes, synonyms, or opposites, they all have one thing in common, and that is making the idea presented more enjoyable, interesting and most of all memorable. It has to be said that even if the message itself was to be forgotten, there is one thing which stays with the listeners regardless, and that is the emotion, the positive feeling the message has granted them. The emotion in itself can be enough to persuade the listener to want more of Osteen.

### 5.1.2 Figures of Speech

A figure of speech is a form of expression which is used to “convey meaning or heighten effect, often by comparing or identifying one thing with another that has a meaning or connotation familiar to the reader or listener” (Merriam-Webster 2014). In other words these devices are used to “add colour, decoration and imaginative expression to linguistic use”, and they also distinguish language use from literal to imaginative (Johnson 2003). Common figures of speech are, for example, similes, metaphors, alliterations, and hyperboles (ibid.). Examples of all four of these rhetorical devices can be found in Osteen’s sermons, although his use of figures of speech is clearly scarcer than his abundant use of repetition. It seems as though out of the figures of speech category, Osteen uses the most similes, metaphors and alliterations, while it seems that alliterations and hyperboles are not his cup of tea. The reason why these four devices are analysed regardless of their scarcity, is to gain a wider scope of the methods Osteen uses to persuade his listeners. Also regardless of the frequency of the devices used, each device can give a new angle on Osteen’s use of persuasion, as well as his use of diverse language. Overall, the function of these four devices in Osteen’s sermons is similar to one another: persuading the audience by vivifying the text. These four devices are explained in a concise manner one after the other, together with illustrative examples from Osteen’s sermons.

#### *Similes*

In order to enrich a comparison or to make it livelier, one can use a simile. A simile connects two different items by showing how they are alike (Terba 1993:10). A simile points towards a quality or a characteristic (colour, shape, movement, action, emotion etc.) which the two different elements have in common. Besides these qualities, the most prominent feature of a simile is that it always contains the word ‘*like*’ or ‘*as*’ (ibid.).

Osteen’s use of similes is few and far between, especially in comparison to his use of repetition, which is abundant. However when he uses similes,

they seem to have multiple functions. In addition to comparing two items to one another (example 20 and 21), similes can illustrate facts (example 22), or draw analogies between two elements (example 23) so that the audience might find the illustration easier to understand. Also similes can function in different contexts, in Osteen's case he also uses similes in a religious context by quoting scripture (example 24) or by comparing people to Biblical characters (example 25).

In the following examples the smiling pastor brings to life sections of his example stories by creating lively similes:

(20) She carried herself like a queen. (JO1)

(21) They go to church like they go to God's funeral. (JO2)

These examples are from two different sermons. In the first sermon, Osteen describes a young lady who "on the surface [...] wasn't very attractive" but who still knew her worth as the "image of the almighty God", and thus was able to carry herself in the honourable manner described. Osteen's use of an exaggerated simile describes expressively the contrast between the lady's looks and the way she is viewed. In the second quote Osteen speaks about how the congregation as Christians should be overflowing with joy instead of going around with such long faces (JO2). To activate the listeners' imagination Osteen draws a simile of how some Christian people attend Church service: "like they go to God's funeral". This simile paints a vivid and humorous picture of such congregation members who wear long, sad faces. In the case of similes humour is a good and indirect way of connecting with the audience and getting one's point across in a more memorable way.

In the next example humour is used to make a point, while in the second excerpt the function of the comparison is to illustrate the point.

(22) A camel after a long day's walk can drink thirty gallons of water. They're like an SUV<sup>2</sup> (laughter). (JO3)

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<sup>2</sup> SUV is an abbreviation for "Sport Utility Vehicle" which is a "large vehicle that is designed to be used on rough surfaces but that is often used on city roads or highways" (Merriam-Webster 2014).

(23) Our mind is like a computer: what you put in, will come out. (JO4)

In addition to enliven his example stories with similes, Osteen also uses them to explain and illustrate supposed facts, and to draw analogies between whatever two chosen elements so the listeners might gain better understanding of the taught topic. Examples (22) and (23) both draw a parallel between two elements: the first with a camel and an SUV, and the second with our mind and a computer. The first example is a humorous one, where Osteen is in the middle of describing how the Biblical character Rebecca went down the well to get some water for Isaac's camels on the day of their meeting. This, according to Osteen, was not a simple task considering there were ten camels all of which drank like SUVs, which points to the extent of trouble Rebecca willingly went through to please Isaac. Also this illustration of the consumption of an SUV refers to something to which contemporary people can relate. Again, by using humour Osteen is able to make a memorable point of this sacrificial unselfishness which later resulted in the couple's marriage.

The second example is a comparison which Osteen presents at the very beginning, and then later utilizes it throughout his whole sermon. When Osteen compares our mind to a computer, it makes it easier to continue this analogue by using other kinds of illustrative examples; such as reprogramming one's mind, or the mind tilting in result of something (JO4). These kinds of imaginative comparisons aid the listener to grasp the core message.

The next two examples portray the use of similes in a more religious context:

(24) God is renewing my youth like the eagle's. (JO4)

(25) You gotta be bold like Abraham. (JO4)

The first quote is actually referring to the Psalm 103:5, which Osteen paraphrases and turns the pronoun 'thy' to 'my'. The actual quote from of

the psalm in KJV<sup>3</sup> is: “So that thy youth is renewed like the eagle’s”. In the second quote Osteen encourages his listeners by comparing their courage to that of Abraham’s. The analogue between the listener and Abraham is that like Abraham people cannot always see or receive straight away what God has promised them. This, though, does not mean that the promise will not come to pass. This analogue is drawn from the Bible from God promising Abraham a son to inherit him, and later Abraham becoming a father of many nations when Abraham and his wife were already old and past their fruitful years (JO4). Nevertheless Abraham did get a son: Isaac. Comparing the church goer to Abraham sends a message of hope to people. This simile is encouraging people to continue believing and trusting God, even in impossible situations, as conceiving Isaac at a very old age was for Abraham.

### *Metaphors*

The difference between a simile and a metaphor is that although both of them are comparisons between things, a metaphor does not contain the word ‘like’ or ‘as’ in it (Terba 1993:17). This means that the comparison between the two things is hidden rather than being explicit as it is in similes. In the following examples Osteen uses metaphors for three functions: to encourage his congregation, to illustrate a point, and to support his views by referring to a Biblical metaphor.

As an introduction before stating his metaphor, Osteen explains how it is stated in a study that “happiness increased 10% on Fridays” (JO2). Osteen then continues this thought by explaining how people are excited about the upcoming weekend and how that is why they have decided to be happier on Fridays (ibid.). After this introduction Osteen encourages his congregation:

(26) My challenge to all of us today, is to let every day be a Friday (JO2)

In this example, the metaphor functions as an encouragement. Osteen implies that as people are in charge of their own happiness, they themselves

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<sup>3</sup> King James Version of the Bible

can decide to be happy and enjoy life every day, not only on Fridays. Before making that statement Osteen makes sure the listeners know what Friday implies: happiness, freedom and an enjoyable day expecting for the upcoming weekend. So every day being a Friday suggests that every day should be a day of happiness and enjoying life. What is also worth noting in this metaphor is the threefold repetition of the stem 'day', which gives an added rhythm to the metaphor.

Another quite clear metaphor is a continuation of the simile of our minds being like computers:

(27) When we go dwelling on these negative, defeated thoughts we are sending poison down through our system. We are telling our command centre, our mind, this incredible tool God has given us, to release defeat, failure, mediocrity. (JO4)

The megachurch pastor extends this comparison by illustrating how our negative thoughts can be poison to us, like a virus which goes into our command centre. It seems as though Osteen does not take risks on being misunderstood, which is why he makes sure this metaphor, although clear, is opened, explained and elaborated on. Osteen takes time in the middle of his metaphor to remind his audience what the command centre refers to: our mind.

In JO3, Osteen tries to teach his congregation about how the small things people do, whether good or bad, matter. He explains how being excellent in the workplace does not mean doing huge adjustments, but rather it means being faithful in the small things. In order to make his point, Osteen verbalizes a line of thought many people might face when it comes to contemplating on doing something small which we are not supposed to do. This can be being late from work, complaining to the supervisor or making personal phone calls on company time (JO3). Osteen takes the role of a tempter and says: "Just a small thing, nobody would know. It's not hurting anything" (JO3) after which he switches back to his role as a model citizen and quotes the scripture:

(28) It's the little foxes that spoil the vines. (JO3)

It is interesting to notice that the pastor does not take time to open the scripture passage in detail but it seems as though he expects the congregation to know how to connect the dots with this passage from the Bible. The one statement to open this passage earned Osteen applause:

Technically I could get away with it. But here's what I've learnt: I don't want something small to keep God from releasing something big. I don't want a little thing to keep me from becoming everything that God's created me to be (applause).  
(JO3)

The little foxes are the small things we neglect, but these little foxes can then spoil our crop of vines, and thus the foxes, although small, should be dealt with.

As metaphors are not as explicit as similes, it becomes evident that if the speaker desires to avoid misunderstandings he needs to create an introduction to the metaphor, then state the metaphor after which he needs to open it so that everyone in the audience understands what is meant by it. This can be a long process and maybe even frustrating at times, which might be the reason why Osteen more often states how things are in plain language, rather than by making metaphors.

### *Alliterations*

Alliteration occurs when two or more words are put together, which begin with the same sound (Terba 1993:33). This means that the initial letter of the words does not have to be the same in alliteration. Examples of this are for example the words 'candy kitchen' or 'funny phone', which are alliterations although they begin with a different letter (ibid.). The reason why alliterations are used is that they are fun to say and easy to remember. This is also why many products or children's characters are alliterated; e.g. Coca Cola or Mickey Mouse (Terba 1993:34).

