



THE ART OF
PREACHING

CORNERSTONE
CHURCH

EQUIPPING
COURSES

THE ART OF PREACHING

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THE ART OF
PREACHING

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Introduction

2 Timothy 4 : 2

... preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching.

The word “homiletics” comes from the Greek word *homilia*, which simply means a conversation or a set discourse. It’s a theological word that describes the art of preaching and the study of the methods of sermon preparation and delivery.

No amount of teaching will make a preacher. The ability to preach and/or teach the Word of God is a gift from God. But a gift can be developed and the best way to develop it is, of course, by using it.

WHAT IS PREACHING?

Preaching is not a debate, discussion or the composition of an impressive oratory work of art. Preaching is also not primarily the exposure of error. In fact, preaching is never negative!

“Men live by the truths they accept and not by the errors they reject.”

- Unknown

Preaching is the proclamation of the good news of salvation through man to men. It’s not the proclamation of a theory or a philosophy but essentially the message of the truth of God as revealed in the Bible and in Jesus Christ. Politics, current affairs, and kindred themes may rightfully be topics spoken about in public addresses, but such addresses can in no sense of the word be called preaching.

The three essentials of preaching are *truth, clarity, and passion* and may be considered as follows:

Truth

God's revelation of truth is Jesus Christ (John 14:6) and we receive this truth through the written Word (the Bible) and personal revelation. Therefore, we can say that we preach the Word of God as it reveals Jesus.

However, to preach the truth, we can only preach that which has been a direct revelation to us. Anything else is speculation and however sound it may seem, it can only be considered as such until the Spirit of God has revealed it to us.

This means that we must experience Jesus to preach Him. When this is the case we will indeed preach the truth.

Clarity

It's essential that the preacher's message be clear because of the importance of every statement. Martin Luther said, "*A preacher ought so to preach, that when the sermon is ended, the congregation shall disperse saying, 'The preacher said thus.'*" Our diction and vocabulary should be such that all people can understand.

Passion

A sermon must always have passion. Not the kind of passion which comes from conscious effort, but the kind that is evident when the truth has gripped the preacher to the point where he proclaims that which has become his experience. It's not good enough for a man to be able to "handle his text" (talk of the Scriptures in a clever and clear way). It is when the text handles him, grips, masters and possesses him, that he is best able to stir people.

Traditional preaching, in spite of differing styles, is generally far too narrow in its parameters when compared to the examples of preaching in the Bible. Traditional emphasis is usually laid on the style and rhetorical art of presenting the message. The Bible on the other hand lays the main emphasis on the message itself, what it contains and the authority and anointing of the preacher.

WHY PREACH?

It's good news

God has ordained that the world shall hear the Gospel, the Good News of salvation of Jesus Christ, through preaching.

1 Corinthians 1 : 21

For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe.

It brings salvation

Men are converted when they believe the message of redemption brought to them by Christians.

Romans 10 : 13 - 15

¹³ *For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.*

¹⁴ *How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching?* ¹⁵ *And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!"*

It raises faith

As the word of God is preached, faith is awakened in the hearts of the listeners.

Romans 10 : 17

So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.

WHO CAN PREACH?

Those who accept the message of salvation and commit their lives to Christ are saved and are called to preach the Word of God. An examination of the history of the early church will show that the preaching of the Gospel was not carried out by a select group of trained men (the clergy) but by every believer.

The Christians of this time simply carried out the injunction of their Lord and Saviour to “go... and make disciples of all nations”. (Matthew 28:19, Acts 8:4, 8:12, 8:35, 9:20, 11:20-21.) Every man and woman was an evangelist, a preacher of good tidings. Every believer was a soul winner, telling the unsaved of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Each believer is called upon to preach the good news to those who are lost. He should use every means at his disposal, including his personal testimony (Acts 22:2-21) and the exposition of the Word of God, to show that Christ is the Saviour of the world. (Acts 9:22, 18:28.)

Also, those who have believed on the Lord Jesus Christ need to be affirmed in the faith. (Acts 14:22, 15:32, 15:41.) It's not enough to just evangelise the world. New believers must be established and strengthened. They must be taught the first principles of the oracles of God (Hebrews 5:12, 6:2) and then the deeper truths of the Christian faith.

Christians sometimes need to be exhorted and encouraged. At other times they need to be warned and corrected. At all times they need to be taught so that they might become mature in the Lord. (2 Timothy 4:1-5, Colossians 1:28-29, Colossians 2:6-7, Ephesians 4:11-16, 2 Timothy 3:15-17.)

The responsibility of elders and translocal team

With the above in mind, we can see that while all Christians are called to proclaim the Word of God to this world, the main burden of preaching to and teaching a local church (ie. Sunday preaching etc.) falls upon the elders of that flock (Titus 1:5-9, 1 Timothy 3:1-2, 2 Timothy 2:2). This is because the elders are responsible for the discipline, direction and doctrine of a local church.

In addition to that, the Bible clearly shows that certain men have been given a teaching and preaching translocal ministry. In our case, many of these would form part of the NCMI translocal team whom we partner with. They visit different churches for longer or shorter periods of time to instruct the Christians in the faith (Ephesians 4:11, 1 Corinthians 12:28-29, Acts 13:1, Romans 12:6-7). Others also engage in large, public preaching gatherings (many of these we often also call evangelists).

We've already stated above that ALL Christians are called to preach and proclaim the Word of God and all are to be evangelists to one degree or another. The difference is context - not all are called to the kind of pastoral preaching and teaching that takes place within a local church; or that takes place translocally; and not all are called for large-scale evangelistic preaching. We will cover the aspect of calling within this topic in the next part of this booklet.

As we approach the subject of preaching, we must make sure we follow the Biblical emphasis rather than let traditional rules on homiletics become our major concern. Jesus has the same call for people today - He is looking for those who will go out and preach the Gospel!

PREACHING IN THE BIBLE

The main words used in the Bible for preaching usually have much more to do with the message itself and the heart of the preacher than the way the message is presented. Here are six words that demonstrate this point.

The Old Testament

Some of the Hebrew words used in the Old Testament are:

“Basar”

Isaiah 61 : 1

The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the poor...

This verse refers to the preaching ministry of Jesus and thus includes all who subsequently are anointed and called to preach. “Basar” is also translated “bringing

good news, to publish (in the sense of making it known to everyone), to announce good news and to proclaim.” Different forms of speech are implied but the emphasis is not so much on the way it’s communicated as compared to what was communicated, i.e. “good news”.

“Bara”

Jonah 3 : 2

Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it the message that I tell you.

This word carries more of the idea of addressing or confronting someone, and adequately describes the task given to Jonah to confront Nineveh with its sin and call it to repentance. It’s also translated, “to cry out, to summon, to call to, to call out, to recite, to give a name to, and to proclaim”. “Qara” would be more suited to describe traditional preaching as we know it.

“Nagad”

Translated “to tell, show, declare, announce.” It has to do with making known a secret or unknown information in a way that is conspicuous. For example, in Genesis 41:24 “nagad” was used to refer to the interpreting of Pharaoh’s dream. It is used in the sense of revelation and making known that revelation by declaring it. (Another example is Psalm 54:4.) In Exodus 19:3, and in a number of other instances, it is used to refer to Moses having to “tell” the people of Israel what God said.

The New Testament

Some New Testament Greek words used to refer to the preaching of the Word of God are:

“Kerusso”

This is the most common word used for preaching. It is used in 61 references to refer to the preaching of Jesus, the Apostles and John the Baptist. It means “to proclaim like a herald, to blaze abroad, to publish.” See Mark 1:14, 45, 46. It usually implies utterances that carry authority and obedience.

“Euaggelizo”

This is the second most commonly used word for preaching in the New Testament

and is usually linked to the bringing of good news, the Gospel, and is the equivalent of the Old Testament “basar”. The word “euaggelizo” is made up of the two Greek words, “eu” meaning “good” and “vangelo” meaning “to report, i.e. report good news”. An example of this is found in Romans 10:14-15, “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news”. (NIV)

“Kataggelo”

This word is used 17 times and is linked with the idea of being a messenger and bringing a message. An example of this is Acts 17:3.

From the brief study above, one can see that the Bible is far more concerned with the message itself and the heart of the preacher than the techniques used to present it. Paul in referring to his preaching made the same Biblical emphasis. He wrote such things as “we preach Christ crucified..” (1 Corinthians 1:23 NIV) and, “I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.” (1 Corinthians 2:3 - 5.)

THE PREACHER’S MESSAGE

So then, what are the main points of the message we preach?

The supremacy of Jesus Christ

There is only one supreme message that we preach, and that is Jesus Christ. This is a New Testament emphasis and the focus of all Biblical preaching.

1 Corinthians 1 : 23

...we preach Christ crucified... Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

1 Corinthians 2 : 1 - 2

¹ And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. ² For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified."

John 12 : 32 (Jesus said of Himself)

And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself."

Acts 5 : 42

And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ.

A subtle danger faces every preacher. Because we preach on such a wide variety of subjects that ought to cover the whole Counsel of God and the whole spectrum of life, we can easily leave Jesus Christ out of it.

We also have to live what we preach. At times we then have to refer to ourselves and our lives and families. We will often be tempted to put ourselves on centre stage and Jesus Christ on the sidelines. (Philippians 2:5.)

Whatever subject we preach on, whatever examples we use and references we make to ourselves or others, must all be related to Him and referred to Him. He must be presented as supreme and Lord of everything.

Ephesians 1 is a great example of this, especially verses 23 and 24.

The Lord Jesus Christ is the Beginning and the End. (Revelation 1:8; Revelation 1:17; Revelation 21:6.) He is the Source of Life and the Center of Life. (John 1:4; John 5:21.) He is the Resurrection and the Life. (John 11:25.) He is the Way the Truth, and the Life. (John 14:6.) He is the centre of all life. He is the centre of all history. If we are to present answers to the problems of life, then we must present the Source and Centre of Life to people.

If Jesus is not central in your life, you will not be able to artificially make Him supreme in your preaching, nor will those who hear you be able to either.

It may be difficult in the beginning of a preaching ministry to relate everything to

Jesus Christ. This requires a skill that has to be practiced. After preparing a message we should always ask if Jesus has been made central in our message and see how the message primarily relates to Him. We may find at times we have to rewrite the entire message! Nevertheless, as we work at it, it will become more natural to us.

The Kingdom of God

If the King must be supreme in our message, then it follows that His Kingdom becomes the next important issue. We must keep Jesus Christ supreme and the Kingdom of God central in all our ministry and preaching.

First of all, we need to have a clear understanding of the doctrine of the Kingdom of God and heaven. Preachers therefore need to give attention to understanding the doctrines of the Bible.

Secondly, a supernatural transformation has to take place in our hearts and minds, where the Kingdom of God becomes more important than our own kingdoms. Without that transformation, much of what we supposedly do for our King is mixed with building our own kingdoms. We end up building our own kingdoms with God's bricks!

In the world of unbelievers this is obvious, but within the church it is often subtle and hidden behind things that look good and right. In fact many of God's leaders are blind to this truth and really believe they are serving the King with pure hearts. This was the problem Peter had before Jesus was arrested, and he had to be exposed by a crisis:

John 13 : 36 - 38

Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, where are you going?" Jesus answered him, "Where I am going you cannot follow me now, but you will follow afterward." Peter said to him, "Lord, why can I not follow you now? I will lay down my life for you." Jesus answered, "Will you lay down your life for me? Truly, truly, I say to you, the rooster will not crow till you have denied me three times.

This crisis experience tested Peter and helped him to see His own heart and helped him to change it. Eventually he was able to reply with sincerity to Jesus:

John 21:15

“Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.”

All who preach the Word of God ought to be praying David's prayer: *“Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts!”* (Psalm 139:23.)

Such a change is illustrated in the two parables in Matthew 13:44 - 46. The *“discovery”* of the Kingdom in both cases causes the individual to see his previous wealth (his own kingdom) as of little value and disposes of it to gain the Kingdom.

We need to give ourselves to both the understanding of the Kingdom and the heart change necessary if we are to effectively proclaim the Word of God. Consider such passages as Matthew 6:33: *“But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you...”* and Matthew 6:9, 10: *“Pray then like this: ‘Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.’”*

John the Baptist's message was that they should repent because the Kingdom of God was near at hand. (Matthew 3:13.) The Kingdom of God was what Jesus came preaching (Matthew 4:17.) Jesus commissioned His disciples to go and preach *“the Kingdom”* while casting out demons, healing the sick and raising the dead. (Luke 9:2.)

The Kingdom of God is larger than the church, evangelism, missions and all the different ministries of the church. It embraces all these things and much more. Where the centrality of the Kingdom is not preached, these various aspects of Christian life and ministry become ends in themselves instead of parts of the whole.

Preaching that gives the Kingdom its rightful place will reduce the number of Christians who look for convenience alone. It will reduce backsliding and produce a people who have a vision of the Kingdom and are willing to serve the purposes of God, in their generation, at any cost.

The coming of the Kingdom of God is the Authority and Government of God coming into a certain situation. That is why the healing ministry of the disciples to the unbelievers was so closely related to proclaiming the *“nearness”* of the Kingdom:

“... Heal the sick who are there and tell them, ‘The kingdom of God is near you.’”
(Luke 10:9 NIV).

Wherever we are we must see that the Kingdom of God comes in. Therefore the message we preach must do the same.

The simplicity of the commission

The “Great Commission” of Matthew 28:19-20 is not some special instruction for a few missionaries and evangelists. It was the final and great command Jesus gave to the whole Church before He ascended. It is indivisibly linked to the Lordship of Christ and the coming of the Kingdom. We cannot preach the supremacy of Christ and the centrality of the Kingdom and neglect the Great Commission.

It is the expression of the heart of God. He is love and loves the world of lost people. Therefore it is unthinkable that His commission should not apply to all who have received the expression of His love in the person and work of Jesus Christ in salvation.

Preaching the Great Commission is not a particular subject for once in a while – it is the vision and goal of the whole Church while it is still on earth! It must always find a place in our message. As everything we preach must keep Jesus supreme, the Kingdom central, so too, it must be related to the great love command of God. Everything we do in ministry and activity in the local church must have as its greater goal to reach the nations!

The word “*nations*” in the original Koine Greek is “*ethnos*” which can also be translated as “*rac*es” and “*people groups*”. Reaching the nations with the Kingdom of God applies to those locally, nationally and internationally.

If our message focuses primarily on meeting personal needs, and the needs of our community, we will not meet much resistance. Preaching about how we can all build our own kingdoms is the easiest kind of preaching. But there is no real, lasting, fruit in this and the end is death, a stagnating of spiritual enthusiasm and sense of fulfillment.

Relating our message to God’s vision and love for the lost world, and stirring people to get involved in reaching the nations, will produce reaction and resistance. People

are always wanting to go the easy way. There will be resistance to the inconvenience and sacrifice of the challenge. There will be resistance to sending people and money to the nations. The fear of such resistance that confronts us should be overcome by our sense of calling and confidence in the authority of God's Word.

We cannot adjust our message to accommodate our comforts and our own flesh. The Kingdom, not the local church, is central – the local church is an instrument for extending and advancing the Kingdom. As preachers, we can't be worried about losing people or being popular. We are here to proclaim God's Word, not our own!

Some scriptures to think about:

Baptism in the Spirit is not primarily for personal benefit, but that we shall be His witnesses to the uttermost parts of the earth. (Acts 1:8.)

Salvation's call to the lost is not primarily to come and be saved and healed, but rather in the words of Jesus “... *follow me and I will make you fishers of men.*” (Matthew 4:19.)

Deuteronomy 8:18 tells us that God gives His people “...*the ability to produce wealth...*” What for? The context tells us it is to establish His Covenant with us. The major theme of the Covenant is that He will bless us so that we in turn will be the channels through whom all the nations will be blessed. Our blessing is not for our comfort but for the purposes of love and going to the nations!

Philippians 4:19 is often preached about and quoted apart from its context. The passage tells us that our God shall supply all our needs. What for? For our own comfort and convenience alone? No. Verse 10 onwards gives the context. It had to do with Paul's apostolic mandate and ministry. They had supported him financially and shared in his ministry to reach the other nations and plant churches. It is in response to their involvement in the Great Commission that he responds with this wonderful promise of God's provision.

Our message and call are simple, but that doesn't make them easy. The message of Jesus is not convenient, but it is good news – convenience is not good news! It's the same news everyone else is preaching! So as preachers, we must be obedient to God's message and God's calling, otherwise there will never be truth and life in the

people we preach to.

PREACHERS ARE PARTNERS WITH GOD

Paul wrote to Timothy exhorting him to give attention to both himself and his teaching/doctrine.

1 Timothy 4 : 16

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

Too many preachers give all their attention to their teaching and preaching, failing to realise that the condition of their own characters, hearts and lives is much more important. Preaching is not some professional thing we do. We are always members of the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 6:15; 1 Corinthians 12:12) in whom Christ lives, and through whom He ministers to the rest of His Body. That ministry involves our whole being, all our relationships and our life circumstances.

This is best described by the words of John 15:5, *“I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.”* Throughout the Bible, God indicates His intentions to work through men and women, and with them, using their faculties, thoughts, abilities, knowledge and experience. The underlying principle is one of partnership.

It's not about entertaining

It is this partnership that often eludes preachers and leads to them seeing it as their job to impart head knowledge alone through persuasive, clever and motivational rhetoric, the very thing Paul said he would not do! (1 Corinthians 2: 1.) It's far easier for a gifted individual to acquire knowledge and put it across in an impressive style than to have to mature spiritually themselves and work with the Holy Spirit in presenting God's prophetic revelation for a specific time and a specific people. Although the one may impress and often entertain, it will leave people (and the preacher) without spiritual nourishment. The other enables them to meet God. They are nourished and truly inspired because their faith has been lifted; and they are hungry to hear more of

God's word. This is a very demanding activity.

However, such a partnership is not something we achieve easily. Our flesh is inclined to want to be independent and in control. It will require a lot of effort and the continuous humbling of ourselves as we learn to walk and work with the Holy Spirit in the pathway of experience.

There are certain things required of us in order for our preaching of God's word to have fruit:

1. A calling from God

As we mentioned in the previous section, while all Christians are called to proclaim the Gospel (which is what preaching is) not all Christians are called to preach to and teach a local church. The main burden of that kind of preaching and teaching falls upon the elders of that church (Titus 1:5-9, 1 Timothy 3:1-2, 2 Timothy 2:2) because the elders are responsible for the direction, doctrine and the discipline of that church. (Elders may ask deacons and leaders to help with this, of course, but it is up to their discretion.)

Some are clearly called to such a responsibility. Others are clearly called to large-scale public preaching and proclaiming of the Gospel (Billy Graham being a well-known example). We might often call this kind of preaching "evangelism" and / or "open-air preaching". And then others are called to translocal work where they exhort and encourage many churches.

Although we work in partnership with Him, He remains our Lord and Master, who decides what He wants us to do and how He wants us to do it.

There are many who want to be preachers for the wrong reasons. They see the apparent importance of being on a platform and they want that supposed glory for themselves! Such an approach will influence their motives and how and what they preach, and will make any partnership with God extremely difficult, if not impossible. More aspects of this will be covered later.

A "calling" comes in different ways and must not be thought of in narrow terms of

someone else's experience, or some "mystical voice out of the clouds". God has His own ways in dealing with each of us and getting through to our hearts, revealing a calling to us. So we shouldn't limit how he speaks and works. He usually communicates in many different ways, over a period of time, concerning important issues that affect our lives. What is important is that as a result of His communication to us we eventually come to a strong conviction that He has called us to preach.

There are those who find themselves thrust into a preaching ministry without feeling as if they have such a calling. They must not regard themselves as disqualified, but rather go to God on the matter and ask Him to establish a calling in their hearts. There are many who have had that experience and been a success for God. Whichever way around, we need to know beyond any doubt that we are called to preach.

2. Dependence on the Holy Spirit

Paul, the apostle, was well aware of the supernatural nature of preaching the Word of God and his dependence on the ministry of the Holy Spirit. In Ephesians 6:19 he writes "[Pray] also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel." This can often be a wonderful experience and we can enjoy seeing God at work through us if we depend on His Spirit.

The Holy Spirit prompts our minds with thoughts, illustrations, and deeper revelations as we preach. Things we have heard and learnt are brought back to our minds. Jesus said that this would be the work of the Spirit.

John 14 : 26

But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.

The Word of God and the Spirit of God go together. They work together to fulfil the purposes of God. Depending on either, to the minimising of the other, will reduce the effectiveness of our preaching. As has been said, "The Word without the Spirit puffs up and the Spirit without the Word blows up!"

"Blowing up" refers to the effects on a congregation who sit under the kind of preacher

who neglects the discipline and hard work of studying and researching the Word of God, and thinks he can get away with it by simply depending on the Holy Spirit alone.

Being “puffed up” refers to 1 Corinthians 8:1:

“... We know that we all possess knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up.”
(NIV)

Knowledge without the revelation and work of the Holy Spirit produces arrogance, evident in many Christians who “know it all” but do not live it at all. It’s an easy matter for preachers to fall into the trap of resorting to an academic handling of the Word without humbly and earnestly seeking to work with the Spirit and preach under His anointing. This becomes especially easy for those with charisma and gifting in the area of communication. We reap what we sow (Galatians 6:7) and preaching that depends on man’s ability will produce a congregation of people whose Christianity depends on the same thing.

Paul, the apostle, writes to the Corinthians:

1 Corinthians 2 : 45

...and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.

It’s the power of the Holy Spirit that opens up the otherwise “darkened” minds of people to receive the revelation of the Truth in God’s Word. (Ephesians 4:18.) Conviction and true repentance is the work of the Spirit.

John 16 : 8

And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgement.

Attempting to preach the Word of God without full dependence on the help and anointing of the Holy Spirit will fail to produce a people who have genuinely changed and who mature into the “fullness of Christ.” (Ephesians 4:13.) They will remain spiritual babies, possibly with a lot of head knowledge, continuously wanting to be entertained by a preacher who has a lot of charisma.

The anointing and power of the Holy Spirit will also depend on keeping Jesus Christ central in our preaching. This is covered in some more detail in the section on authority below.

There is no easy way for us to learn to preach in the power of the Holy Spirit. It's something each of us must give ourselves to and have to learn to do by practice. We have to grow into it as we *"...grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord Saviour Jesus Christ"* (2 Peter 3:18 NIV). It will develop in accordance with the development of our overall walk with God.

We must be patient, for it will take time. However, we must never be complacent about it.

THE PREACHER'S AUTHORITY

Very few of God's people have an adequate revelation and understanding of Godly authority. We have been influenced by so many things in this world that taint our view of authority. Thus, authority is generally abused by man and at best it is usually tolerated, or it is held in suspicion, criticised and resisted.

When we come into the place of having to exercise authority ourselves, we are subconsciously influenced by the above mentioned factors and face the danger of abusing it, abdicating it, confusing it, resorting to substitute authorities, and even feeling guilty and apologetic for having to exercise it.

A good study of the Bible will reveal that authority is an integral part of God's nature. It is one of the purposes for the creation of man, essential for order and affecting the purposes of God, a fundamental principle of leadership.

With this in mind, we have to consider the enormous importance, as sons and daughters of the Most High, to give ourselves to appreciating Godly authority, seeking revelation from the Father and having our minds renewed. We need to understand the various areas of delegated authority from God and how to exercise these in a covenantal manner.

There are two important areas of authority related to preaching that need to be mentioned:

1. The authority of the preacher's calling from God
2. The Authority of the Word of God.

1. The authority of the preacher's calling

Everyone who is called to preach the Word of God has to keep that calling in focus. A genuine calling from God becomes a source of faith, confidence and endurance for the preacher.

1 Corinthians 9 : 16 - 17

¹⁶ Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel! ¹⁷ For if I do this of my own will, I have a reward, but not of my own will, I am still entrusted with a stewardship."

In the face of demonic resistance, human reaction or criticism, failure, persecution, suffering and inconvenience, the preacher must have both a higher authority and a supernatural source of strength if he is to continue to preach the Word of God.

There are many examples in the Bible of those who had a calling and anointing from God and demonstrated powerful spiritual authority in their preaching ministry. E.g. Moses, Amos, John the Baptist, and of course, Jesus, who is our supreme example, to name but a few.

There are those who are not called to preach (to and for the local church, translocally or in a large evangelistic gathering) and set up their own authority. They like to preach, enjoy it, are gifted at public speaking, and set themselves up as preachers by using the opportunities afforded to them by others and by their own gift. They may enjoy a certain amount of success and depending on their gifting and charisma will have an audience. However, there will be a definite lack of anointing and authority from God if they do not have a genuine sense of being called by God to preach.

This is not only relevant for public speaking but is worth thinking about when it comes to what happens online as well. Many gifted individuals build followings for themselves and create online ministries and blogs, but there is a definite lack of anointing and authority from God. Often, online ministries can become critical of others and can

cause division in churches. There is something about the online world that makes many forget that they are still speaking to real people!

The Greek word for “sent” is “*apostello*”. It is usually used in the context of a superior sending a subordinate on an errand or mission. Delegation of authority is implied. The “sent one” is under orders from a higher authority. To know beyond any doubt that we have been called, and commissioned by our Lord to proclaim His truth, and thus carry His authority delegated to us, is absolutely necessary for bold uncompromising preaching of the truth.

Such authority will be made evident in a preacher by the Holy Spirit. It will be recognised by the hearers. It will draw people as well as command their attention. Release, revelation, and growth will take place in the lives of those who sit under such preaching.

2. The authority of the Word of God

This is of utmost importance in preaching. The Bible carries its own authority, apart from man. It is the Word of God and He is the supreme authority in existence. By His Word the universe was brought into existence (Hebrew 11:3). By His Word we are born again (1 Peter 1:23). He backs His Word and “*watches over it to perform it*” (Jeremiah 1:12). It is powerful and penetrating, analysing and exposing the very motives of men’s hearts, better than any system of psycho analysis (Hebrews 4:12). It is the basis of instruction, exhortation, rebuke and training in righteousness (2 Timothy 3:16). The Bible declares its own authority, “... *the Word of our God stands forever.*” Isaiah 40:8 (NIV). See also 1 Peter 1:25.