In Osteen's eight sermons only a few alliterations are found, and their functions are also hard to pinpoint. Some alliterations Osteen uses are in a list, in an idiom or as a regular word pair for added emphasis. The following

three excerpts from Osteen's sermons exemplify the use of alliterations in lists:

(29) It was like the words from this five-year-old big brother were releasing health and healing and wholeness into his baby sister. (JO5)

(30) You will be healthy, whole and strong. (JO5)

(31) Send out health, send out healing, send out strength, vitality, victory (JO4)

The examples are very similar to each other. The first example has three words, 'health', 'healing', and 'wholeness', which all have the same initial sound, the second combines 'healthy' and 'whole'; while the third example has two pairs of different alliterations: 'health' and 'healing', and 'vitality' and 'victory'. Health and healing having the same stem are easy to combine together as a memorable duo of a blessing. 'Vitality' is an interesting word, as it can be said that it is synonymous with the word 'strength', 'energy' or 'spirit' (Thesaurus.com 2014). This in turn suggests that Osteen having already listed 'strength' he chose to pair 'victory' with a word with a meaning close to the one he had already listed. This results in added emphasis and also makes the list more memorable.

In addition to lists, alliterations are also found in an idiomatic expression Osteen uses, and also in a normal word pair for emphasis:

(32) It's very easy to get complacent, to lose your enthusiasm, start slacking off, start cutting corners (JO3)

(33) They were not a part of your divine destiny (JO7)

In these examples of alliterations, Osteen uses an idiomatic expression: "to cut corners". This expression, when we look at the example more carefully, is a synonymous repetition of "slacking off". So in this sense again Osteen is highlighting that negative aspect by repeating what is said in the form of alliteration. Example (33) sounds quite dramatic. Earlier in the sermon Osteen speaks about being betrayed by other people, and he continues to console his congregation by stating that people should not be heartbroken or even dwelling in their self-pity over the fact. Instead Osteen advises them to realize that those people who walked out on them, are "not a part of their divine destiny" (JO7). Divine destiny being such strong and impressive



words, they help carry the message through in a memorable and comforting manner.

### *Hyperboles*

The word ‘hyperbole’ comes from the Greek language, and means ‘excess’ or anything that goes beyond normal, believable limits (Terba 1993:41). In other words, a hyperbole is used when one uses a “very big, extravagant, unbelievable exaggeration to express” oneself (ibid.). Usually hyperboles are cultivated so that the idea or situation is described in a way which is surprising, dramatic or humorous (Terba 1993:42). The audience knows not to take such hyperboles seriously, because they are aware that the exaggeration is made to get the point across in a more striking manner (ibid.), as the following example demonstrates.

(36) I know people who haven’t smiled in six months. They haven’t laughed in six years. (JO2)

The example was the only clear hyperbole that was found in Osteen’s sermons. In it Osteen is explaining how toxic it is for people to not think positive, and how many people are sullen and negative (JO2). To emphasize his point Osteen illustrates an outrageous exaggeration of people who do not smile or laugh from several months to several years. This is a humorous way to make the audience realize that such people do exist, who act in negative ways.

### **5.1.3 Pronouns and Advice Intertwined**

The clever use of personal pronouns make the message feel more personal and the audience feel more involved in the matter. The more involved the audience feels, the more likely it is that they will think the matter through and change their attitudes towards the matter discussed (Simons 2001:35). Pronouns also play a huge role on how one’s advice is given and received. In contrast to telling straight out what ‘you’ should do, one can swiftly package the advice in a more milder form by telling what ‘I’ do, or how ‘we’ should do it together. A good way of instructing people is also to show

how wrong ‘they’, as referring to a group outside of ‘us’, did it, so the listeners can then avoid doing the same mistakes. In the following section special attention is given to the personal pronouns ‘we’, ‘they’, ‘you’ and ‘I’, and their use in Osteen’s sermons as well as the way advice has been given through these pronouns.

### *The Pronoun ‘we’*

By using the pronoun ‘we’ one is able create a sense of collectivity and a shared responsibility (Håkansson 2012:14). Mostly in Osteen’s sermons this pronoun was used for 1) giving advice, and 2) speaking about something in a general level. Using ‘we’ to give advice is a mild way of doing so, since it is not an accusing ‘you must do so’, and also because the ‘we’ encloses the ‘I’ in it so it thus suggests that the speaker encloses himself in the group who needs this advice as well.

In addition to ‘we’, Osteen uses the form ‘let us’, as the following examples display:

(39) Let’s make a decision to enjoy our life right now. (JO2)

(40) Let’s do like that roommate n [sic] be dream releasers. Let’s believe in people before they succeed. (JO8)

In these quotes Osteen indicates a sense of collectivity by expecting people to identify with ‘us’ and therefore heed to his advice. By saying “let’s” Osteen points out that he counts himself in the same group of ‘us’.

The advice Osteen gives through the use of ‘we’ is systematically encouraging:

(41) The truth is, *we* should glorify God more during the week than we do on Sundays. (JO3, emphasis added)

(42) That’s why *we* should get in the habit of speaking the blessing every chance we get. (JO5, emphasis added).

(43) *We* should be dwelling on thoughts like “I’m blessed, I’m talented, I’m strong, I’m creative, I’m more than a conqueror”. When you do that you’re gonna draw in the good things of God. (JO4, emphasis added)

(44) *We* should have the attitude: ‘what can I do for them? How can I help them come up higher? Can I teach them something I know? Can I connect them with a colleague of mine’. (JO8, emphasis added)

These examples show the ease of giving advice through the pronoun ‘we’. There is no singling out anyone and thus no condemnation, but only encouragement through what ‘we’ could do as a congregation. Notice also, that Osteen does not say “all should do” or “everyone should”, not even “every one of you should”, but he chooses to say “we”. ‘All’ and ‘everyone’ are not personal in their meaning, and thus these words do not create a sense of collectiveness similarly as ‘we’ does. Also by adding ‘you’ in the sentence (e.g. ‘all of you’, ‘everyone of you’) does not achieve the wanted persuasion, because although the meaning regains its personal touch, it is the wrong kind of, demanding, personal touch. One reason why the example above sounds demanding might be that by saying ‘all of you’ the speaker excludes himself from the one needing this advice, and gives the advice to the crowd as though he himself would not need to adhere to it. If one excludes himself from the group who needs advice it might seem to others that one elevates oneself above them. This in turn might mean that although the advice itself might be good and even maybe positive, it might be harder to receive from someone who is perceived as regarding others to be beneath him. This, then, sheds light to why Osteen has chosen to use the pronoun ‘we’ when giving advice.

When regarding the general level of speaking about things also such statements have their persuasive value, as quote (45) exemplifies:

(45) Sometimes we lose perspective and life can be routine. (JO6)

This type of a general comment has a touch of sympathy in it. The sympathy comes from the fact that he generalizes this kind of a negative way of thinking into something ‘we’ do in opposed to something only ‘you’ do. This means that he includes himself in the picture, which brings him closer to his congregation. Now his listeners can perceive him as human and as someone who admits to making mistakes himself, instead of a perfect preacher who is elevated on a pedestal and thus never makes mistakes. This

quality of being only human will most likely make the listeners perceive his commands and advice as something they too can achieve; as something which is not only achievable for the perfect people.

### *The Pronoun 'they'*

When it comes to the pronoun 'they' I chose to analyze two ways how it was used: to exemplify a group of people who 1) act in a good, correct and pursuable way, or act in a bad, wrong and unwanted way, and 2) to whom Osteen wants to show sympathy. The third group which was left out is its use to refer to a specific group of people in his illustrative stories (e.g. a certain family, a classroom of children etc.). The reason why the third group was left out is that in it the pronoun 'they' is used in a narrative way instead of using it to create contrast or persuasion in the sense I am analyzing it in this chapter.

The pronoun 'they' stands for those who are not we, and it is used to form an oppositional relationship between the speaker and others often with negativity towards the others (Håkansson 2012:17). An example of the positive use of 'they' is when Osteen says

(46) You've been around *those* people before; *they're* so enthusiastic, happy, and full of faith. (JO2, emphasis added)

This comment draws the listener in to relate to his example. By saying "You've been around those people before" (emphasis added) Osteen makes an assumption that the audience know what he is talking about, and that everyone in it can relate with an encounter with such a positive person. In addition to this assumption, the positive usage of the pronoun 'they' gives an image to the listeners that it is possible for them to attain those desired qualities since such people apparently exist. A similar kind of a pattern is vivid in the next example:

(47) Because you can take a positive, happy, faith filled person and put them in negative circumstances and they're still gonna be positive, happy, faith filled they're gonna find the good. They're not gonna be complaining. They're gonna say "God is

gonna turn this around. I'm a victor and not a victim." It's because their heart is right. It's filled with faith, with hope, with gratitude. (JO2)

It is also easy and safe to draw a positive example of a fictitious 'they' who the audience can relate to without having to have to feel jealousy, insecurity or inferiority towards the person or people group in the example.

Interestingly enough, it appears as though the pronoun 'they' is used more to denote a group of people whose behaviour is unwanted than the other way around as Håkansson (2012:17) suggests. Furthermore, often in Osteen's sermons it is implied that the people, to whom the sermon is addressed, is by no means the same people group who have these negative qualities. This also goes hand in hand with Håkansson's notion that 'they' point to those who are not 'we', and the following example illustrates Osteen's use of this:

(48) I know people that can quote half the Bible. They can pray two hours a day, but they have no influence, no credibility, because they're sloppy in the workplace. They're always late; always wasting time; they're not productive; they're not efficient; no one will even listen to them. (JO3)

In this example Osteen speaks about a people group of 'them' who act in an unwanted way. As becomes evident from this excerpt, it is easy to assume that the people group Osteen is talking about is not the same people group he is preaching to, or this is what he is assuming. This type of a pattern boosts the ego of the audience and invokes a sense of belonging to this particular group of people who do the right thing. This is because the congregation is grouped in the positive in-group of 'us' who do not behave as the negative out-group of 'them'. This thus gives the audience the feeling that the people Osteen is talking about is indeed someone else and not them, and thus makes it quite easy to shout "amen" and agree with the preacher.

Many wives probably know from personal experience that surprisingly their husbands do not change even though the wives are helpfully reminding them what they are doing wrong. Osteen is also aware of the notion that it is often more difficult to change one's behaviour due to someone constantly

telling them what mistakes they are doing. This is why he has adopted another approach, namely encouraging his listeners, believing in them and telling them how wonderful they are (Olson 2005). This is probably one of the reasons why Osteen chooses to exemplify most of the negative aspects of his sermons through this anonymous group of ‘them’ rather than pointing blamingly to ‘you’.

A term that Osteen often uses in his sermons, which has the same function and thus is sometimes used synonymously as the personal pronoun ‘they’, is ‘some other people’ or ‘too many people’. Osteen states:

(49) *some people* have wasted year after year living unhappy... I know people who are perfectly healthy, but they are never really happy. (JO2, emphasis added)

(50) *Too many people*, like Job, they’ve had unfair things happen (and) now they’re sitting around. They’ve lost their joy; lost their enthusiasm. (JO7, emphasis added)

These types of statements are ways to make general comments without hurting anyone among the listeners, but still being able to get the point across. ‘Some people’ hints that although there are such people, they are scarce; whereas ‘too many people’ has a sympathetic undertone to it, as it supposes that the amount is too high for the preacher’s liking.

The main lesson Osteen probably tries to teach with the group of ‘them’ is in JO5 when he says: “Don’t let that be you”. In other words, Osteen is saying that there are people who act in this unwanted way, but the members of the congregation are not, and should not be that people.

#### *The Pronoun ‘you’*

The pronoun ‘you’ is usually used to refer to the person(s) the speaker is speaking to (Håkansson 2012:12). I chose three main themes in Osteen’s sermons in which he uses the pronoun ‘you’: 1) showing sympathy to the congregation by making general assumptions, 2) encouraging and making promises to the listeners, and 3) giving advice.

The first category portrays a way for Osteen to connect and sympathize with his audience. By saying things such as:

(52) You may not be in the home you wanna be living in. (JO2)

(53) You may kinda [sic] feel (that) God's forsaken you. (JO7)

Osteen shows sympathy for his listeners as if he understands their possible hardships. This consequently makes the preacher seem amiable in the eyes of the congregation, and an amiable speaker might seem more trustworthy as a source of expertise on a topic, than someone less amiable; thus this makes his message easier to receive (Stiff et al. 2003:105).

The second group is categorized as exhortation, but the means of persuasion are very similar to the first group. The next quotation gives a good example of why Osteen's message can also be called a feel-good gospel:

(54) *You will fulfil your God-given destiny (applauses). You will have wisdom to make great decisions. You will live debt free. You will be healthy, whole, and strong. You will accomplish things that you never thought possible. You will see your whole family come into the kingdom. You will be free from every addiction and every bad habit. God is gonna take you places you've never even dreamt of.* (JO5, emphasis added)

In this excerpt there is a very strong emphasis, responsibility and role on the listeners, as they are the 'you' Osteen is speaking to. There are not many who would not want to hear such positive things declared over them. Having the preacher speak such words over the congregation might stir the audience's thoughts to the following direction: if someone thinks such positively about me, surely the rest of his message is worth listening to and his advice worth adhering to. Stiff et al. (2003:120) mention that when the speaker expresses values and opinions which are similar to the ones his audience holds, it makes him appear more credible. It is plausible that within his congregation there are many who could boldly shout "Amen!" and "I believe that!" to the Osteen's quote given above, and thus many see Osteen as a credible speaker, since they share a similar belief system.

Giving advice through the pronoun 'you' can be risky if one wants to avoid sounding blaming and accusing. Nevertheless it is partly a preacher's job to

give advice to his congregation on how to live a Christian life, so giving advice cannot be avoided. It seems as though Osteen has a great variety of ways of giving advice and commands that it is hard to categorize them. Most of the time, though, his advice seem to fit the category of how a motivational speaker would motivate his listeners into living their ‘Best Life Now’<sup>4</sup>. That is to say his advice has to do with this life, not the afterlife, and everything is also told intentionally so as to not beat the listeners over the head with condemnation (Olson 2005).

In an article on The Christian Post Osteen says he does try to give the people a moral template but in a positive way (Menzie 2013). Osteen continues by explaining that since there are so many things pushing people down nowadays he wants to be able to provide something that lifts people up (ibid.). In another article Osteen clarifies that “I am not here to tell everybody what they’re doing wrong” (Clark 2013). This attitude explains why his advice is structured as nice requests rather than brute commands, which can sound manipulative or coercive. Also the topics he chooses to give advice on are not of repentance from sin onto salvation, but rather about how to be happy and blessed in this life. Many of his advice almost sound like encouragement instead of commands. He says:

(55) Make a decision to enjoy your life, right now! (JO2)

(56) Why don’t you make up your mind to be happy every day. (JO2)

In regard to the first example, there is nothing wrong with enjoying your life, so it is very unlikely that someone might take offense. When one looks at the advice given in the second quote, not only is it given in a quite fatherly manner, but who can get offended by such an advice. Although the advice is given directly, to refuse it would mean refusing being happy if it was a possibility. Another approach to giving advice is through offering sympathy, and appealing to authority:

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<sup>4</sup> Osteen has written a book by the same title: “Your Best Life Now: 7 Steps to Living At Your Full Potential” (2004)



(57) You may not feel blessed today, feel confident, look healthy, or look favoured, but don't you dare drag through life with a poor-old-me-mentality, put your shoulders back, hold your head up high. (applauses) You are a child of the most high God. God has blessed you. You are highly favoured. You are strong, you are talented, you are redeemed. Not going to be, not maybe one day in the sweet by and by. No. God has already blessed you. He has already made you more than a conqueror. He's already given you that crown of favour. (JO4)

Osteen begins by showing that he can relate to the different situations people are going through, "you may feel". Then he tells his audience what they should do in spite of these conditions after which he appeals to God, "you are a child of the most high God", as an authority, and explains why they should do as he exhorts. Appealing to God and the Bible is very common among preachers. After all, the Bible should be, and is, the highest authority of Christians. Osteen also recognizes this as he states:

(58) The scripture says here in Colossians 3:23: "Whatever you do, do it with all your heart, as though you're working unto God, and not unto man. (JO3)

(59) You have to get a new perspective. You're not working for them, you're working under God (applauses). (JO3).

These types of commands are easy to give, because of the common authority among the Christians of Lakewood Church: the Bible. In other words if someone disagrees, they do not disagree with Osteen, but with God. This means that the disagreeing listeners do not have a problem with Osteen, but rather with Scripture.

Stiff et al. (2003:131) point out that the more relevant the message to its listeners is the more concerned they will be of it. In the example quote below Osteen commences his advice by creating a situation that everyone can identify with:

(60) There are people listening right now, who still struggle with their sense of value, with their self esteem all because they never got their blessing from their parents. They never felt that they measured up. They never were quite as smart as their sister. Didn't play ball as well as their brother. No parents. Don't let that be you. (JO5)

Most likely nearly everyone can say they are not as self-confident as they would like to be; also nearly every listener can relate to some kind of a shortcoming in their lives, whether it was smartness or ball playing; after

all, nobody is perfect. This makes the message relevant to the audience so that they can then grasp the last comment: “Don’t let that be you” and agree with it.

### *The Pronoun ‘I’*

The pronoun ‘I’ makes the speaker distinguish himself from others and gives him a more personal voice (Håkansson 2012:10). Since the pronoun ‘I’ transfers the message into a more personal level, one can also use it to establish a relationship with the audience. It can also convey one’s opinion, make the speech more subjective, or it can be used to narrate a story (ibid.).

In the previous section it was mentioned that when the speaker seems amiable the crowd might regard him as more persuasive. By using the pronoun ‘I’ one can also describe himself in a positive light and thus reach the same goal. For example Osteen says:

(61) I don’t know about you, but I’m gonna help set the course for everyone God has give me authority over.... With my words I’m gonna shoot arrows of favour, arrows of wisdom, arrows of deliverance, arrows of increase. (JO5)

The statement is two-fold, because in it he not only gives indirect advice by explaining what he will do, but because he says *he* will do it, he elevates himself knowingly into a positive light in front of the congregation as a person who does the right thing. In this sense Osteen himself becomes the model example of a good person by making himself that by his wording. In the eyes of the audience Osteen’s character is now similar to a person one should aspire to be like. Such examples are many in Osteen’s sermons:

(62) I don’t know about you, but I’ve made up my life. I’m gonna answer that door, I’m gonna get up every morning and say ‘father (applauses) thank you for another beautiful day’. I’m gonna be happy, I’m gonna enjoy this day, I’m gonna brighten someone else’s life. I am choosing to receive your gift of joy. (JO2)

(63) I don’t know about you, but I’m not sending defeat through my system. I’m not going to go around thinking how I’ve reached my limits and my obstacles are too big, and I’ll probably never get out of debt. No! I realize I’m going to become what I believe..... I’m gonna believe what God says about me. And God says I’m blessed (applauses), I’m strong, I’m healthy, I’m well-able, I’m gonna program that onto my computer. (JO4)

(64) I don't know about you, but I'm on a mission. I'm gonna speak the blessing into as many people as I possibly can. (JO5)

These example quotes from Osteen strengthen the notion given above. Osteen himself becomes the concrete example whom the audience should aspire to be.