In order to be effective, every preacher must be absolutely convinced of the inspiration and authority of the Word of God, as well as the power it has to bring about the will and purpose of God.

The preacher must learn to appeal to the authority of the Word of God, especially in the face of opposition, addressing delicate issues, challenging unbiblical traditions, values, teachings and the status quo. It is the only authority that will stand in the end. It is not the authority of reason, church tradition, cultural tradition, education, position, rank, opinions of our own or the writings or quotations of the famous that

will be ultimately effective.

The Authority of the Word must be upheld before others in order to inspire them to honour it, uphold it, and submit to it. This is accomplished by:

Placing ourselves under the authority of the Word

Your lifestyle, family, values and behaviour have to demonstrate it, or else your own life and those who hear you will be undermined.

The Bible is clear that *“Whatever we sow we shall reap”*, including what we sow into the lives of those who hear us preach. (Galatians 6:7.) The harvest will always be a multiplication of what we sow.

The results of a little carelessness will astound us in the end. Many visionary elders or parents have been absolutely overwhelmed by the results of their own behaviour and standards in the people or children under them. Most often they cannot see or relate it to their own behaviour and values, and end up placing the blame at the door of those who they lead instead of taking responsibility for their own failure.

Another aspect of you placing yourself under the authority of the Word of God is by the way the message must become your own. The Truth must first break into our own lives and become a reality before we can communicate it with conviction. More will be said about this Part One and Part Two of this study.

Upholding the Authority of the Word of God is an absolute necessity if we are to produce men and women who are prepared to submit themselves to the will of God, and to become the kind of people who are bold enough not to succumb to the volatile trends and philosophies of our chaotic world system.

After all, we are *“... a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.”* (1 Peter 2:9 - NIV.)

We are to be part of the solution, not part of the problem.

Preachers often resort to substitute authorities. This takes place either in the absence of the genuine delegated authority from God, or simply following the easier path of depending on their gift, their reputation, their rank, position and title given by a human organisation. These things influence their motives for preaching, and in turn result in compromising the message they preach.

A note on “anointing”

“Anointing” - which has become something of a misunderstood and abused buzz word - simply means that God has poured out His Spirit and empowered someone for a particular task. This is why it often has to do with our “calling” and we may say that someone is “anointed” to do something in particular. (This doesn’t always have to be a life long thing - one may be “called” and “anointed” for a task in only a season or for a particular moment in time.)

As Christians we are all already “anointed” to preach the good news, just as we are all “called” to do it. Jesus was anointed to preach the good news to the poor (Luke 4:18) and as we are “in Christ” so we are also anointed for this task. In this sense, all our preaching is anointed - it carries God’s authority - so long as we focus on Christ Jesus and make him supreme and the Kingdom central.

This means that all our preaching of God’s Word comes with authority, but this authority - the “anointing” - is even more clear, powerful and fruitful when our lives reflect the message. In other words, if we’re not practicing what we preach, our preaching is much less powerful.

This is why in the next few sections we will be looking at the life and heart of the preacher first.

Note on our use of the ESV

We typically use the English Standard Version (ESV) in all of our preaching and teaching at Cornerstone Church. After careful investigation, the elders have concluded that, currently, the ESV is the closest readable English version of the Bible available.

Translating from another language (in this case, Hebrew and Koine Greek) is difficult if you translate word-for-word, as each word may carry several different meanings, depending on the context of the sentence. Therefore, a word-for-word translation is often difficult to read and follow. Therefore, there are also “thought-for-thought” translations, but these might often not allow for the reader to think for themselves as to what the text means – and the ideas of the translator will get in the way – which isn’t the best way to study the Bible.

The ESV is in between these two extreme (although relevant) approaches to translation and that’s why we use it. We recommend it as the current (2013) best Bible for ordinary reading and study.

Part One

CONSIDERING THE HEART

As mentioned in the previous section, a preacher must live out their own Christian life, working on their character and trusting in the Holy Spirit. Preachers who don't do this will not produce the kind of fruit necessary for the Kingdom to advance as effectively as it should.

Here are a few heart considerations that preachers should be regularly attending to.

Motives

Motives are often subconscious and have to be examined. Our motives affect everything we do and say. Our motives are often suspect and severely influenced by our flesh, by our needs, ambitions, reputation, reactions to people and circumstances. We need to bear in mind what the Bible says about the heart. (Jeremiah 17: 9,10.)

As preachers handling the Word of God we must purify our motives.

2 Corinthians 7 : 1

Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God.

The purifying of our motives is a process and we have to keep working at it. We need the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit to expose our motives to us, so that we can bring correction through repentance and the renewal of our minds.

Hebrews 4 : 12

For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

What God reveals must be ruthlessly dealt with. When God reveals something of my motives it must not be side-stepped or explained away. Many a preacher has

thought they could get away with it, deceived by the fact that the anointing continues to rest on them with good results.

However, if we do not develop our characters and purify our motives to carry His gracious anointing, that very anointing will eventually destroy us! There are enough examples in life and the Bible to prove it. Eg. King Saul's character was not able to support the anointing that was upon him.

There must be a heart decision to pursue the goal of preaching only for our Lord. Our aim should be to promote Him, to bring His word without compromise, to edify and draw all men to Him, and to keep our own needs, problems, and sin out of it!

We need to continually call on God to expose our hearts and enable us to understand our true motives. He will gladly do it, and will use circumstances and people to reveal the truth. David's prayer ought to be on every preachers lips:

Psalm 139: 23 - 24

²³ Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts!

²⁴ And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!

Trying to impress

Preaching is not about impressing people, becoming famous, and using sensationalism and controversy. We don't use vulgarity and coarse language - even under the guise of being 'honest' and 'calling a spade a spade'. And it's not a platform for criticising other people or other churches.

Although we cannot compromise the truth and beat around the bush in order to avoid offence, we can learn to skillfully choose expressions that will enable us to be direct and yet take everyone with us to an understanding of the Truth.

Humour, though a very important part of preaching, can also be abused. We don't use humour to keep people entertained and to self-promote ourselves, because we're likeable. This will only create childish people who continually expect to be entertained.

There is the danger of adopting techniques, methods, values and standards of the world into our preaching, because they seem so much more effective and easier. There are many psychological tricks used by the entertainment and advertising world that are both effective and attractive, but do not impart the life of God.

We do not look to make an impact through any other means other than the power of the Word and the Holy Spirit.

1 Corinthians 1 : 21

For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe.

Prejudice

This extends beyond the issue of race. It is our attitude towards those with A.I.D.S., homosexuals ... etc. Our hearts need to change on these important issues. We need to have a biblical philosophy of attitude to ALL people, especially those that many would consider “lepers” of our society.

Have we lost contact with the world we live in? We need a baptism of love, care and concern for people. Jesus died for *all*, and so we need to embrace *all* with His love.

Are we trying to fill our churches with safe people? Jesus came to save the world from sinners. Remember, “*We are what we are by the grace of God!*” (1 Timothy 1:12-16.)

Loving money

Where there is money there is temptation! The love of money is the root of all evil! (1 Timothy 6:10.) Judas sold himself. Are we willing to swap our calling to preach for money, or allow money to tempt us into sin so that our gift/ministry from God is disqualified?

How do we handle the rich in the church? And how do we handle the poor? There is no room for compromise.

Politics in its rightful place

We can often get heated about our political opinions and this affects our heart in a big way. Preaching is about proclaiming the Word of God, the Gospel, and Jesus as the Son of God. It's a sad day when a preacher uses his influence to push forward a political agenda.

Loving glory

Having the opportunity to be on a platform in front of people who have come to hear you speak places you in a position of authority and is a natural boost for the ego. All kinds of opportunities arise for our flesh to express itself. Two things will help us.

1. We have to walk worthy of the calling to which God has called us (Ephesians 4:1) with a deep sense of the privilege entrusted to us and the accountability we have towards Him.
2. We have to genuinely see the congregation as the “Bride” of our Lord (Ephesians 5:25-27). We have to make ourselves eunuchs for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven. (Matthew 19:12 NKJV). We can never sample, rape, use or take advantage of the King's Bride for our own benefit. It is our responsibility to prepare her for the wedding day!

We like to be accepted

Your human need for affirmation and acceptance are often met to a certain extent by the love and responses of the people we lead and preach to. You will be tempted to compromise God's message to hold people and keep them happy, drawing them to yourself.

We don't seduce or draw the Bride of Christ to ourselves, but we endear her to Jesus by keeping Him uplifted and central in all our preaching.

A low esteem or poor self-image needs to be dealt with. Is our focus more on what must be done or on Him who empowers us? We must minister out of a foundation of

affirmation in God. A negative self-esteem will sow fear into people. We need to rise up in our dignity, who we are in Christ, and from that position of affirmation comes our confidence.

We have to face the issues of our lives and character

Personal problems, weakness, sin, and domestic conflict cannot be allowed to influence our preaching negatively. The struggles of life give us both a field of experience and also a personal testimony of God's grace. Both form a very valuable background to our preaching ability.

However, we cannot preach out of the negative emotions and impure thoughts and values that arise out of these issues if we do not actively look to resolve them. People are bound to pick it up. The mature become offended and the weak are led further astray.

We have to be protective and pure in all we do. For example we must be able to communicate on sexual matters with purity. As Jesus says, a good tree cannot bear bad fruit and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit (Matthew 7:17 - 18).

Does your message come with a heart in the transformational state? If so, then you will see the breakthrough you long to see when you preach.

We are here to exemplify God

We need to train ourselves in godliness. How strong is our personal devotional lives? Our hearers and the world must know that we love God. Our assertiveness is the spiritual authority we have, based on the message of the Gospel, and nothing else.

This is true when we are online as well. Many people seek to build a preaching platform of their own through the use of social media, blogging and the like. We must carefully examine our hearts and motives here as well.

Ungodly ambition

The temptation to promote ourselves cannot be ignored. Sometimes, we might use illustrations from our own life, making comments on how busy we are and all the sacrifices we've made, subtly promoting ourselves in the eyes of our hearers.

Subtle self promotion will receive a surprisingly positive response from most people because of our idolatrous flesh (Galatians 5:20) which loves to elevate heroes. We live in a celebrity culture, after all!

Also, we must guard against wanting to get ahead at someone else's expense. This problem has left many casualties in its wake. Walk in humility and remember it's always "friendship before function". Along with trusting God for His anointing of power on us when we preach, we need to trust Him for a servanthood anointing. We need to become preachers of heart and not of program. Selfish ambition is unspiritual and is of the devil (James 3:13-16).

We need to deal with our own self-absorption and not be absorbed in our own ministry and gifts!

Abuse of authority

Those called to preach the Word of God find themselves in a place of authority delegated to them by God's call to preach, and in turn affirmed by the people who come to hear them and follow them. Authority creates the potential to have power over the lives of people.

The rebellious inclination of our flesh seeks power and control. It is an easy matter to abuse that authority with drastic results. History is full of examples of such abuse. We have to be extremely careful of this danger. We can begin to exploit our position without even realising it.

The first sign of danger is building towards ourselves and seeing everyone else as a threat. We need to light fires under our people - give them wings and not control them. Our aim is to build towards Christ and not ourselves.

Some of the following points cover the subtle ways in which we do this: -

1. Becoming legalistic in our preaching
2. Condemning our hearers, by using the preaching opportunity to make people feel condemned about that which is unreasonable.
3. Preserve or defend one's reputation by attacking others or exposing their weakness or sin.
4. "Get at people" using the preaching opportunity in an indirect manner, avoiding the unpleasantness of having to confront them personally.
5. "Painting everyone with the same brush". Applying broad generalisations carelessly.

Now that we've looked at heart matters, we can begin to discuss matters of preparation because the most important part of preparation is, in fact, our life, our relationship with the Lord, our own personal study of the Word and ultimately our own hearts. This will be discussed in the next section.

Part Two

PREPARATION

We've covered the heart of the preacher a great deal in our previous sections and the heart is your first major factor when it comes to preparing a message. The other factors have more to do with life style and how we manage our time. Finally, we will talk about preparing the actual content of the sermon.

PREPARING YOUR ENVIRONMENT

Preaching can be quite an emotional experience and can often strain us. Many attest to feeling spiritually heavy on the Monday after preaching. Many more attest to the week before their preach, and the day before (usually a Saturday) being frustrating and abnormally busy.

You need to prepare yourself for these eventualities. Here's how.

1. Making space for what matters

As much as you can, make plenty of space on your calendar. Streamlining our lifestyles, sorting out priorities and ordering our lives to be able to cope is not an easy matter, but we must do it as best we can.

Many good things may have to give way to the greater privilege God has given us to preach.

Giving our families the attention God expects is another consideration. No preacher will be able to bear the strain of tension and trouble in the family and marriage in addition to the strain of the ministry. Make space for the family so that in that area, and the area of relationships, you won't bring unnecessary strain on yourself.

2. Resting and exercising

As with most of our work, we must make sure that we get enough physical exercise and eat well, otherwise we can overdo it. Rest. Get some rest before and after your preach, so you don't burn yourself out. Be realistic with what you can manage. And spend time in God's presence simply to enjoy Him as well - not just to receive a revelation, but to rest in Him!

3. Managing your head space and environment

We all need to learn what works best for us, and you'll begin to create your own tips and tricks as you grow. Many of these will have to do with managing your head space and your environment.

For example, you might like the outdoors - in which case, make sure you get under a tree and spend time with God, and do your preparation in a place where you feel close to God. Or maybe you've created a space for yourself at home for this purpose. Some of us even find that visiting a local coffee shop is what we need. This all has to do with ensuring you have the right kind of environment that works for you and helps you commune with God, research properly, and be able to prepare.

You will know those things that distract you. If Facebook and Twitter are too much of a distraction (and these are known to clutter our thinking) then make sure you avoid these, even switching off electronic devices and leaving them with your spouse! Also, it may be helpful to have a piece of paper close by when you prepare so you can jot down distracting thoughts (responsibilities, chores etc.).

PREPARING FOR THE BATTLE

While many would highlight that critical people or even they themselves are their enemies when it comes to preaching, the fact is that we must never forget what we are doing when we preach - advancing the Kingdom of God and bringing the Truth of God's Word, the Truth of Jesus, to hearts. This means we will always come up against spiritual resistance from Satan and demons.

Matthew 13 : 19 - 22 Jesus talks about this battle.

¹⁹ *When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is what was sown along the path.* ²⁰ *As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy,*

²¹ *yet he has no root in himself, but endures for a while, and when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately he falls away.*

²² *As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it proves unfruitful.* ²³ *As for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it. He indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty.*

Often, when preparing for a message, many will find all sorts of unexpected demands or circumstances will arise. It's healthy to anticipate these sorts of things happening and never forget the call to faith, keeping in mind the big picture. It's not unusual for there to be relational problems and tension in the family just before having to get up to preach! These are certainly of the enemy.

When we preach, we do engage in spiritual warfare. There are many testimonies of how freedom and deliverance has come to people while the Word is preached. Mindsets are broken and ideas and values are changed. Consequently, it is often the preacher's experience to feel absolutely worn out after preaching under the anointing.

Remember, though, we should expect victory. Jesus said in Matthew 16:17-19 " *...I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.*" (NIV). Nothing can stop this Kingdom from advancing.

PREPARING THE CONTENT¹

There are essentially three aspects to any message:

- 1.** The heart / anointing - who says it

¹ We are grateful to PJ Smyth for this section as it has been inspired by his book, *The World Needs More Preachers*. This is available at www.godfirst.co.za. This section has also been inspired by Leon van Daele's original notes on preaching.

2. The message's content - what is said
3. The delivery - how it is said

Each of these influence the other, so each of these must be a focus in our preparation:

1. The heart / anointing - who says it

*"You cannot preach conviction of sin unless you have suffered it. You cannot preach repentance unless you have practiced it. You cannot preach faith unless you have exercised it. You may talk about these things, but there will be no power in the talk unless what is said has been experimentally proved in your own soul. It is easy to tell when a man speaks what he has made his own, or when he deals in second-hand experience. 'Son of man, eat this roll.' You must eat it before you can hand it out to others."*²

- Charles Spurgeon.

The power and weight of a message is very much influenced by the heart and life of the one preaching it, more than just what is being said and how it is being said, as we have stated in great detail in the previous section. That life will also include much prayer and increased anointing.

The well-known preacher Martyn Lloyd-Jones said, "What is the chief end of preaching? It is to give men and women a sense of God and his presence...I can forgive a preacher almost anything if he gives me a sense of God". How can we give people this sense of God? I doubt there is a formula for this, and I am sure that many factors come into play, but I suggest that whatever our topic or text, there should always be sections when we, like Paul, cannot resist branching off to rave and praise the person and exploits of Jesus! In his epistles Paul can't seem to go more than a few sentences without bursting out some praise to God (Philippians 2:5-9 and Colossians 1:15-20)!"

The great Scottish preacher and hymn-writer James S. Stewart said, "*Preaching exists, not for the propagating of views, opinions and ideals, but for the proclamation of the*

² Spurgeon, from Spurgeon Gold by Ray Comfort, Pg 125, 2005. This particular quote is taken from The World Needs More Preachers by PJ Smyth, available at www.godfirst.co.za.

*mighty acts of God.”*³

Therefore, as we've stated, we must remember to make our preaching about Jesus and His Kingdom! It will then always carry an anointing and power!

2. The message's content - what is said

Our principle source is the Bible. We may use other resources to help us understand better and have an idea on how to present it, including other books, study guides, sermon downloads and notes from another preach we have heard.

Also, do not discount our life experiences and the testimonies of others.

We also do need to keep abreast of world trends and affairs, reading journals and magazines and the newspaper, to be like the sons of Issachar in 1 Chronicles 12:32, "... who understood the times and knew what to do."

There may also be opportunities for us to visit communities of other cultures (locally or abroad, e.g. a trip in another country) and participate in some of their activities.

We also need to spend time with people in other age groups. We need to understand how the elderly and how teenagers think, what is important to them and what problems and temptations face them.

People who come and hear us will quickly discern whether we understand life in general and where we're at. Life is a big factor in preparation and we need to have open ears to what is going on! This will provide angles and topics to preach about.

Also, within every message there should be **Salt, Milk and Solids**. This means that in a sermon you speak to the completely churchd (solids), the partly churchd (milk) and those not churchd at all (salt). See Hebrews 5:12 and Matthew 5:13 for more on these metaphors. You could also adjust this to suit the audience - for example, if you are speaking to church elders only (completely churchd) you would want to make sure that your message is relevant for new church leaders as well as veterans in the group.

³ James S. Stewart from Preaching. Hodder and Stoughton. 1955. This particular quote is taken from The World Needs More Preachers by PJ Smyth, available at www.godfirst.co.za.

3. The delivery - how it is said

Here you need to pay attention to your style, your audience, and illustrations. Humour, the length of the sermon, how clearly you speak, how loudly you speak, and so on are important factors. For more on this topic, refer to Part Six “Tips for Public Speaking.”

Preaching the message to an empty room is a helpful idea as this trains you on how to speak, read your notes, and hear from God at the same time. It’s not recommended that you learn a message word-for-word in “parrot fashion” but learn how to use your many faculties at the same time. As you do this, you will find that God will speak to you and stir you and you will receive deeper insight and revelation into your topic. You can then adjust your content accordingly.

DECIDING ON WHAT TO PREACH

So then, what are we going to preach on? These guidelines will help.

1. Foundational topics

A church needs to be regularly exposed to foundational topics that are always relevant, for example grace, the Holy Spirit, evangelism, doctrine, the Bible, sex, money, power, and marriage. These kinds of topics (and many others) can be done every year without ever becoming repetitive. This is because different preachers may do them, or they may be presented differently (within a series, for example) or you can preach them from different angles (using a verse; using a current news item; and so on).

It’s also great to go through a book of the Bible every year (for example, our Revelation series). The advantage of this is it is always relevant for new Christians and veteran Christians.

2. Cultural topics

This refers to certain special days in our culture such as Valentines Day, Easter,

Christmas, Mothers Day, Fathers Day etc. If you are preaching in a week where any of these special days are taking place you have a relevant topic to preach on. These times are great opportunities to preach on something that the audience will already be open to – and you can use the opportunity to bring in the Gospel.

Also, major events such as the elections or natural disasters can also be considered but be careful, these are difficult and charged topics. Remember, we don't use the platform to push forward our own political agenda and we don't use the platform to pronounce judgement either, but to encourage people to seek their joy and peace in Jesus.

The German theologian and pastor Karl Barth is often credited as saying: *“A preacher should always have a Bible in one hand and a newspaper in the other.”* He also said, *“Take your Bible and take your newspaper, and read both. But interpret newspapers from your Bible.”*

We have to be aware of what's going on and what people are currently thinking and preach on these.

3. Where the church is at

The local church (or universal church) may be in a particular time and place where a very particular message is needed. Here you may use common sense (for example, there may be a lot of marriage problems and it's then worth speaking on this topic) or God may, prophetically, reveal a certain need, especially if you are the leader of a church.

This is one of the most effective ways to build up the congregation into a powerful and mature people for God.

4. A personal revelation

There will be many times when God has revealed something in Scripture to you so clearly and particularly and you are so excited about it that you just have to preach on it!

Psalms 45 says: *“My heart is stirred by a noble theme....my tongue is the pen of a skillful*

writer...lips anointed with grace.”

We must, however, be sure that something that is on our hearts is for the congregation and not God speaking to us personally for our own correction or encouragement.

It must be pointed out, nevertheless, that at times our preaching is born out of our own experience of God’s dealings with us. The message must become part of us and fill our hearts if we are going to preach with passion and reality. Consider how some of the prophets of the Old Testament had to go through certain experiences in order to communicate God’s Word to the people.

So which comes first, the text or the topic?

This is never really set in stone. Sometimes, the text will come first while at other times the topic is first. But if you feel you must preach on a certain topic, find a verse of scripture to preach from. You must bring it back to the Bible and equip people to read the Bible for themselves.

It’s good practice to not use a dozen texts to drive home a topic – try and preach from only one or two texts. You can, of course, refer to other texts in your preach, but keep one text as your primary base.

GENERAL RULES OF PREPARATION

There are general rules, which are applicable to the preparation of all sermons. Take note of these and apply them when you are called upon to preach.

1. **Pray** for God to give you a message, to speak to you from some portion of Scripture.
2. **Read** the Bible much. Get filled with God’s word. Learn verses off by heart. Use different translations. We have a lifelong commitment to regularly study the Bible.

A good rule for those in paid ministry or leading churches is to set aside a period each week (a morning or day) to study the Word. It is preferable that this study be unrelated to what will be preached the following weekend. A good study of Bible background, times and customs, is also very helpful. It will enhance our preaching, as well as help the hearers to better understand the message of the Scriptures.

Also, while we can never fully have or fully understand everything, gain a good knowledge of Theology and Doctrine (while keeping an open mind) so you can have a framework which will help guide you into consistency and balance.

- 3. Read** a lot, in general. Words are the colours with which we paint pictures in the minds of the people. We must learn how to use them for the best effect.

This does not mean sophisticated levels of vocabulary. In fact we must learn to speak in a way that will be understood by everyone. Consider the way Jesus preached, and how people from all walks of life flocked to listen to him. Look at His language and the simple day to day illustrations He used. It was not His language that baffled them, but the profound truths of the Kingdom, which they could not always grasp.

One of the problems facing preachers is that of how the reading of reference and other books of academic sophistication affect us. We come to appreciate clever phrases and bigger words, attaching a high value to their use, and feeling very proud of ourselves as we include them in our preaching! Or if we don't feel proud of it, sometimes we're just so used to thinking with big words because we do so much reading, that we almost naturally speak with these big words.

However, the truth is that these words may mean absolutely nothing to the average person who is not exposed to such vocabulary and even leave them confused about what we are trying to communicate! Therefore, it can be very unhelpful.

- 4. Write** your thoughts down when you get them.
- 5. Look** for illustrations in your daily walk – stories you read, life experiences from others, and also creation.

6. **Listen** to other preachers. We have to produce our own message out of the revelation we receive and the research we do. Resorting to preaching the sermons of others is equivalent to serving up regurgitated food! However, reading the sermons of others and listening to their preaching as an extra study develops our field of experience and exposes us to new ideas and different ways to approach a subject or a text.
7. **Remember** to whom you will be speaking - Christians? The unsaved? Children? Teenagers? Remember why you are preaching: is it to (a) get people saved? (b) exhort the children of God? (c) teach the Christians something from God's Word?
8. **Ask** yourself questions about your message, about the subject you are discussing, the person you are describing, the story you are telling, or the passage of scripture you are expounding.
9. **Get filled** with your message, get enthusiastic about what you are going to say, otherwise no one else will! People will only believe you if you believe your message yourself.
10. **Be careful** that you are preaching the truth, and that you are making things quite clear to your hearers. Put yourself in their place. Remember they have to put up with your speaking.
11. **Be willing** to accept criticism from others about your messages.
12. **Use** good reference material. E.g. concordances, lexicons, commentaries ... etc. But always remember to rely on other comment as a last point to preparation.
13. **Keep** Christ pre-eminent in your thoughts.
14. **Don't** become over-complicated. Keep your language simple. Make sure you understand what you are saying, otherwise nobody else will. A message can be profound and simple at the same time.
15. **Remember** that **words** are bricks which go to build up the sermon, and therefore

the correct use of words is important. A preacher should be a student of language. Now that we have a good idea on our basic preparation, we need to discuss how to actually construct a message and break it down into parts. This we will do in the next section.

Part Three

CONSTRUCTING THE MESSAGE

In the introductory section of this study guide the point was made that the Bible places the main emphasis on the preacher and the message rather than on the technical construction of the sermon. However, there is much to be said for putting together a structure for a message as long as we do not bind ourselves to it and make it rigid and inflexible.

A good rule to follow is to prepare as if there is no Holy Spirit, and then preach as if there are no notes and only the Holy Spirit !

GOOD SERMON CONSTRUCTION WILL DO THE FOLLOWING FOR US:

1. Help us to keep to the main message

Pruning away irrelevant points will prevent us rambling all over the place. Remember we are trying to get God's message and truth across, not demonstrating to the people how much we know! Don't try and say everything you know on a particular subject - keep it simple and to the point, you don't need to expound on every point of the Bible in one message!