In summary it can be said that Osteen uses pronouns to create a sense of collectiveness and unity by distinguishing 'us' from 'them'. In addition to this Osteen rather chooses to use the collective 'we' than the accusing 'you'. In cases where 'you' is used, it is used in positive and encouraging ways. In many cases Osteen becomes quite personal by expressing sympathy and compassion to his listeners and thus creating rapport with them. This also has the ability to make the audience relate to what Osteen is speaking about through the everyday situations he paints in front of them. Osteen also uses pronouns to encourage his audience straightforwardly by declaring to them what they are ("you are a victor" (JO1)), what they can do ("You can be an excellent mother, you can be an excellent accountant, you can be an excellent receptionist" (JO3)), or what they have ("You have a crown of favour" (JO4)). Lastly he also elevates himself into a position of a person the congregation should aspire to be by stating what he would do or how he would behave. Although that might sound prideful at first, it also means that he comes down to the level of his listeners by showing that if he can do it, they can do it too. All in all, Osteen uses pronouns very consciously and in a manner which goes hand in hand with his message of acceptance and tolerance.

## **5.2 Persuasion Through Culture, Values and Twisted Christianity**

Individualism, self-help and materialism are listed as the three cultural values, which are examined in order to understand how Osteen uses them as means of persuasion, and as gateways into the lives of his listeners. Beebe et al. (2012:315) say that understanding what one's audience values means that the speaker is able to adapt the content of one's speech to those values, and thus be able to reach the audience more successfully, and hence make the

sermon more persuasive. The main aspect what is explored in this section is the connection of the selected doctrines with the US cultural core values. If these doctrines reflect the US values, then advocating for these doctrines is a means of persuasion through which Osteen will appear more credible. Souders (2011:363) adds that rhetoric is cultural awareness, and according to him this means that Osteen is aware of his contemporary audience and what it desires to hear. It is thus logical that what the audience desires to hear is what they value, and thus if they hold individualism, self-effort and materialism as their values then that is what Osteen will knowingly give them.

These values overlap with three doctrines that Osteen advocates for; namely self-help, positive confession and prosperity gospel. Self-help is a doctrine in which man's own abilities is emphasized in regard to achieving blessings, prayer answers and even in some cases salvation from God. In other words, self-help advocates for the thought that man can make God move in a way they desire. Positive confession on the other hand draws from self-help but in the form of words. The main idea is, that our words have the power and the ability to make things happen, and thus whatever we speak, the words we say, have consequences, good or bad. Prosperity gospel then again fends for materialism, and sees that the blessings God bestows upon us are and should be in material form, as in money, promotion, health and so on. These three doctrines are discussed below in the same order as mentioned above.

### **5.2.1 Individualism through a 'me'-centred Christianity**

One of the most prominent features in Osteen's message is the emphasis on *you*. It seems that faith is seen as an individual effort, where one needs to fend for himself the blessings of God by doing different kinds of actions, from changing one's perspective, to behaving in an appropriate manner. When salvation became me-centred different kinds of teaching were developed around it to boost man as the centre of faith. In Osteen's sermons he speaks about what people are in Christ, what they can do in faith, asks what they want, and guides his listeners to what they should do in order to

get it. These aspects tie around each other and are a logical consequence of one another. After explaining to his congregation what *you are* in Christ, Osteen raises awareness of *what* then *you can do* in faith. When the church knows what they can do in faith, they are taught that it is only a matter of *what you want*. So in order to get what one wants, Osteen guides them to what *you should do* in order to get it. The part of *what you can do* will be dealt with in the section of self-effort and positive confession, whereas the other topics, *what you are*, *what you want*, and *what you should do*, are explored in this section in more detail. In this sense this section goes deeper into the use of the pronoun ‘you’, which was dealt in the previous section and further looks into what kind of messages (values and doctrines) Osteen conveys to his audience.

### *What You Are*

In Osteen’s sermons the focus is on *you* rather than on God; and even when it is on God, it is often from the point of view of what God can do for *you*. In Joel Osteen Ministries website they write in the “We believe”-section that: “...as children of God, we are overcomers [sic] and more than conquerors and God intends for each of us to experience the abundant life He has in store for us” (2014). The statement sheds light on how Osteen and his Ministry view man’s life on Earth. It also acts as a basis for Osteen’s belief which he brings forth in his sermons:

(65) You have excellence from the inside. (JO3)

Thus, according to Osteen we “*have excellence on the inside*” because God the Creator of the universe has created us. Being the creation of an almighty God, means, according to Osteen, that God has placed greatness within every person. This includes *you*. Later Osteen explains in more detail what this means and how he views man and his nature:

(66) God has blessed you. You are highly favoured. You are strong. You are talented. You are redeemed. Not going to be, not maybe one day in the sweet by and by. No. God has already blessed you. He has already made you more than a conqueror. He’s already given you that crown of favour. Well, how do you tap in, into what God has already done? It’s very simple, just start acting like you’re

blessed, talking like you're blessed, walking like you're blessed, thinking like you're blessed, smiling like you're blessed, dressing like you're blessed. (JO4)

In this excerpt Osteen lifts 'you' on a pedestal by using very encouraging and grand words such as being *blessed, highly favoured, strong, talented, redeemed,* and *more than a conqueror*. As Osteen seems to make his way reassuring his congregation that they are enough, thus soothing their insecurities, he appears to take into action what Aristotle said about friendship. Baity paraphrases Aristotle by stating that "friendship is developed with people 'who praise the presence of good qualities [in others] and especially who praise the qualities that these people fear they do not really have'" (Aristotle quoted by Baity 2011:43). Osteen also invokes divine authority to validate his claims on man. As in the example (66) Osteen begins his declaration by stating that *God* has blessed them, and all through the example he seems to rely on that fact, and reasons through it, that this blessing must mean that men have to be strong, talented and everything else positive he mentions, because of the underlying fact that God has blessed them.

These positive declarations on what *you* are create a friendly bond between the speaker and his audience, making the audience feel as if they knew the pastor more intimately. It also creates a sort of a likeness of a friendship, as the congregation members are able to feel Osteen's support and appreciation for their character (Baity 2011:43).

Interestingly, original sin is not mentioned, although the main thesis of Christianity is that God came to save sinful people. Kringlebotn Sødal (2010:39) describes how Osteen downplays teaching about conservative dogma and ethics, avoids talking about sin, and rather celebrates human potential for victory. If, then, Osteen concentrates on selective aspects of Christian faith as Kringlebotn Sødal suggests, then man is made to be the main character of faith and not God as the Bible teaches. This twist in preaching can be said to be partly Osteen's choice, but the other part can be argued to be the result of cultural emphasis on individual abilities, as well as the rising of 'political correctness' which abides in the postmodern western culture. Since it is politically correct to avoid mentioning anything that

might offend the listener, in Christian circles preachers might read this to include sin.

### *What You Want*

When *what you are* is established and the congregation has absorbed the idea that they should be thinking nothing but positive things about themselves the next logical step is to ask oneself ‘Since I am this favoured by God, what do I want God to do for me’. Osteen teaches accordingly:

(67) This is very important: if you don’t learn to be happy where you are, you’ll never get to where *you wanna* be. Being happy where you are, and not falling into self pity, not complaining. That’s a seed that you’re sowing, for God to take you where *you wanna* go. (JO2 emphasis added)

(68) Where you are is not an accident. It’s all a part of God’s divine plan. If you’ll stay in faith and just go out each day, be your best with a smile on your face, being happy where you are. Then you are passing the test. That’s what allows God to open up new doors and get you to where *you wanna* be. (JO2, emphasis added)

(69) Here’s the key: if we complain about where we are, we will never get to where we *wanna* be. (JO6 emphasis added)

Notice how in all of these cases the emphasis is on what *you* want in opposition to what God’s will is. In other words, Osteen teaches to succumb to the situation one is in, not because it is God’s will, but because yielding means one will get one’s way and end up where one wants to go. Jesus (The Bible, King James Version Matt. 6:10) himself is said to have prayed “Thy will be done”, but now it seems as though this has turned around and Osteen, among others, is preaching a new message of ‘My will be done’. This then shows the contrast of how culture can have an impact on the Christian message itself, by having preachers lay emphasis on aspects which are culturally acceptable, instead of being what the original theological emphasis was.

### *What You Should Do*

Also an interesting thing to point out is that in all of his sermons the main thesis is all about *what you should do* in order to improve your current life. This type of thinking of elevating the individual as the main character of

faith, in opposition to God as the active part, is a product of the western thinking, and thus influenced by the US culture.