One of the problems we face, when we do research, is we get excited about all the other related things we discover and want to include them in the sermon. A common mistake made by inexperienced preachers is that they overload the message with information and Bible verses. The main message is obscured and the people get indigestion with the huge variety served up for them!

An exception to the above will be when you are teaching on a subject, preaching through a book or a passage etc.

2. Enable the message to progress logically

Logical progression is important. I.e. each point building upon and following the previous one. This makes more sense to the hearer. It is extremely difficult to follow and understand a preacher who is making a whole lot of comments and statements that do not seem to go together.

What would you make of the following?: *“Jesus walked on the water Elijah was a powerful prophet!”*

Making unrelated comments is one of the most common weaknesses most preachers have. We often assume too much in terms of what people know and how they think. We assume they will be able to make the logical connection when they cannot.

3. Help us to keep the sermon balanced

Therefore we will avoid giving more time to the less important issues and ending up failing to give sufficient time to the main message.

4. Help us to plan to bring the sermon to a point where we can challenge people to make a decision

We obviously build up to a point of challenge with the message we preach, and want our hearers to make a decision concerning the truth they have heard. We will cover this in more detail later.

A WELL-CONSTRUCTED SERMON WILL CONTAIN THE FOLLOWING:

1. Introduction
2. Body
3. Conclusion

1. Introduction

The introduction must introduce the BODY of our message, leading up to the theme of the message. The introduction prepares the ground, explaining the relevance of the theme.

An introduction should:

- Be simple
- Be pertinent
- Be courteous
- Catch the attention of your hearers
- Unfold the context and point of your message
- Not be distracting
- Not be pure entertainment and have no relevance to your theme
- Connect with your audience personally.
- Make them want to hear your main point / theme before you actually tell it to them.
- Say the main point/theme and what specifically you are going to tell them today.⁴

A good idea is to prepare the introduction last, once you know your theme, and the challenge you want to leave your hearers with.

2. Body

This constitutes the main part of your message, centering on your theme, and

⁴ These last points are from the book *How to Preach for a Change* by Terran Williams, available at www.commonground.co.za.

containing three or four main points.

There are certain principles of arrangement:

1. Explanation and argument come before persuasion and appeal. Always base your appeal on a fact you have already explained, and, of course, it needs to be a biblical principle.
2. There should be a build-up in your message. Work from your weaker, less impactful points to your stronger, impactful points. I.e. your sermon should build up to a climax. A sermon should not becoming a muttering or rambling on.
3. The people should understand the theme or main point of the message. They should see the value of what you are saying; it should have purpose; it should have relevance; and it should have easily understood practical application. Your listeners should know what to do about what they have heard! Always build a bridge from the “known” (the readily perceived) to the unknown (the point you want them to grasp).

You may be preaching a one-point or a multi-point message. Most of the time, you will probably preach a multi-point message, which means that within your body you would have several sub-points, and each of these you can break down into smaller bits.⁵ Each sub-point should include:

1. Reference(s) to Scripture
2. An application.

3. Conclusion

For your conclusion, do the following:

- Repeat what you stated in the introduction (your build-up).
- Repeat the main theme of the message.
- Repeat the sub-points made (each application or each point within the preach - remember, this is a summary!).
- End it off with one big application and make it inspiring.

⁵ See Part Five: Other Types of Sermons for more on a one-point message.

Notice the basic flow in your message:

1. You make them want to hear what you have to say before you say it.
2. You tell them what you are going to say.
3. You tell it to them (this is the bulk of the message).
4. You tell them what you just said.

Now let's delve into more detail.

CONSTRUCTING THE MOST COMMON SERMON: A MULTI-POINT MESSAGE⁶

There are six phases in the preparation of a message's content. Here is a suggested process of preparing the message's content:

1. **Palm:** What is your main point / theme?
 2. **Fingers:** What are your subpoints?
 3. **Two creases in each finger:** for each point:
 - a. **First crease:** How will you show that this subpoint is from the Word?
 - b. **Second crease:** How will you amplify and apply this subpoint to our lives now?
 4. **Skin between fingers:** How will I transition from subpoint to subpoint without losing people?
 5. **Wrist:** How will I, in the introduction, make people want to listen to me, and want to hear what I am about to tell them?
 6. **Knuckle and punch:** How will I bring this all together, and give that final inspiration?
- Now let's look at how to do each of these.

1. Phase one: Palm: What is your main point / theme?

Every message needs one main point / theme. People need to be able to remember what you spoke on and so your message needs to have focus.

It's so important to dig until you find this main point / theme. It gives the message its

⁶ The following is taken, with some slight adjustments, from the book *How to Preach for a Change* by Terran Williams, available at www.commonground.co.za.

focus. Everything that is said in the entire message needs to develop and support that single point / theme.

The main point of a single-text message

Single-text messages can sometimes be difficult when it comes to having a main point, because the scriptures attend to several things at once in a passage. When this is the case you can usually choose just part of the chapter, and say, 'You can read the rest of the chapter at home.'

If however you get to choose your own single-section of the Bible to preach from, you can then choose one that deals with just one main theme / point. The main point needs to be the most basic summary of that text.

Here are some examples of main themes / points when looking at various Bible passages:

- Luke 12:1-12: 'Fear the God who loves you.'
- Luke 12:13-21: 'Handle your money with eternity in mind.'
- Luke 12:22-34: 'Seek first God's will, and you will experience God's care'
- Luke 12:35-48: 'Get ready, or else.'
- Luke 14:1-14: 'Christ calls us to a humble generosity.'
- Luke 14:15-24: 'God's kingdom is a party.'
- Luke 14:25-34: 'Put Jesus first.'

(Look at the texts and see if these are appropriate main points for each text.)

The main point / theme of a multi-text, topical message

When doing a topical message you will also need a main point / theme that holds it all together. It may be a simple theme like worship, humility, serving etc.

For example you may say in your message: 'I want to speak to you today about personal prayer / being filled with the Spirit / how to restore a broken relationship / have a good marriage etc.'

But beware of trying to cover too much ground when you choose a theme. For example, you could give one message on 'What is prayer?' Another on 'Why pray?' Another on 'What makes it hard to pray?' And another on 'How to pray.' Sometimes you can try do all in one go, but beware of information overload. A singularly focused message is more powerful.

Choose just one main point / theme in any message. And let everything develop that point.

2. Phase two: Fingers: What are your subpoints?

Choosing subpoints for a multiple-text, topical message. If you were talking about the things that delight God, you would think of dividing it up as such:

1. We love him above all
2. We trust him most of all
3. We obey him first of all
4. We praise him always

And each of these would have a base in a verse.

Choosing subpoints for a single-text message

One way to find subpoints for a single-text message is to cut and paste the text you're speaking on from the Internet (such as www.biblegateway.com/versions) into a document.

Then on the computer screen you can separate (with a few lines of space in between) the Scripture subsections that each have a different thought. You can then give each separate section a summarising heading.

This heading is the first movement towards identifying the subpoints. You can then try to connect the summarising heading to the main point / theme.

So for example look at Galatians 1. Let's say the topic is "Freedom". You might battle to find an integrating main point. But you could pick out three insights into freedom

from this text and make these the subpoints:

- vs 1-5: Freedom happens when we believe the message of freedom
- vs 6-10: Freedom dwindles when we begin to doubt the message of freedom.
- vs 11-24: Freedom explodes as we encounter the Liberator himself.

(A critical comment on these subpoints: The wording of the subpoints is unusually long, but you're holding them together around a single theme - in this case the theme of freedom. But as a general rule the wording should be as short and simple as possible.)

Make the wording of the subpoint immediately applicable to our lives, usually even putting it in the imperative tense. The temptation is to use subpoints that simply describe the text, and then try to apply it to our lives as you speak about the subpoint.

An example of simply describing the text is as follows:

The subpoints of Luke 15:3-7, if you just described the text, would be:

- vs 3-4 - The good shepherd went looking for the lost sheep
- vs 5-6 - The good shepherd celebrated the finding of the sheep
- vs 7 - Even the angels celebrated

But here is a far better way to make each point: make it immediately applicable to the lives of your hearers. Here is a better way of creating subpoints for Luke 15:3-7:

- vs 3-4 - Commit to go after the lost
- vs 5-6 - Expect to experience the ultimate joy
- vs 7 - Remember all heaven applauds your efforts

Notice that these subpoints are applicable to our lives now. Notice also that they are not descriptive in tense, but imperative - they tell us to do something. It's true that the subpoints made in the effective example would have been applications mentioned within the subpoints of the ineffective example. But rather put the application in the subpoint itself. That way the point will have greater impact, and the application will be more memorable. Besides, people are more likely to remember headings than information under a heading.

Whenever possible make the subpoints in the form of an imperative, as opposed to a

mere description. So for example:

- ‘Confess your sins’ is better than ‘Confessing our sins is good’
- ‘Realise God will never leave you’ is better than ‘God will never leave you’
- ‘Demonstrate the shepherd’s heart’ is better than ‘We should reflect God’s shepherd heart’

Sometimes the subpoint will be something they need to do, and sometimes it will be something they need to know. When it’s the latter, start your subpoints with verbs such as “discover”, “understand”, “realise”, “get a revelation of”, “know”, and “remember”. Make sure that each subpoint is in the same tense and has a similar feel to the other subpoints.

An example of not doing this would be: (from Matthew 5:13-16)

- Subpoint one: We should be salty.
- Subpoint two: Be the light of the world.
- Subpoint three: Making a difference is a great privilege.

Notice that they don’t feel similar, and they are in different tenses, and therefore not so effectively stated.

A more effective wording would be:

- Subpoint one: Salt the earth.
- Subpoint two: Light the world.
- Subpoint three: Make a difference.

Notice that they are similar in length and feel. And they are all in the imperative tense.

Sometimes, but try to avoid this, topical messages can have sub-subpoints. The most common way that this happens is if you make the subpoints themselves into questions (which themselves are answered by some sub-subpoints).

For example, if you were speaking on worship your three points could be:

- What is worship?
- Why worship? (with three reasons given as sub-subpoints)
- How to worship? (with four practical tips as sub-subpoints)

Using the three questions of 'what', 'why' and 'how' as the three subpoints help you with the flow and arrangement of the content. These talks can really dazzle people, but the information overload can undermine the long lasting effectiveness of the message.

The goal of preaching should not be to impress people, but to impact them. So as a general rule, rather choose just one question per message. In other words, the above message could rather be done as a series of three talks, with each talk answering just one question. If you only get to speak once, choose just one question to answer.

3. Phase three: Two creases in each finger

(The two subsections of each subpoint)

For every subpoint you make you will generally have two parts to it.

1. You will show how this subpoint comes from a specific verse(s) in the Bible.
2. You will amplify the subpoint and apply it to our lives now.

First crease: How will you show that this subpoint is from the Word?

Charles Colson writes, *'The only way you can speak for God with certainty is to speak from the Bible.'* Henry C. Fish said, *'Preachers who saturate their messages with the Word of God never wear out.'*

You have already given the point, which immediately gives it the application edge. Now you read and explain the Scripture verses themselves, and show how you got to this application.

Focus on bringing the specific verse(s) to light. Open them up. Explain the words or phrases that are hard to understand. People need to understand that you are getting this from God's Word. This is not your opinion. Engage them with the text. Bring it to life. Let people feel the wisdom and the power and the clarity that flow from specific verses in the Bible. Bring the story to life if it is a narrative section; speak to people's imaginations not just their minds.

Second crease: How will you amplify and apply this subpoint to our lives now?

Thomas Manto wrote, *'Teaching what God's Word says is like drawing the bow, but calling people to apply the truth to their life is like actually hitting the mark.'* It's not enough to explain a truth from God's Word and not encourage, equip, ask or tell people to apply it to their lives.

Once you have looked at the specific Scripture(s), you need to amplify and apply the subpoint to our lives. Here are seven possible ways that you can amplify and apply the subpoint to our lives:

• Be perspicuous (which, ironically, means 'be clear')

You could say the subpoint again in other words. Don't underestimate the power of repetition, especially repetition that says the same thing again and again but in different words. Another way to be clear is to say what you don't mean by this subpoint.

• Be persuasive

If you have some doubt that people will believe or accept this subpoint on the basis of God's Word alone, persuade them that it is so. Use statistics, or personal stories, or lines of logic that remove all doubt that God's Word is right about this.

• Be pictorial

You could use a Bible story or analogy or object lesson or visual that illustrates this subpoint in picture form. Truth in picture form seems to lodge deeper in a person than truth in propositional or factual form. So give them a mental picture that illustrates the subpoint.

• Be practical

You could suggest one or two very specific ways we can apply this to our lives this week.

• Be provocative

You could ask them questions like: Do you get this? Do you realise how important it is that we actually do this, and not just hear about it? Does this apply to you? What stops you from believing this? Doing this?

- **Be personal**

You could tell a personal story of how you have either battled to believe or do this personally, or of how you got it right and how positive the experience was. Interestingly, nothing seems to empower people to do what you're saying, quite like you vulnerably admitting that you have at times failed in doing this.

- **Be prophetic**

You could try and capture the prophetic urgency of this, saying something like, 'Please hear me. I believe with all my heart that this is what God is saying to you and me. You are not here today by accident. God is speaking to us now through his Word. You and I must make the adjustments in our lives. His grace is here to help us.'

Do not rush through your subpoint. You need to give each one sufficient time for the Holy Spirit to really massage it into the minds and hearts of the people.

That is why, as a general rule, it is not good to have more than three or four subpoints.

4. Phase four: Skin between fingers: How to transition from subpoint to subpoint without losing people

One of the most common mistakes in preaching is to change from one subpoint to another, but to do it too quickly, or without sufficient clarity so that some people do not understand that the previous subpoint has ended, and the next has started. This can be a frustrating experience for hearers since they have lost track of where you are.

The best way to avoid this is to be very clear that one subpoint is ending, and the next is starting. So at the end of every subpoint, slow down, take a breath and say something to the effect of, 'So that brings us to the next thought.'

To come back to the analogy of the fingers on the hand: the way to get from one finger to the next is to come back to the palm (the main point of the whole message) and to the skin that joins one finger to the next. That means that you must be sure to repeat the main point or theme of the message again. And perhaps repeat the subpoints already stated. Here is an example:

‘So the first way to protect our church is to ‘focus on what we have in common’. And the thought we’ve just looked at is ‘1) Be realistic in your expectations’. That brings us to the second way that we can protect our church: ‘2) Choose to encourage rather than criticise.’

That may sound like a lot of words, but they are vital. Remember that we are trying to make a singular point (in this case protect our church) and we are trying to help people follow very clearly our flow of thought and especially to remember the subpoints that develop the main point. They also give a person time to change mental gear (which takes a good ten seconds) from one subpoint to the next. Besides, repetition is very effective to really impress a message upon your hearers.

5. Phase five: Wrist: How to, in the introduction, make people want to listen to you and want to hear what you are about to tell them

You’ll notice this is last because, as above, it’s recommended you prepare your introduction last. Figure out what you want to say and then, at this point, you can figure out how you want them to hear it.

6. Phase six: Knuckle and punch: How will I bring this all together, and give that final inspiration?

This is the conclusion. This should bring the message to an end, and NOT be another message in itself! We must not “waffle” on ad infinitum, because many a good message can easily lose impact with the hearers at this point.

It has four parts, the first three being really brief.

1. Briefly repeat your build-up in your introduction.

2. Then repeat your main point / theme.

3. Then repeat your subpoints. (Don’t introduce any new points! You will lose people.) For example: you could say ‘Let me wrap up. We all put something first in our lives, but only Jesus is worthy of being first. He is the only one who won’t ultimately disappoint

us. That's why God has spoken to us today in his Word and has said, 'Put Jesus first.' And the way we put him first is to 1) Love him more than family, 2) Love him more than our independence and 3) Love him more than comfort.'

This is a 'punchy' moment because you pull your whole message together. It enables people to feel much like they've been watching an artist sketch something line by line, and then once the artist is finished, they step back and get to look at the whole picture with one view.

4. Land with something inspiring.

Sometimes you don't need to land with more inspiration, because the message and its punch is already so powerful. But if you have an inspiring way of landing that captures the main point / theme it will add even more. But make sure that it's the best story that comes out in the message. Save the best for last.

Here are two things that you could do:

1. Tell an inspiring true story of someone that somehow relates to this theme.
2. Cast vision for the church saying, 'Can you imagine what kind of church we will be if we take God seriously, and actually do what he is saying. Families will be stronger. So will marriages. Our city will feel the benefits of. God himself will be deeply enthralled. And we will find real joy.'

5. Your final application / appeal

Think of what kind of application you want. For example, salvation, healing? Make your application appropriate - you may want to move into a time of ministry and prayer here, or make an appeal that people put their faith in Jesus for the first time. Let's cover this in more detail:

TIPS, TRICKS & TECHNIQUES⁷

Brainstorming

You will eventually develop your own way of preparing and constructing a sermon, but the following method may be helpful:

⁷ This section is mostly inspired by Leon van Daele's original notes on preaching.

When you feel you have God's message or subject, take a sheet of paper and write down everything that comes to mind (even if the thoughts and points are not in progressive order) before you do any research on the matter. You will often find that that will contain the main message! This is referred to in some circles as "brainstorming".

The next step is to write out in one simple sentence the main theme or message you believe God wants you to share with the people. Keep it before you as you prepare. It will help you to prune your material and keep your sermon as simple and as focused as possible.

Look at your brainstorm sheet, and see if you can work out an outline from what you have. You may have to give this some thought and add headings and points. You now have a framework for your message. Keep it next to you while you do some research adding the material you select under the relevant headings. If you can't fit it in, ask yourself if it is really necessary, no matter how wonderful and exciting it seems!

Using illustrations

It's worth talking about how to use illustrations properly as this can often be done in an unhelpful way.

An illustration is a story, an analogy from nature, something humorous, (e.g. an anecdote), a testimony, quotation, poem or song which illustrates a point in a sermon.

Illustrations need to bring illumination and refreshment to your message, as windows bring light and fresh air to a stuffy room.

Jesus is the master at the use of illustrations. Some examples are: -

Matthew 5:1-12, "You are the salt of the earth, and the light of the world"

Matthew 7:24-27, Jesus using the analogy of building using good foundations.

Right throughout His ministry Jesus used illustrations to teach His message, many in the form of parables. This corresponds with human psychology, for we think in images, and they assist in stressing, explaining and making a point stick.

Because illustrations have been called the windows of a sermon, an appropriate illustration will often throw light on a difficult point. The audience may find a point difficult to comprehend or apply, until the preacher illustrates his reasoning with a simple story.

The use of illustrations is therefore invaluable when preaching. Illustrations stimulate the imagination of the listener and impress the sermon on their mind. It's true to say that an illustration is often remembered long after the actual sermon is forgotten.

The danger of using illustrations is that they might take up too much of the sermon itself. Also some illustrations are "old favourites" (be they your own or well-known illustrations) and you must avoid inserting them everywhere, for they will lose their impact and become meaningless.

Also, some preachers fall into the snare of telling incidents which they have supposedly experienced themselves, when in fact they are simply exercising a vivid imagination. A congregation will never trust the word of a man who is known to exaggerate.

It is perfectly correct though to tell a story which is imaginary, if the audience knows that it is not a true story. You could begin such a story with the words, "suppose...", or "let us imagine..." There is no end to such illustrations.

The sources from which sermon illustrations may be drawn are much the same as for the introduction and conclusion. History will often provide interesting stories to throw light on a message. Life itself is rich with illustration material. Other sources are the Bible itself, literature, the daily newspaper, magazines, tracts, good poetry, hymns, and the saying of famous men.

Good ground rules for an illustration are:

- An illustration should always be connected to the sermon.
- The illustration should always explain the point you are making.
- An illustration should present the Truth in a life situation.

Different kinds of illustrations:

Story

An example of this is found in Luke 15, the story of the Good Samaritan.

Analogy

When Jesus said, “I am the door”, it throws light on what He is teaching.

Testimony

A true life account in an individual’s life. Paul the apostle constantly used his testimony in one form or the other to bring home truth. We need to be prepared to use ours too. But beware of the big “I” - this isn’t about you!

Humorous anecdote

This can be valuable, but must not be forced into the sermon. Humour puts people at ease, helps them to relax and apply the truth of your message. Humour must operate under the law of love. Never use humour to be disrespectful to others or to be coarse. It is helpful if your humour points at yourself first. The use of puns is also good.

Poetry, songs and prose

These help us to be contemporary but must not be overdone.

Quotations

These are valuable if they are appropriate, and if they illustrate the theme. Do not use quotations just to show off how well read you are! Always give credit to the one you have quoted.

Scripture

Every main doctrine in the Bible can be an illustration. There are many wonderful stories we can quote from the Old Testament.

Beware of the following when you use illustrations:

Length

If your illustration is too long it can detract from your main message.

Forcing

Forced illustrations are not effective.

Coarse, cheap or misleading

We represent God in the pulpit.

Lying

Even the slightest bit of exaggeration is a lie! Check your facts and represent the truth well!

Every preacher must develop their own style and technique. Never try to copy and be someone else! That is not God's way. We must become the unique workmanship of His hands.

On the other hand, take note of the suggestions made by others as you read, avoid the pitfalls and apply the good ones. Watch how other preachers preach, and learn from them. Observe the many varied techniques they use. Provide a background from which the Holy Spirit can draw to shape and mould your own ministry.

Part Four

EXPOSITORY PREACHING⁸

2 Timothy 4 : 1 - 5

¹ I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: ² preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. ³ For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, ⁴ and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths. ⁵ As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.

There is a necessity for us to preach the Word of God, and in doing this we must be masters of our craft. Not only in delivery, but in preparation too. Expository preaching is the challenge for all preachers to discipline themselves and preach precisely what the Word of God says.

There is a lack in the Church of truly great preaching. There are very few preachers today who are expository preachers, yet it is so vitally important. The preacher must become the mouthpiece of his text, opening it up and applying it as the infallible Word of God, nothing less and nothing more. The text needs to speak to people.

Most of our preaching should be expository preaching, where we are expounding a book, a chapter or passage. When we stick to this discipline we will invariably cover the whole counsel of God and not just our favourite subjects. This is a spiritually healthy approach and presents the authority of God's Word foremost.

Why expository preaching?

1. Christ is the incarnation of truth (John 1:14), and our job as preachers is to present Christ.

⁸ This entire section is taken from Expository Preaching study notes by Shaun Mackay, with very minor adjustments.

2. Truth sets free. (John 8:32).
3. Our authority is not in what we say, but in what Scripture says.
4. We refute error by preaching truth.
5. Restoration comes through the preaching of truth, (Acts 3:21).
6. God confirms the preaching of His word with signs following, and not our ideas or thoughts (Mark 16:20).
7. The application of truth overcomes the enemy, (Luke 4:1-13; Ephesians 6:10-20; Revelation 12:11).
8. When we preach the revelation of God's word, we prepare the Bride of Christ for the Bridegroom who is coming, (Ephesians 5:26). Therefore, we are preparing for eternity.
9. We are servants of God's purpose as contained in His word.

Expository preaching in Scripture:

Nehemiah 8 : 1 - 8

¹And all the people gathered as one man into the square before the Water Gate. And they told Ezra the scribe to bring the Book of the Law of Moses that the Lord had commanded Israel. ² So Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly, both men and women and all who could understand what they heard, on the first day of the seventh month. ³ And he read from it facing the square before the Water Gate from early morning until midday, in the presence of the men and the women and those who could understand. And the ears of all the people were attentive to the Book of the Law. ⁴ And Ezra the scribe stood on a wooden platform that they had made for the purpose. And beside him stood Mattithiah, Shema, Anaiah, Uriah, Hilkiyah, and Maaseiah on his right hand, and Pedaiah, Mishael, Malchijah, Hashum, Hashbaddanah, Zechariah, and Meshullam on his left hand. ⁵ And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people, for he was above all the people, and as he opened it all the people stood. ⁶ And Ezra blessed the Lord, the great God, and all the people answered, "Amen, Amen," lifting up their hands. And they bowed their heads and worshiped the Lord with their faces to the ground.

⁷ Also Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodiah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiah, the Levites, helped the people to understand the Law, while the people remained in their places. ⁸ They read

from the book, from the Law of God, clearly, and they gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading.

Let's go through this passage verse by verse:

- v2** Our objective in expository preaching is understanding.
- v3** Reading the word is an absolute priority. (1 Timothy 4:13)
The people were attentive, and it is our job as expositors of God's Word to keep their attention!
- v4-5** There was respect for the Word of God.
- v4** God's Word was elevated.
- v6** The people praised and thanked God for the word (and not for a good sermon or performance).
- v7** The leaders helped the people understand the word.
- v8** The leaders read the Word clearly and gave the sense or meaning, so that the people understood the word.

Luke 24:13-35, 44-49

- v27** interpreted (ESV)
explained (NIV)
expounded (KJV)

Greek, '*diermeneuo*' meaning, to unfold the meaning of what is said, to translate into one's native language, and to do it thoroughly!

- v32** opened the scriptures
- v45** Greek, '*dianoigo*' meaning, Plato - 'to open by dividing or drawing asunder, to open thoroughly what has been closed', a male (first born) opening the womb, to restore or give hearing, to open the sense of the scriptures explaining them, to open the mind of one causing him to understand a thing, to open one's soul, i.e. to rouse in one the faculty of understanding or the desire of learning, to open up completely and thoroughly.

2 Timothy 2 : 15

Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.

- v15** The word "*handling*" above in Greek is '*orthotomos*' meaning "*cutting straight*" - to cut straight or proceed by straight paths, to hold a straight course. The equivalent of doing right. To handle aright. To teach the truth correctly and directly. To cut new

veins in mining. To make something new, introduce new things, make innovations or changes.

2 Timothy 4:1-5

¹ I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: ² preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. ³ For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, ⁴ and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths. ⁵ As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.”

The use of God’s Word in expository preaching.

- Preach the word
- Be prepared in season and out of season
- Correct, rebuke and encourage with great patience and careful instruction
- Sound doctrine
- Keep your head in all situations
- Endure hardship
- Do the work of an evangelist
- Discharge all the *duties* of your ministry

2 Timothy 3 : 16 - 17

¹⁶ All scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, ¹⁷ so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.”