What makes this aspect also interesting is the assumption that salvation from sin is the main doctrine of Christianity and also so in Osteen's congregation as their "We Believe"-section implies (Joel Osteen Ministries 2014). In Osteen's website they state that they believe "Jesus died on the cross and shed His blood for our sins", and that one is saved by placing one's faith in what Jesus did for us on the cross (ibid.). This suggests that there can be no own efforts when it comes to salvation, since Jesus was the doer. Nevertheless Osteen takes the focus off of the cross, sin and salvation, and points the listeners to turn their focus on this life, and their own efforts to improve it. Osteen states that our deeds can result in a better, happier, more blessed, abundant and prosperous life on Earth:

(70) When you get up in the morning, don't wait to see what kind of a day it's gonna be, make a declaration right at the beginning: "This is gonna be a great day." And if you'll do this on a daily basis, choose to be happy, you'll not only enjoy life more, but you'll brighten up other people's day; God promises your joy will be full, and I believe and declare that every one of you are gonna live a happy, joy-filled, blessed, prosperous, victorious, Ephesians 3:20 life. Amen! (JO2)

(71) In the same way God has all kinds of promises stored up for you, they already have your name for it, now it's up to you to come and get it (applause). (JO4)

In these quotes Osteen explains what the congregation *should do* to achieve this happiness, blessing, or a more than a conqueror lifestyle. In most cases all it requires is a decision or a change of attitude, which are not physical actions, but rather something that happens within a person. This encouraged action can sound easy, as in example (70) all it takes is a declaration, while in example (71) the promises God has for us are just waiting for us to pick them up. It is interesting that Osteen does not give hands-on instructions about what it means to come and get the promises that are stored for us. Instead Osteen declares that whoever chooses to live with that positive attitude will see joy, blessings, prosperity and victories, which sounds quite vague.

Although Osteen's teaching is very me-centred, one of its premises is that God is the provider for all the blessings. The upside of this is that all who believe in this have the same resources and keys to success if they just have



faith (Baity 2011:62). This, according to Baity (2011:34), is one of the keys to why Osteen's message prospers, as it has been researched that not only the audience for religious broadcasting, but also the population in Houston Texas, where Osteen's church is, in average has been characterized as living below the poverty line. In this sense it is easy to advocate this type of me-centred ideology as it is already a part of the country's valued beliefs which means that the individualistic work-based gospel also 'sells' well in a congregation and culture where most of the individuals hunger to prosper.

The actions Osteen asks for do not seem to be much in exchange for such wonderful rewards, but radically speaking, some might suggest that Osteen implies depressed people are not choosing to be happy hard enough. In other words, this type of individual-centred teaching can feel good at the beginning of hearing it. It might seem easy to achieve, thinking that just changing one's perspective can have a huge impact on one's own life. The flipside of the coin is that it is believed that the problems in one's life are often resulting from laziness in pursuing a better life (Kohls 1984). Thus the inevitable conclusion from this type of teaching is that if there are hardships or failure in life, there is only one to blame: you yourself. There is no comfort in failure as it is implied that the person just did not try hard enough. Also, when people lose sight of God working in people through the hardships, and when people suppose that being a Christian means leading a leisured life of happiness, it can lead to a crisis in faith when good things do not always happen in life, as also Baity realizes (2011:90).

The influence of the culture becomes radically visible if one was to imagine Osteen preaching this same message in the slums of Africa or India. Many of the poor and afflicted might ask how the strength, blessedness or the crown of favour is visible in their life. Although this message could soothe the people at first, in the long run the message would be weighed in accordance to if it delivers what it promises to deliver. If the lives of these afflicted people would change to the better, physically, materially and mentally, merely by self-effort or attitude change, then one would have to conclude that Osteen's message is maybe not as culturally partial as one

would suppose. Then again, if not, then Osteen's message suits the US pulpits better than the African or Indian slums.

This message of happiness would be understandable if Osteen was to point towards salvation from sin and afterlife in heaven with God, because that is a message which can produce joy, hope and comfort regardless of how life has treated one. This said, it must be concluded that this message of putting the individual on a pedestal and emphasising on the works that *you can do* in order to achieve something is very much a Western line of thought influenced by the US culture.

### **5.2.2 Positive Confession and Self-Help**

It is believed that in the US people can take credit only for what they have accomplished by themselves (Kohls 1984), which makes grace something which goes against culture, because it is something one cannot earn. In this sense it seems almost as if the US culture encourages American Christians to want to play a greater role in their faith, and maybe this is also one of the reasons the doctrines of self-help and positive confession came to be.

The belief of individual achievement or self-help can be explained as people's own effort as the means to gain favour from God in opposition from believing that favour can be granted by grace alone. These efforts take form in a teaching called 'positive confession' or 'name it and claim it', which Osteen advocates in his sermons. These two teachings form the basis of what you, as a Christian, *can do* in faith, the question which was mentioned in the previous section.

#### *Positive Confession*

Positive confession is a teaching, according to which "faith is the force by which we speak into the existence God's will for our life" (Agnew 2009). It has to be added that this teaching of positive confession differs "sharply with normative Christian teaching regarding God's will and Biblical faith"

(Agnew 2009). Yet, as it is in contrast with the common Christian doctrines, it must hint towards positive confession being more a product of culture than of the Bible. This then makes it interesting to analyse what aspects of the US culture positive confession reflects within it.

When favour and blessings become dependent on one's own works and deeds, it also gives room to positive confession as a means to gain these rewards. The root of this ideology among self-help is the belief that words have creative power as Osteen repeatedly reminds his listeners:

(72) Your words have creative power, they help God release favour into their future. (JO5)

(73) There's incredible power in our words. And that power is multiplied when it's spoken by someone who has a God given authority over us. (JO5)

(74) You gotta call it forth. (Applause) Your words have creative power. (JO5)

(75) Friends there's incredible power in our words (applause). When you speak the blessing over your children, over your family, over your students, supernatural things begin to happen. I'm asking you today to get in a habit to speaking the blessing over everyone that god has put in your life. (JO5)

In these examples Osteen teaches his audience about the power of words. This power seems to be almost like magic, since only speaking words over people will make "supernatural things begin to happen" (JO5). This idea of words having creative power comes from the belief that we are like God, and as God creates from *ex nihilo*, nothing, using only his Word, so can we (Spann 2009). Osteen demonstrates this thought below:

(76) Well you say (applauses) well you say, Joel, that's just wishful thinking. No. *You're doing like God*, you're speaking of nonexistent things as if they already existed.(JO4 emphasis added)

(77) When you get into agreement with God like that, it allows him to release the promises that already have your name on it. *You can pull it out from the unseen spiritual realm* over to the physical seeing realm. That's what it says: "God speaks of nonexistent things as if they already existed<sup>5</sup>" (JO4 emphasis added)

The logical line of thought goes as follows: God's words are creative in their power, we are like God, thus our words have creative power. When regarding this conjoined idea, it creates the basis for the whole teaching of positive confession. In example (77) Osteen implies that God is only able to release blessings *after* one gets into agreement with God. This being in

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<sup>5</sup> Romans 4:17

agreement with God does not mean just silently agreeing with what God says, but often it suggests cultivating language which agrees with what God wants. What God wants, then, often depends on what each congregation teaches about God's will. For some congregations God works in mysterious ways, while other congregations find that God's will is blessings, prosperity and a leisured life for anyone who follows him, and so on. Osteen's church advocates the latter, and thus such statements as "you are a victor" (JO1) are not only statements but they are meant to make the things said a reality.

In the examples below Osteen underlines how this speaking the blessing works, as people can declare favour and speak blessings into other people's lives:

(78) They were not just encouraging me, but they were *declaring favour into my future*. And every time they said it, God released a little more of his goodness. That's the way the blessing works. (JO5 emphasis added)

(79) The moment you speak it, the blessing releases Gods favour into their future. Just like you pull back a bow and shoot an arrow, you release wisdom, protection, favour, God's abundance. (JO5)

(80) What am I saying? When you speak the blessing. When you call forth the potential. When you look at someone and say "I don't just see what you are, I see what you can become" and you speak words of life, and faith and victory. Those words can help shape their destiny. They will rise to the level of what you are prophesying. *Your faith-filled words release God's favour, ability, confidence, creativity*. You can help set them on a whole new course. (JO5 emphasis added)

These examples illustrate, as example (77) does, that it is only when people step up in faith to speak the blessing that God is able to operate. In example (78) God released favour only the times when favour was declared over Osteen, while in example (79) the blessing is released only at the moment when someone speaks it. The example (80) shows how it is actually the words which carry the power, and thus they are the one's which have the ability to release God's power.

This idea of our words being able to shape reality gives a strong emphasis on the individual as the initiator and the active part. This means that God is reduced into someone who is dependent on how and when the individual decides to act and speak, and thus cannot act before man does. In other words, the culture affects Christianity through individualism which is very

strongly visible in the teaching of positive confession. Interestingly positive confession reflects not only individualism, but also man's own efforts as an important factor in receiving blessings and other material 'advantages' from God.

Also, if people's words can shape reality, as Osteen suggests, then the words spoken can determine what happens in us or to us, whether it means blessings as John MacArthur (2013) suggests, or even curses as Joel Osteen implies. Osteen seems to promote the idea that speaking things into existence works both ways as the two examples below illustrate:

(81) When you do that you're programming your mind for victory. Jesus put it this way "you will become what you believe"<sup>6</sup> That means if you believe you'll always be heavy, you'll always be heavy. If you believe you'll never break that addiction, then you'll never break it. If you believe you're not attractive, you're not that talented, you don't have much to offer, then you'll go through life with low self-esteem, and miss out on the fullness of God's blessing. You gotta turn that around and start programming your mind for victory. We should be dwelling on thoughts like "I'm blessed, I'm talented, I'm strong, I'm creative, I'm more than a conqueror". When you do that you're gonna draw in the good things of God. (JO4)

(82) When we go around thinking: "I'm well able, I'm anointed, I'm equipped, I'm empowered," your mind goes to work saying "let me make sure they're at the top of their game. I've gotta make sure their smart, they're intelligent, they're creative, they're strong, they're confident." You may be facing a sickness, but instead of saying "I'll never get well" you're saying "I'm getting better and better, health and healing is flowing through me, God is renewing my youth like the eagle's." When you do that your mind says to your system: "Do you hear what she's saying, she's saying she's whole, she's healthy, she's strong, Let's get busy. Release the healing, create new cells, unleash strength, vitality, energy." (JO4)

According to these excerpts, our words are described almost as magical. In example (81) Osteen warns his congregation for believing the wrong things because according to Osteen, the things they believe and say will come to pass. He gives a contemporary example many can relate to in the US by telling that whoever believes they are heavy, they will always be heavy. Osteen gives remedy to these curses by guiding his listeners to think, believe and say positive things, such as in example (82) "I'm well able, I'm anointed, I'm equipped, I'm empowered" (JO4). Thus, according to Osteen, whatever we speak, good or bad, will influence not only the spiritual but even the physical realm. This means that Osteen's congregation are

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<sup>6</sup> Matthew 9:29 "Then touched he their eyes, saying, According to your faith be it unto you." KJV

encouraged to believe that they, as individuals, have the power to influence, not only themselves, but also others. This notion goes hand in hand with another of the US values, self-help, where the person's own efforts are put on a pedestal.