Our authority is that when Scripture speaks, God speaks. As preachers, we are to allow the Scriptures to speak, and rely on the authority God has given us.

How do we prepare for expository preaching?

The discipline of expository preaching is the correct hermeneutical study (interpretation) of Scripture.

The Holy Spirit is the interpreter

The Holy Spirit is introduced to us by Jesus as the Spirit of truth, who will illuminate truth. (John 14, 16.)

Read the text/passage/chapter/book

- Read the scripture over many times. F.F Bruce, a renowned Bible commentator, stated that before he dared write a commentary on any portion of Scripture he read it over a hundred times!
- Use a few different translations, and compare them to each other.
- Make notes asking yourself what the scripture is saying.
- Read the context of the passage of scripture you are studying.

Use good hermeneutics

Follow the basics of hermeneutics (interpretation) when trying to find out the meaning of a passage of scripture:

- Structures and idioms of the Biblical language
- Context
- Word origins
- Culture
- Historical setting
- Geographical conditions
- Compare texts, using texts to interpret texts
- The type of literature, e.g. literal, symbolic, poetic, historic narrative, Gospels, epistles etc.

The purpose is to clearly be able to define the application of the text today. I.e. what it was meant to say to us here and now?

Make proper use of good reference books

These should assist us in our study of the text and not skew our study or persuade us in an interpretation, especially when it comes to Biblical commentaries.

Some of the study aids necessary are:

- A concordance
- Commentaries - choose commentaries wisely; check the author's background and reason for writing the commentary. Some commentaries are very verbose and technical, complicating our understanding of Scripture. Use commentaries as a

supplementary help. Remember the commentary is an educated opinion, and we want to base our interpretation more on the source than on the opinion. Never use a commentary to prove a point.

- Greek and Hebrew lexicons
- Bible dictionaries
- Word study dictionaries
- If possible – Bible study software like e-Sword, Logos, Accordance, OliveTree
- There are also online Bible study environments (bible.org; biblegateway.com; biblehub.com)

The subject of the text

The key issue is to extract the subject or subjects out of the text, inspired by the Holy Spirit. Then, out of the subject or subjects will come your message you will expound/ preach. I.e. the message we believe God is saying to the congregation through that scripture.

Follow a good homiletic flow

In constructing the sermon, follow good homiletic principles, building up to the challenge of that passage of scripture. Include illustrations and real life examples that will help the message, and not distract. Each message we prepare and preach is an incarnation of Jesus Christ. The Gospel message needs to come through strongly, for no message can be preached without reference to the centrality of Christ. He is our authority.

Pray

We need to spend an equal amount of time praying over our message as we do preparing our message.

Michael Eaton on expository preaching

This is Michael Eaton's commentary on Peter's sermon in Acts 2:14-41.

Note: The result of Peter's sermon was three thousand salvations!

“This is a special kind of preaching. It is very direct. Peter addresses them very personally. This is not ‘teaching’ which is very entertaining intellectually but has no impact upon anyone’s life. This preaching relates to an actual situation that is

upon them. Peter has to give a few words of explanation (2:14-15) before he starts. The best preaching has an introduction in it which gets people thinking about the actual situation they are in. Verses 14-15 are Peter's way of being sure he not giving some kind of detached unrelated lecture. He is speaking about the acts of God that are taking place right where they are.

This preaching is not exclusively 'bible-exposition'. I do not believe in 'pure' bible exposition; I only believe in applied bible exposition. Acts chapter 2 is the greatest example of what I mean by 'applied' bible-exposition. We talk about 'expository preaching', but the word 'preaching' is more important than the word 'expository'. The 'thunder and the lightening' of preaching is more important than what can be put into print! Peter gives an exposition of Joel 2:1 (Acts 2:16-21 quotes Joel 2:28-32, and we may take it that Peter spent some time on what it meant; Luke is only summarising).

Notice what is not in the sermon. It is not about religion in general or politics. It is not even about the wind or the fire of the gift of tongues. As soon as he possibly can Peter gets to speaking about Jesus and appealing for living faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. His words pierce the peoples' heart. This is what the church is: a community of saved people among whom God acts in power."⁹

⁹ Quoted from Michael Eaton's commentary series on 'Preaching Through the Bible: The Book of Acts'.

Part Five

OTHER TYPES OF SERMONS

In the previous section we covered expository preaching in detail since this is usually the most common kind of message we should deliver. We will now cover other kinds of sermons which are good to keep in our arsenal.

A preacher should know what he wants to say, how he should say it, and why he should say it. He should then be able to preach his sermon in a way which leaves his hearers in no doubt as to what his message was about.

Young Christians sometimes want to preach, but do not know how to go about preparing a suitable message. Their thinking is often muddled and this is reflected in the ideas they gather together for a sermon. When they have delivered their message the audience is left wondering what the fuss was all about, and what message, if any, the speaker wished to convey to them.

For you to approach the subject of homiletics clearly you need to understand the different types of sermons there are, for this will better enable you to know how to prepare accordingly. Sermons, especially those of maturer speakers, may not fit exactly into any one of these categories. They will nevertheless be seen to follow a similar pattern to what is suggested here.

All sermons may be classified under the following categories, with exception to the expository sermon which we have already covered. Each of these is prepared in a different way from the others. We will consider these types of sermons and the method of preparation in each case.

THE ONE-POINT SERMON¹⁰

In Part Three we covered the structure of a typical sermon which we called the “multi-

¹⁰ This section is taken, with some adjustments, from the book *How to Preach for a Change* by Terran Williams, available at www.commonground.co.za.

point” sermon. It’s worth now discussing the “one-point” sermon.

The idea of a one-point sermon is, as its name suggests, to make only one point. Everything in the message must support that one point. You may make use of illustrations, stories, analogies and Bible verses to make the one point, but the point is not to have any sub-points (if you do, they must only serve the one point, and would typically be about applying that one point).

The advantages of the one-point message are:

- People are more likely to be impacted by a message they remember. And they’re more likely to remember a message where less is said, a message that is built around just one point.
 - If people forget what you say within hours or days, do you really think you preached a life-changing message?
 - Many multi-point messages are forgotten within hours, sometimes minutes. Ecclesiastes 12:10,11 speaks of a teacher whose teachings are like nails. Think of a point as a nail. When you preach many points, each nail of truth is just shallowly hammered in. But if you preach one point, that nail has enough time and focus to get hammered deep into a person’s memory and life.
- If, in a message, you preach a great point and then a second great point, the two points work against each other’s impact.
 - When painting, a good practice is to paint one layer at a time. Let it dry before painting over it. In the same way, if we preach two points back to back, it is like painting a new layer before the other dries.
 - Jesus taught his disciples over a period of three years. He took it slowly, teaching one layer of truth at a time. And letting it dry before another layer of teaching was applied.
 - We only have heart-space for one noble thought at a time. If you preach two or more points there could be a real sense of overload.
 - Just because a person is taking notes does not mean that the truth has time to sink in. And how many people read the notes later and then give each point time to sink in? Not many. It is the living message, not the notes of the message, that changes people.
- There are other Sundays or times to preach.
 - When you are preparing and you just have so much amazing stuff to say,

remember that there are other Sundays coming. Fifty-two in a year in fact. That means that over ten years people will hear up to 500 messages. Take your time.

- If you only get to preach once and not again, resist the temptation to shove a series of teachings into one message. After all, do you want a message with high impact or low impact? If you want to impact people deeply, don't hammer too many nails in. They will all fall out. Choose one nail and hammer it in deeply instead, so that it doesn't fall out.

Building a one-point message:

If you take the multi-point structure we outlined in Part Three, you can alter the structure for your one-point message.

It's helpful to compare doing a One-Point Message to being a mountain guide taking people up and down a mountain. This picture best describes the energy-flow of the message.

Phase One: Begin your message with connection and curiosity

This is like the mountain guide trying to recruit some climbers to come up the mountain with him. They won't do so until they feel safe with the guide and they feel drawn to the mountain with a curiosity and hunger.

Phase Two: Scripture build-up to the One Point

This is like the slow but steady meander up the mountain. For every step taken there is a growing anticipation of the summit. And all steps lead to the summit that they have yet to discover.

Phase Three: Say and repeat the One Point

This is the summit moment. Everyone arrives at the mountain top. And what a joy it is. And what a "aha!" moment it is. The movement stops for a while as everyone pauses to ponder the beauty of it all, and just take it all in.

Phase Four: Amplify the One Point

The guide spends some time on the mountain peak showing people the different

views from it. People become more familiar with it, and begin to see things from its perspective.

Phase Five: Apply the One Point

The team of climbers descend. While the journey up was loaded with curiosity, the journey down is more focused and has the momentum of descent. It energises people to move. The guide does not need to lure them down, just guide them down.

Phase Six: Land with an inspiring story or an inspiring vision for our community related to the One Point.

The team and the guide finish the trip. On the one hand there is a sense of gratifying after-glow and on the other hand there is an anticipation of how things will be different now that life has been seen in a fresh way from the mountain top.

THE BIOGRAPHICAL SERMON¹¹

This type of sermon deals with the life story of some Bible character e.g. of Moses. The preparation of such a sermon involves firstly reading what the Bible says about the man.

A good concordance will prove most helpful here. An Old Testament character is often mentioned at various stages of God's revelation to man. The New Testament will sometimes throw light upon the men of the Old Testament era. For example, see what the writer to the Hebrews says of Moses. (Hebrews 3:2; 2:23-29.)

You should ask yourself the following questions while reading the relevant portions of scripture:

1. What kind of man was he?
2. What mistakes did he make?
3. What dealings did he have with God?
4. What does God say of him?
5. What virtues did he have?
6. What effect did his life have on others; on his friends etc.

¹¹ The next sections are adapted from Leon van Daele's original notes on preaching.

7. What important lessons can we learn from his life? Positive and negative.
8. How can we apply these lessons to people in our modern world?
9. *Most importantly:* What did God do here, what was God's response, and what can we learn about Jesus from this passage?

There might also be other questions which suggest themselves to your mind. In a message such as this you should not only know enough about the man to be able to relate the story of his life, you should evaluate the man's character in the light of God's revelation. It is necessary to look beyond what is obvious, and find what the implications were, if any, of his words, actions, and thoughts in the context of his life as a man. This kind of thinking will help you understand the motives, or driving forces, which made him do the things he did. It will help you understand yourself and others.

It's worth noting, however, that this requires careful thought and prayer. Narratives can be tricky and you must bring it back to the Gospel of Jesus, grace and faith. Look at how God acts and reacts more than the person so that you can exemplify God's grace and goodness more than the cleverness, goodness or nastiness of the Bible character (that has the danger of making your preach a works-centred Gospel).

THE TOPICAL SERMON

This is also referred to as thematic preaching. A topical sermon deals with a subject such as the second coming of Christ, redemption, faith, or Christian discipleship; or topics such as addiction, violence or money. The most effective way of preparing such a sermon is to ask yourself questions about the subject you wish to discuss, and to find the answers to these questions in the Bible.

It's important that your topic is not too broad otherwise you are not going to make an impact - there will be just too much information.

It is again important to use a good concordance for the purpose of quickly ascertaining what the Word of God teaches about the relevant topic.

Here are the questions you should ask:
What? Who? When? Why? How?

Try to use only one or two key texts as a reference point. While you can obviously refer or quote other Scriptures as part of your message, you don't need people to necessarily turn there. However, just rattling off a list of scriptures at the end of each of your points for people to read at home isn't helpful - most people won't read them at home and you haven't really equipped them to read the Bible for themselves very well.

THE HISTORICAL-INCIDENT SERMON

Some incident recorded in the Word of God is closely analysed to determine what spiritual lessons are to be learned from it. These lessons are then brought to the attention of the listener.

Examples of this kind of sermon would be the spies going into the promised land (Numbers 13: 1 - 14) or the story of Cain and Abel (Genesis 4:1 - 15).

The value of such a sermon is that people love a story. The Bible is full of stories which are rich with spiritual instruction. Paul wrote that the incidents recorded in the Old Testament were "written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come." (1 Corinthians 10:11; Romans 15:4).

If you decide to prepare such a sermon you should be careful to faithfully present the facts of the incident. You should avoid spiritualising any details where there is no warrant for doing such a thing. This is particularly true when discussing the parables which Jesus told. The theme of an Historical-Incident sermon is the story itself.

THE PERSONAL TESTIMONY

A personal experience with God is an undeniable fact. The recounting of such an experience is often the means of winning the unsaved to Christ.

There is an old English proverb which says, "*An ounce of experience is worth a ton of theory.*"

Paul sometimes gave his personal testimony when presented with an opportunity of preaching the gospel. (Acts 22, Acts 26; see also Galatians 1 and Acts 9:27.)

However, it's worth noting that the recounting of an experience with God may become tiresome and ineffectual if the audience has heard it many times before. Furthermore, although it is wonderful to tell of what God did for you or someone else ten years ago, it is more wonderful to be able to tell of what God is doing today. There is a danger that the personal testimony might take the place of the preaching of the Word of God.