This belief in the power of words also sheds light to why Osteen's favourite rhetorical means seems to be repetition in its various forms. When words have power and both parties, both the giver and the receiver, believe it, then every time Osteen begins his mantra of encouragement by declaring to his congregation what they are or have, the listener can assume that he or she is being blessed in that moment. If all it takes to have an impact on someone's destiny, as Osteen put it, is someone telling another how good people they are and how everything will go well, then Osteen's words are not seen as vain, but as vital. Often Osteen ends his sermon in an inspirational speech such as this:

(83) You are blessed, you are prosperous, you have a crown of favour, start acting like it, talking like it, dreaming like it. If you program your mind for victory and believe you are what God says you are, no obstacle can hold you back, no enemy can defeat you, no sickness can keep you down, all the forces of darkness can't keep you from your God-given destiny. You'll be like Abraham, you'll see impossible situations be turned around, you're gonna rise higher and higher, supernatural doors are gonna open for you. Divine connections are coming your way, unprecedented favour. Because you programmed your mind for victory I believe and declare you're gonna see every dream, every promise gods put in your heart; it will come into fulfilment. Amen. Do you receive that today? (JO4)

This excerpt has a great deal of persuasion in it. It has encouraging exclamations: "you are blessed, you are prosperous", which turn the audience's positive emotions towards the speaker. It has conditions which give room for the person's own achievements as Osteen says: "if you will program your mind to victory, then nothing can hold you down". It has vagueness and something temptingly mysterious; rising higher and higher can be interpreted to mean anything positive, and those supernatural doors or divine connections leave a hint of expectance into the mysterious future which withholds these elements. Also it has almost unbelievably good promises, as Osteen declares that every dream and every promise God has put in your heart will come to pass. Yet, even in the last promise there is a loophole. Osteen is not promising every dream to come to pass, but only those which God has put in there. If some dreams do not come to pass, one

can always conclude, it was not of God. But hearing it declared in such a manner is something many Christians will want to agree with.

It is also interesting to consider the elements Osteen says are released in his examples: wisdom, protection, favour and God's abundance. These words are very vague in their meaning, and one might wonder how this protection and favour is visible in the person's life, not to mention what is meant by 'God's abundance'. In many cases Osteen prefers using these grandiose words without explaining what he means by them in a concrete manner. It can be argued whether his use of such terms and the lack of explaining them is also one way of persuading his audience. Baity (2011:36) suggests that Osteen's deliberate shying away from polarizing issues and his usage of affirming language widens Osteen's rhetorical audience. In other words, Osteen's message becomes acceptable not only to Christians, but also for anyone seeking for motivation or meaning in life (ibid.).

In summary the teaching of positive confession reflect all of the three US values: individualism, self-help, and materialism. The first two values are reflected on the emphasis on how man is the initiator, the active part of the process. This gives responsibility for individuals as makers of their own future through their words. Positive confession also sees that since man is able to speak blessings, such as health and wealth, into their own future, thus people can conduct self-help to gain these blessings by engaging in positive confession. Lastly, these blessings are often seen as material ones, instead of spiritual ones, which indicate towards the influence of materialism.

### *Self-help or selfish-help*

Many know the Biblical parable of the Good Samaritan<sup>7</sup>. In the parable a man was robbed, wounded very badly, and then left by the road to die. Along comes a Jewish priest, who walked hurriedly past, as does the second man to come by, a Levite<sup>8</sup>. The third man was a Samaritan, who are often

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<sup>7</sup> Luke 10:30-37

<sup>8</sup> "A member of the priestly Hebrew tribe of Levi" (Merriam-Webster n.d.)

despised among the Jewish culture. He walks along the road and stops to help the man in need. He takes the man, binds his wounds, lifts him on his donkey and even pays for his treatment at the hostel. The Samaritan did not receive anything in return for helping that man, not at least in this life.

This Jesus' parable teaches that one should help others in need regardless of whether one gets anything in return. The reason why this parable is brought into attention is its contrast to what Osteen teaches about his motivation of helping others. Osteen's main motivation to help others seems to be encompassed in the following phrase: Helping others means helping yourself:

(84) Here's the key: what you make happen for others God will make happen for you. When you live unselfishly (applause) and you help somebody else get ahead, God will make sure somebody's there to help you get ahead. (JO8)

(85) We think I can't stop, other people are gonna get ahead of me. The truth is when we take time to help other people win, what we're really doing is helping ourselves to win. (JO8)

(86) When you're a dream releaser God will make sure your dreams come to pass. (JO8)

Before diving into these examples there are two points that must be brought to attention. As was mentioned earlier, many citizens of the US do not want to take credit on anything they have not done themselves (Kohls 1984). In addition to this looking out for one's self-interests first and foremost is considered normal in the US (ibid.).

Thus, it can be hard for the citizens of the US to accept help from other people, as Kohls (1984) suggests, but after learning these principles, which Osteen teaches, they no longer have to feel bad about it. The logic from Osteen's examples is, that if we are helped by others, it must be a result of us helping someone else before that, in other words it is our own effort which helps us. Osteen suggests this in example (84) by saying that if we help someone, then "God will make sure somebody's there to help you get ahead". This, interestingly enough, will give credit for receiving help for the one on the receiving end, as he is just reaping what he has sowed. Regarding these two aspects of the culture in the US it becomes clear how these examples above take advantage of these cultural values.



The main point summarized is ‘helping others means helping yourself’, which means that one’s motivation for helping someone is often selfish. After receiving this kind of teaching the motivation for Osteen’s congregations to help others, be unselfish, and generous, will be indeed selfish. Thus Osteen makes helping a selfish action, and receiving help about oneself as well.

Similar kind of thinking is applied when Osteen instructs his congregation on positive confession:

(87) Before your children leave to school give them a big hug. Tell them “I’m proud of you, you’re gonna be great today. When you do that, you’re not only releasing favour into their future, but you’re releasing favour into your own future. Because when you help someone else rise higher, that’s a seed that you’re sowing, and God will make sure there’s someone there to help you rise higher. (JO5)

(88) When you’re speaking the blessing you’re not just releasing favour into their future, you’re releasing favour into your own future. (JO5)

(89) You know what I just did? I released favour into your future. Now why don’t you go out this week and do the same thing for somebody else. (applause) If you will learn to live blessing-minded, speaking the blessing whenever you can, you will not only help others rise higher, but God will help you to rise higher, you will accomplish your dreams, overcome your obstacles and you will live that life of victory he has in store. Amen? Do you receive that today? (JO5)

When looking at these examples, it seems that even when we encourage each other we are actually gathering blessing for ourselves. Osteen promises in these excerpts that when we selflessly do good for other people, we are actually helping ourselves. These benefits of helping others include being blessed, rising higher, living in victory, accomplishing dreams and overcoming obstacles just to mention a few. Some could argue, that God does bestow rewards for his people, and this should not be a problem. Nevertheless, the Bible often speaks about eternal rewards, pointing towards gaining these rewards in heaven<sup>9</sup>, but the blessings Osteen speaks about seem to be the kind which can be obtained during this life.

Because the contrast is so vast between what Osteen teaches about selfish helping compared to what Jesus taught about selfless helping, it has to be concluded that the US culture has influenced these teachings also. It is

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<sup>9</sup> Matthew 5:12 “Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven...” KJV

almost as if people cannot be motivated to do good if they do not get something in return in this life. If Osteen believes what he preaches then his words of encouragement to others are probably words, for which he expects to be rewarded later.

### **5.2.3 Prosperity Gospel Advocating for Materialism**

Prosperity gospel can be defined as “the notion that God's favour is expressed mainly through physical health and material prosperity, and that these blessings are available for the claiming by anyone who has sufficient faith” (MacArthur 2013). This teaching often combines two of US's values, namely materialism and self-effort, since the riches, prosperity and abundance which are promised to the believer are often the result of one's own actions. As said in the definition of prosperity gospel, the blessings are available for “anyone who has sufficient faith” (ibid.).

Osteen's message has also been called ‘word-faith prosperity gospel lite’ and ‘Cotton Candy Christianity’, because although Osteen is seen as a positive character, his overly positive attitude can lead him being out of touch with human suffering (Fiorazo 2013). Osteen's work and material based message is visible in this excerpt of his: “when you focus on being a blessing, God makes sure that you are always blessed in abundance” (Osteen quoted by Fiorazo 2013). Osteen states that when we focus on being good and doing good, then good things will happen to us. Many times these good things are implied to be material, and this can lead the message becoming work-oriented in order to gain the blessings as the examples below show:

(90) Do you know when you look good, it makes God look good? When you get promoted, God is honoured. When you excel, and you go around telling people I got this new position God's been so good to me; you're exalting God. You're bringing attention to Him. (JO3)

(91) In the difficulty were thanking him that he's turning it around. In the slow economy, were thanking him that he's bringing favour, increase, promotion. (JO6)

Notice that in both of the examples, Osteen speaks about promotion, and one is led to believe that this promotion is the kind one receives from work.

In that case promotion often means more money, which then hints towards materialism, and as example (91) implies, this blessing has not yet come, but rather the person is expecting for this blessing in the form of a promotion. On the other hand the implication of example (90) is that only by doing good or being successful one can exalt God, and make God look good. Probably, though, everyone is good at something, and thus every one of Osteen's listeners can feel that they can make 'God look good' in their area of expertise.

Also what is interesting is that often the power of words is combined with material blessings as the examples below portray:

(70) When you get up in the morning, don't wait to see what kind of a day it's gonna be, make a declaration right at the beginning: "This is gonna be a great day." And if you'll do this on a daily basis, choose to be happy, you'll not only enjoy life more, but you'll brighten up other people's day. God promises your joy will be full, and *I believe and declare that every one of you are gonna live a happy, joy-filled, blessed, prosperous, victorious, Ephesians 3:20 life.* Amen! (JO2 emphasis added)

(92) You need to let that seed take root, and you need to start speaking double over your situation. You lost your faith, father I wanna thank you I'm coming out *twice as strong, twice as healthy. That I'm gonna have twice the energy, that I'm gonna feel twice as good as I used to.* You lost your job, don't go around complaining, go around saying: *Father I thank you for a position with twice the benefits. Twice the income. Twice the friends. Twice the fulfilment.* (applause) (JO7 emphasis added)

In these examples Osteen declares that whatever is spoken will happen, and when it is spoken, it will not only result in joy and blessings, but also in being prosperous, and having twice the benefits and income. This means that the benefits of, for example, not being bitter in a bad situation can be materialistic ones.

If one was to look at any example given in this study, nearly all of them have a nature of the prosperity gospel. Many times Osteen speaks using words such as victorious, abundance, prosperity, increase and so on, and the tricky part is that he leaves it to the congregation to decode what is meant by these words. What this means is that the congregation can decide whether 'abundance' and 'favour' are to be interpreted in a spiritual way or in a more material way, for instance as money. The following example illustrates this point:

(93) With my words, I'm gonna shoot arrows of favour, arrows of wisdom, arrows of deliverance, arrows of increase (JO5)

Favour and increase, for example, can be thus interpreted as spiritual, or material, either way the listener decides to interpret it. The interesting part, as Souders (2011:342) notes, is that in many Osteen's example stories people "gain profitable jobs, business opportunities, backyard swimming pools, or sudden fortunes" which means it is hard to imagine the words Osteen uses to denote spiritual enrichment in opposition to material. In this sense the underlying basis of Osteen's teaching is materialism.

MacArthur (2013) describes that prosperity gospel is God's favour expressed though physical health or material prosperity available for those who have sufficient faith, the following excerpt illustrates then blessings as physical healing:

(94) You may be facing a sickness, but instead of saying "I'll never get well" you're saying "I'm getting better and better, health and healing is flowing through me, God is renewing my youth like the eagle's." When you do that your mind says to your system: "do you hear what she's saying, she's saying she's whole, she's healthy, she's strong, let's get busy. Release the healing, create new cells, unleash strength, vitality, energy." (JO4)

This example combines the power of words taking effect in the physical realm. Through one's words, one can even be healed, Osteen teaches.

Regarding materialism, what is intriguing, is that in the Bible Jesus draws people's attention from gathering riches on Earth to storing treasures in heaven<sup>10</sup>. Also, the Bible seems to support the idea that his followers would have to suffer greatly because of Jesus<sup>11</sup> in opposition to Osteen declaring all the benefits God intends people to have during this earthly life. This notion is not brought up to criticize Osteen by saying if it is right or wrong, but rather to show how culture and values of a certain country can also have an impact on the Christian message itself.

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<sup>10</sup> Matthew. 6:19-20

<sup>11</sup> 2 Timothy. 3:12

Nearly all are familiar with John 3:16<sup>12</sup>, which is often called ‘Gospel in a nutshell’, but it looks as though the influence of culture has changed that verse in Osteen’s ministry into: “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have an abundant, prosperous and victorious life while on Earth”. It seems as though the message of salvation from sin through the suffering on the cross has become through Osteen a message of salvation from unhappiness by doing one’s best. Osteen encourages his congregation to repel all negativity and to state instead:

(95) No, your report should be “I am free, I am victorious, I am blessed, I am healthy, I am prosperous” (applauses). (JO4)

This statement encompasses everything. Saying that our report should be something, suggests that what we say has an impact on reality, which speaks for positive confession. Also ‘you’ being the one doing the reporting indicates not only me-centeredness, but also self-effort in giving the credit to the one doing the action: ‘you’. Freedom denotes one’s individual freedom to make one’s choices even regarding the decision of salvation, whereas the adjectives victorious, blessed, healthy and prosperous all speak for prosperity gospel and materialism. All in all, the effect of the US culture and its values are very much visible in Osteen’s choice of words as well as his theology opening a window through which Osteen is able to feed his message to his western audience in a more persuasive manner.

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<sup>12</sup> “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” (King James Version).

## 6 DISCUSSION

The megachurch leader also known as the smiling pastor Joel Osteen has been able to lift himself not only on top of a flourishing church, but he has also made himself known as an author of many successful books, and as a brand of hope. This has led some people, including myself, into examining him, his message, or even his character in order to see if it can be pinpointed where the keys to his success lie. The present study took the position of exploring both Osteen's rhetorical means of persuasion as well as his means of swaying his audience through the cultural values of the US.

Religious rhetoric is not a new invention, as it is not a new idea to explore Joel Osteen's rhetoric. Nevertheless in many cases the focus of study has been a theological one as there are many who do not agree with Osteen's theology and feel the urge to express it (Fiorazo 2013). Some have written about Osteen's use of rhetoric, though, and in the present study I have drawn from the following previous studies: *A Rhetorical Analysis of Joel Osteen: How America's Most Popular Pastor has Gained Influence in a Time of Increasing Privatization* (Baity 2011), *A God of Wealth: Religion, Modernity, and the Rhetoric of the Christian Prosperity Gospel* (Souders 2011), "Victor, not victim": Joel Osteen's Rhetoric of Hope (Kringlebotn Sødal 2010).

This Chapter will discuss and compare some of the main findings of Baity, Souders and Kringlebotn Sødal to the findings of my own. First the findings on Osteen's use of rhetorical devices are discussed, second the influence of culture and values on his sermons is explored, after which the implications and applications of this study are elaborated on.

### *Rhetorical devices*

In regard to Osteen's rhetorical devices it is evident that his primary device from the ones that were analysed in the present study is repetition in its various forms. Repetition creates rhythm and beat while it also makes the message a more memorable one. Kringlebotn Sødal (2010:44) confirms that

repetition plays a role in leading to recognition while also conveying the feeling of being an insider. The words Osteen chooses to repeat are often positive ones (victory, vitality, strength, blessings), and if negative words are repeated after them often comes a list of positive terms in order to leave the audience in that positive atmosphere. This repetition occurs in various levels of language as Osteen not only repeats single words (lexical level), but also sentence structures and speech acts in the form of encouragement or commands.

Figures of speech were also used in Osteen's sermons. The more popular ones were similes and alliterations, while metaphors and hyperboles were scarcer. One reason for this might be that since Osteen uses ordinary and down-to-earth language, and thus avoids too complex linguistic embellishments it means he tries to make his message such which can reach everyone. Using too eloquent language and too complex imagery might be socially excluding as Kringlebotn Sødal (2010:45) also notes. In this sense rhyme, repetition and alliteration are simple enough not to exclude anyone, but still effective enough to attract attention and to surprise (ibid.).

Osteen's use of pronouns is very conscious and also goes hand in hand with his whole message of acceptance and tolerance. Thus he avoids coming too straightforward with an accusing 'you', and rather uses a more collective 'we' in situations which could sound accusing. In this sense 'we' and 'us' is used to create a sense of collectivity where there is no singling out, and thus no condemnation. 'They' on the other hand is used to single out an imaginary group of people as either an example of the people who do wrong, or an example of the people who do right. By doing so, no one is offended if 'they' are acting in an unacceptable way. Nevertheless, if 'they' act in a wanted and pursued way it gives hope of the supposition that such a people group exist. 'You' is used in a way to encourage and offer sympathy to Osteen's listeners, while by using 'I' Osteen can make himself as one of the people in his congregation. Also the preacher has the power to decide how he wishes to portray himself, and thus how he uses the pronoun 'I'.

Neither Baity (2011), Souders (2011), nor Kringlebotn Sødal (2010) studied Osteen's use of pronouns, but their use in this present study support what others have discovered about Osteen in general. That is the avoidance of negative issues such as accusations, and rather using pronouns to create a pleasant feelgood atmosphere of collectivity where no one is judged.

### *Culture – Individualism, Self-Help and Materialism*

As Souders (2011:363) remarks, rhetoric is a kind of cultural awareness. This is very much visible in Osteen's sermons in the form of celebrating the individual, emphasizing individual effort and insisting on health and material wealth as a symbol of God's blessings. Being aware of one's culture means one is more capable of getting one's message across because people are able to relate to a message which speaks from their standpoints using their values.

The US celebrates the individual and individual freedom, and the present study shows that Osteen's whole focus of faith is not on God, but on the individual. Man is lifted up on a pedestal by celebrating all his positive characteristics and efforts during this passing life, while similarly avoiding mentioning anything about sin or other negative features. Osteen's focus is also on the wants and desires of the individual as well as what one should do in order to gain their desired life.

Baity discusses individualism in detail in her study, and notes that while Osteen preaches individualism, on the other hand he does this by promising "the eventual deliverance of goods, within a formal community structure" (2011:3). In this sense Baity sees that Osteen tries to balance between the individual and the community. This is visible when Osteen gives emphasis on man and his abilities for example by stressing the idea of being "a person of excellence and integrity" and then directs the attention into taking care of other people in the community (Baity 2011:54). Although Baity has a good point, it seems as though Osteen's emphasis on the community is not that much caring selflessly about others, but more about calling people into caring for others by giving them selfish motives to do so. In other words,



Osteen tries to motivate people into doing good by telling them that when they help others, God will bless them in return. This means that the focus is only seemingly on helping the community, but in reality even helping others is about the individual and the individual's needs to gain blessings in different forms for him- or herself.

Emphasis on the individual is also visible in self-help or self-effort, which springs out from the ideal American Dream, where the individual succeeds to climb the ladders from rags to riches. Kringlebotn Sødal sheds light to how Osteen strengthens his ethos by the fact that he is a living example of that American Dream, and continues to explain how Osteen “started as an anonymous technician in a medium-sized church and is now the leader of the largest church in the country as well as a public figure and a multi-millionaire” (2010:42). Baity on the other hand does not see Osteen as emphasizing one's talent or own effort in climbing up the stairs of life. She concludes that Osteen's victor-victim metaphor encompasses the essence of Osteen's theology, according to which “success is dependent on faith in God and positive thinking, rather than on talent or effort” (Baity 2011:84). The present study affirms the first part of the statement, but it cannot agree with the latter. The findings create a more self-effort oriented image than Baity leads us to believe. While Baity elevates faith and positive thinking as the means to success, the present study sees that actually faith and positive thinking as well as positive words are often the result of one's own effort. In this sense Osteen's theology is more work based than it might seem at first glance.

Positive words, that is the teaching of positive confession, did not go unnoticed by Baity (2011:40-41, 80) or Kringlebotn Sødal (2010:40) either. Kringlebotn Sødal explains that in positive confession “words are supposed to literally create what they express” (2010:40), while Baity states that Osteen advocates for a reality in which this positive thinking as well as faithful expectancy can “unlock a person's spiritual and material goals” (2011:80). These studies do not dive deeper into positive confession or its nuances, but they only explain what this teaching is and acknowledge Osteen's use of it. The present study however sees how positive confession

is linked with the cultural values of individualism, self-effort and materialism, by encompassing characteristics from all of these areas.

The results of positive confession are often described with ambiguous words, such as prosperity, victory, and abundance. The ambiguity of Osteen's words is also noted by Baity (2011) and Souders (2011), who both see it as conscious choice of words in order to persuade his listeners. Baity (2011:36) suggests that Osteen deliberately means to produce a message which is acceptable for a wider rhetorical audience; a message which is acceptable for anyone seeking for motivation or meaning in life, and thus he chooses to use affirming language and shies away from polarizing issues. Souders confirms what this study also notes, that the terms Osteen uses are "ambiguous enough for Osteen to plead that he means internal enrichment as well as material enrichments" (2011:342). Nevertheless this transcendence by ambiguity is contradicted by Osteen's example stories of financial gain and health miracles (ibid.). To put it shortly, too many of Osteen's examples involve "people gaining profitable jobs, business opportunities, backyard swimming pools, or sudden fortunes for Osteen to claim a focus on a challenging, spiritual enrichment" (Souders 2011:342). This in turn means that Osteen portrays the blessings of God as material one's thus tapping into the US value of materialism and in that manner finding a gate to persuade his listeners.

Souders (2011:400) continues to explain how in Osteen's examples Scriptural characters are repeatedly confronted by different kinds of problems, including self-esteem, negative thinking, depression, or lack of confidence, but eventually they overcome these obstacles with God's help. These moments of victory are then linked with "financial, social, psychological, and other form of manifest success" (ibid.). Baity continues Souders' line of thought by asserting that Osteen's message "affirms the individual's self-worth and encourages listeners to pursue their true destinies, with the promise that it will bring about uncharted happiness and material gain" (2011:80). What makes prosperity gospel interesting in Osteen's case is, that one has to read the prosperity between the lines and

his use of ambiguous words, and when one sees it, it becomes obvious, as Souders and Baity also note.

Although the present study was able to pinpoint the rhetorical devices Osteen prefers to use the most, some of the devices were not as deeply explored as they could have been. Metaphors for example can have many layers and thus they might be harder to find in addition to being complex to decipher. Also some might argue that eight sermons do not provide sufficient data to draw such conclusions the present study has done. Although I agree on the note that the data could always be broader, I do disagree on the latter note. To remove Osteen's use of repetition or to extract his sermons from the positive and up-beat choices of words, would mean that Osteen himself would undergo a makeover in what comes to his use of persuasive language. This said, I believe that eight sermons do give a clear image on what kind of style Osteen has in his preaching. I believe that one of the strengths of this study is the connection made between contemporary Christian teachings (self-help, positive confession, prosperity gospel) and the corresponding US values (individualism, self-help, materialism) in persuasion. This connection shows two things: 1) how a religious message can become influenced by culture through time, and 2) how a message can be modified to correspond to the culture on purpose so that it becomes more persuasive to its audience.

As it is visible, the present study found the role of culture much larger than others studying Osteen have given it credit. This can and will hopefully shed light and attract discussion among preachers of the nature of the Gospel message. One might then ask the question, whether this is acceptable and fine in regard to the Christian message, as one might wonder how much of the message of the Gospel can be altered for the sake of culture and persuasion for the message to remain the Gospel.

This, then, can lead to several outcomes that would be interesting to study further. Namely, on the long run, how much will and has Osteen's message changed and has the change followed the cultural trends and values. Also, as the present study contributes to the field of humanities to the branch of oral

literature, rhetoric, and religion, if one were to take a more theological point of view it would be appealing to find out which weighs more: his rhetorical output or the content of his feelgood message. That is, if other preachers adopted his rhetorical style but had a more conservative message, would people find it appealing? On the other hand, one might ask if Osteen's message were to be stripped off its rhetorical gadgets, would people find his sermons as appealing as they find them now.

## 7 CONCLUSION

The present study aimed to find out the prominent rhetorical devices Osteen uses to persuade his audience, as well as the way Osteen employs Christian teachings to appeal to his audience through their cultural values. In summary regarding Osteen's use of persuasion, his main means of doing so was using the peripheral route. This was visible in Osteen's use of rhetorical devices, of which repetition was by far the most common device in Osteen's language use. Within repetition the lexicon and sentence structures repeated were not filled with rational facts, as the central route would assume, but rather with words filled with emotion and sentences creating a pleasant atmosphere.

Osteen's use of the indirect route of persuasion was also visible in other areas of persuasion such as using simple down to earth figures of speech, and also pronouns to create a sense of unity and collectiveness. Thus Osteen's use of pronouns is visibly conscious to correspond with his overall message of tolerance and acceptance. Using the indirect route also points towards Osteen putting emphasis on Aristotle's pathos, appeal to the audience's emotions, rather than on logos, the logical appeal. What comes to ethos, the speaker's credibility, much of it is covered by the fact that Osteen creates a credible image of himself by being an American to the Americans and thus speaking through the same cultural window. Also Kringlebotn Sødal (2010:42) notes the fact that Osteen is the realization of the American dream, a man climbing from an anonymous technician to the leader of the largest church in the country, which gives credit to his credibility.

All in all, it can be said that Osteen's rhetoric is very much in sync with the US cultural values of individualism, self-effort and materialism. Kringlebotn Sødal (2010:43,48) argues that Osteen's relational prosperous theology is linked to an American context, and goes on to state that since Osteen's message is better adjusted to an American cultural context, it might not succeed in Europe as it has in the US. It must be said that this is by no means a negative aspect on Osteen's talent since from a rhetorical

point of view it is natural that rhetoric is contextual and thus the same message cannot be delivered in different social and cultural contexts in the same manner (Kringlebotn Sødal 2010:48).

On the basis of Osteen's rhetoric and its goal as to change and persuade his listeners, one must conclude that Osteen is a good rhetorician. This is visible especially by viewing the growth of Lakewood Church, the number of TV viewers worldwide, and the number of sold books (Kringlebotn Sødal 2010:48). Although it seems as though the message of salvation from sin through the suffering on the cross has become through Osteen a message of salvation from unhappiness by doing one's best, it appears that this relevantly new message spiced with cultural values is what 'sells' in the US. In this sense it must be said that Osteen exploits well the cultural window of the US in order to convey his message to his audience. Through this window Osteen markets and sells his cultural feelgood message his audience can identify with, of how everyone can make the decision for themselves to decide to live a happy, prosperous and victorious life in God's abundant blessings; and people buy it.

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## 9 APPENDIX: DATA SOURCES

### 2010

JO1 – 08.01.2010 Have a Good Opinion of Yourself  
29min15s

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=svk13rnPwFM>

JO2 – 04.03.2010 Living Life Happy  
31min39s

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zyd96oWNSss>

JO3 – 28.05.2010 Being Excellent in the Workplace  
30min11s

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2Orpe6lqcVg>

JO4 – 08.07.2010 Programming Your Mind for Victory  
27min46s

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hBZK1dojuPc>

JO5 – 12.08.2010 Speaking the Blessing  
32min09s

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=99CjuFE\\_Nso](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=99CjuFE_Nso)

JO6 – 02.09.2010 Having the Right Perspective  
31min48s

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eSfmswNkgBw>

### 2011

JO7 – 17.02.2011 Heaven is Cheering You On  
31min37s

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nWSI5ojURIM>

JO8 – 03.04.2011 Help Others to Win  
31min47s

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=guVoouuxqF4>

See Chapter 4.2