You should always be careful of unwittingly creating an impression in the minds of people that God only works in certain ways. God is a God of infinite variety. The experience of one Christian might differ considerably from that of another. Many Christians have spent agonising hours before God trying to get an experience similar to one of which they have heard. They have felt disappointed and disillusioned because they cannot enjoy the same feelings or have the same experience which they hear others have experienced. Your testimony can never be made a mould for everyone else.

You should be careful when giving a testimony not to exaggerate. Stick to the facts and be specific in recounting the details of your experience. Always remember to keep Christ pre-eminent. There is nothing more distressing than the testimony which focuses attention on the speaker rather than on Christ.

Be careful not to dwell on past sins, sordid, or unpleasant experiences you might have had before salvation. The personal testimony is of value only if it glorifies God, and if it can assist other Christians, or unsaved people, to a better understanding of God's ways, and His will for their lives.

Though it is not always necessary, or advisable to spend time in deciding what to say in a personal testimony, it may happen that you will be called upon to speak before a congregation of people and give an account of your experiences with God. It would then be wise to stress, always bearing in mind the purpose for which you are giving the testimony, either to bring unsaved men and women to salvation, or to encourage those who have already believed on the Lord Jesus Christ.

For a personal testimony to be effective it should be fresh and spontaneous. It never really helps to read it from a piece of paper.

DOCTRINAL PREACHING

All preaching should be doctrinal to an extent. In doctrinal preaching, areas of doctrinal ignorance or haziness are cleared up with your hearers. Doctrinal preaching produces and builds up faith, and lays good foundations for life.

The dangers with this type of preaching is that you can become abstract and dry, and it can be unrelated to life and just plain boring. You need to create interest by relating your doctrinal message to lives personally, with good practical application to life.

A general rule is that if you can't relate it to life, then don't preach it!

Part Six

PREACHING THE MESSAGE

DEALING WITH TWO OBSTACLES¹²

Generally, at the beginning of your sermon, two obstacles exist in the minds of the hearers:

1. The obstacle of trust

Many people in the audience probably don't know you and, especially in a culture where people intuitively distrust authority, are wondering, "Who is this person? Why should I trust or listen to him?"

This is a real obstacle because people are more likely to really listen to someone they trust.

2. The obstacle of hunger

Most people have heard hundreds of different messages of all kinds in a week from all sorts of sources (TV, Internet, the newspaper, people at work, a book they're reading etc.) and despite the fact that most know the Bible is God's Word, they are not as eager to hear what you want to say as you are to share it. This is a real obstacle because people are more likely to really listen to a message that they want to hear.

To deal with obstacle one, try to be real or vulnerable in some way right up front. Try to say something that helps people connect with our humanity. Or just share very briefly something humorous that happened that week (but then try to connect it to the message).

¹² This section is inspired and adapted from the book *How to Preach for a Change* by Terran Williams, available at www.commonground.co.za.

But the best way is to deal with obstacle one is to do it at the same time as dealing with obstacle two. To deal with obstacle two, try make them want to hear what you have to say by appealing to something in their experience of life or the culture that shows that that they really do need what you are about to say. Try to include non-Christian people in this part too.

Here is an example. If you were about to introduce the main point “Live to impact people, not impress them” (from 1 Samuel 12) start off speaking about our deep desire to impress people. Share one or two of your personal stories of this – preferably funny ones. Then speak of another desire in most of us: the desire to make a difference. And maybe share a personal story about this.

Then ask them if they can relate to what you’re saying about these two desires. You can then say, *“Today I believe God has given me a message which says, ‘You can’t fulfil both desires. These desires are in conflict. Choose today: ‘Will you live to impact people? Or will you live to impress people?’ That is what we will look at today. Turn with me to a wonderful section of the Bible that so clearly speaks about this...”*

Another example: If you were to speak on “put Jesus first” (from Luke 14:25-35) you could first speak about the way we as humans tend to put something first in our lives. A story or two would help – preferably personal and humorous ones – of different things people tend to put first. You can then ask people about the different things that they have put first. And then speak of how so many things we put first ultimately disappoint us, and are not really worthy of our deepest devotion. And then you can say, *“I believe God wants us to explore carefully what we put first in our lives, and to hear his gracious invitation: ‘Those other things are not worthy of you. They’ll let you down. I made you for more. Put Jesus first. Turn with me to a wonderful section of Scripture that so powerfully helps us to put Jesus first...”*

USING MEDIA

In today’s media-mad culture, it is very powerful to use a media clip that humorously or provocatively introduces your talk. (You might also use it at the end, but it does have more impact in the beginning.) It could be a movie excerpt, or a song video, or a home-spun powerpoint, or something you’ve found on YouTube. You might also have

a presentation of points you want to go through as you preach.

Here are a few important pointers to remember when using media:

- Don't rely on media! You can't be put in a spin if some technical issues arise.
- Make sure the video clip is no longer than a minute or two, unless it is some sort of talk you want to refer to or there is good reason to have it go for longer.
- Discuss your media requirements and wishes with the media team well in advance. "Well in advance" is not just 30 minutes beforehand, but actually a few days in advance, as much as you can. There may be technical requirements you are not aware of – you can't make assumptions here.
- Be careful with copyrights. It's often not technically legal to play a given movie clip to a large audience without a license to do so. Discuss this with the elders and media team and make sure you honour the creative work of others.

MINISTRY APPEALS

At any point of a meeting you can make a call for people to accept Jesus as Lord and Saviour, but generally at the end of a message people are often asked to make some kind of response to this call or to respond to the message in some way. When you've decided that there needs to be some kind of active, visible response, here are some tips.

1. Keep it short – this isn't the time for another "mini sermon". If it's too long it's usually not helpful.
2. Have a good idea on how you want to do this – until you are experienced, you may struggle to do this easily. Learn from how others do this.
3. Include the fact that people need to repent of their sins and come to Jesus – we don't soften the Gospel!
4. It's good to have several scriptures that you can regularly and easily rely on, especially if you're called to do this without expecting it.
5. You need to discern how people should respond – should they come forward for

prayer? Should they stay where they are? Remember, you need to consider things such as time and how many people are able to help if a large amount of people come forward.

Here's an interesting quote from Charles Spurgeon:

*"If we want men to be truly converted, we must set before them the plan of salvation very clearly and distinctly. I meet with hundreds of persons who have had some kind of work upon their hearts; but they tell me that they walk in a mist. They have not quite understood it. They felt that they were on a rock, but they were not quite sure what the rock really was. It is a good thing that our zeal for God should be according to knowledge, that we know what we believe, and why we believe it, and know that we are saved and how we are saved and why we are saved; for if there be a mistake here, it may be fatal."*¹³

A note on music:

Many preachers like to get the music team up to play when they make a Gospel or ministry appeal. This is well and good, but often they do it more for their own sake, as it makes them feel comfortable, than for the sake of everyone else! It can be both helpful and disruptive and so this calls for discretion.

The point is, don't rely on music to make an appeal – it's the Holy Spirit who moves people and convicts, exhorts and encourages. While music may help, it sometimes may not. We want people to respond with their mind and their emotions, and if we overdo the music we may end up just having people respond by emotion alone, which isn't helpful. This isn't a hard and fast rule - it's just worth remembering who does the saving!

¹³ Charles H Spurgeon from Spurgeon Gold by Ray Comfort, Pg 19, Bridge-Logos, 200561. Quote taken from PJ Smyth's book The World Needs More Preachers, available at www.godfirst.co.za.

GET PEOPLE TO WANT TO COME BACK¹⁴

Don't only aim at getting unsaved people saved in the meeting, but aim also at getting them to come back again the following week.

It is wonderful when people get saved. But we must remember that most people in our culture will not get saved the first time they come. They are just too far away from crossing the line of faith to cover that much ground.

There are many people who are instantly converted to Christ, but most people who come to faith seem to make many mini-decisions over a period of time, so that, over time and accumulatively, a major decision toward Christ has been made. This insight calls churches to patience in their longing to see the lost saved.

So the goal should not be to preach in such a way that all the unsaved get saved now, but that unsaved people say to themselves, *“Wow. I'm not sure I buy all this stuff, but that message really spoke to me and got me freshly curious. Maybe these people have something I want. I'll come back next week.”*

Instead of only asking, *“Did my unsaved friend get saved today?”* we should also ask, *“Does my unsaved friend want to come back?”* It is not hard to figure out that if they just keep coming, then it is likely that over time they will respond to the Gospel.

TIPS FOR PUBLIC SPEAKING

Time

Remember, people generally can't concentrate for more than 20 to 40 minutes in one sitting. It's actually better to run under time than over time. But don't be pre-occupied with the clock, constantly talking about how much time you have left. If you have run out of time and feel that God is not finished yet, i.e. You feel an anointing, then don't apologise, preach on!

However, if you always go over time, that might not be the anointing, that is probably

¹⁴ This section has been taken from Terran Williams' *How to Preach for a Change*, available at www.commonground.co.za. Some minor adjustments have been made.

just bad technique and preparation. Respect your audience. Watch them. Some preachers are like Tennyson's brook that murmured, "Men may come, and men may go, but I go on forever". If you do not "strike oil" (impact people) in 30 minutes, you need to change your approach.

Pause

Don't talk too quickly! Ask questions and pause for responses. Talk slowly and clearly.

Reference correctly

Clearly give the book, chapter and verse you are going to read from. Pause to give people time to find it. Finding it yourself in your own Bible may help you in the beginning to give them enough time. Repeat the reference again to fill the gap and to help those who missed it or part of it at first. And clearly name anyone who's quote you use.

Using notes

If you like to write your whole sermon down, don't take this to preach from. Make sure you are thoroughly familiar with it beforehand and then take a clearly printed or written outline with you. Learn to be sensitive to and to trust the Holy Spirit to adjust, change and guide you as you preach.

Be careful not to be preoccupied with your notes. Rather try to have the "picture" in your mind of what you want to communicate. Focus on that and use every reasonable means to get it across to the congregation.

Object lessons

Don't forget the use of object lessons to make a point. The prophets of old used this many times. Many Bible scholars believe there actually could have been a farmer sowing his seed on the mountainside where Jesus may have pointed when he told the parable of the Sower to His hearers.

Body language

Some training in drama can help us illustrate with body language and gestures which can go a long way to get the message across. But be careful of excessive or inappropriate gestures.

Use simple language

When people come to church they like to bring their Bibles, not the dictionary.

Using slang and grammar

Excessive use of slang offends. Also try to be grammatically correct in your speech. Do not make a mistake like the one made by a preacher who when describing the fiery furnace said, “They hotted that furnace seven times hotter than it used to was.”

Be careful with cliché

Your favourite saying might be the least favourite of another. Try and avoid using clichés where you can as you do risk irritating some people as a result. Be careful with over-used acronyms too.

Avoid jargon

Use simple words where you can for Bible terms (many people don't even understand what 'faith' and 'salvation' mean!) Also, terms such as “Life Group” and others that refer to ministries within your local church or things a particular local church does may need to be explained. You can't assume everyone knows what a Life Group / Cell Group / Community Group is!

Speak naturally

Avoid using a “pulpit tone” or a “televangelist tone” - switching to King James English or shouting. Volume does not equal authority!

Avoid “Christianese”

Adding “Christianese” to spiritualise or pep up your message should be avoided. E.g. The inappropriate use of “Hallelujah!” or “Amen!” or “Glory!” etc. Remember, people don't speak like that normally, so why do it from the pulpit?

Eye contact

Look around the crowd and make eye contact. Don't stay glued to one person all the time (that will unnerve them) but don't look at the roof, floor or your notes all the time. Speak to the people!

Write it out

In the beginning stages of your ministry, write out your whole message, complete with illustrations. It is a lot of work, but it will develop your ability to express yourself,

choose the best words and expressions to communicate what you have to, and help you determine how long your sermon is. (But don't just read your sermon when you deliver it – this is just to help you start and refine your preaching gift.)

How you feel after you preach

Thomas Brooks wrote, “*Preaching is a spending, painful work.*” Joseph Parker said, “*True preaching is the sweating of blood.*” It's hard work but this is what we're called to!

Most preachers find they experience some depression, which is usually just emotional fatigue, afterwards or the day after. It's good to reflect on your message but don't dwell on it. This is all about practice and requires a lifetime commitment.

Part Six

SERMON CRITICISM

“Criticism” isn’t a negative word, although we tend to see it that way. It’s all about the heart. Therefore, sermon criticism must not be seen in a negative light, for the motive is to build up and to improve ourselves. We need to know about any problem or shortfall with any issue that relates to every aspect of our preaching.

With this in mind here are a few types of constructive criticism we should invite and expect:

- Preaching practise criticism
- Asking someone, a friend or our spouse, to crit us, looking out for ways in which we could improve.
- Judge the response, or lack of it, of the audience we speak to. Remember always that with praise or criticism, treat it like chewing gum. I.e. Chew on it for a while and then spit it out.

Learn never to own the glory of a job well done, when people thank or praise you.

When you are criticised, prayerfully consider the content of the criticism before God, making the changes that are necessary, and ignoring those aspects that are untrue.

Note that we will always have opposition when we preach as ambassadors of the Kingdom – Jesus did! (See Luke 9:51-56; 10:3; Acts 4:18-20.)

- Listen to the recording of the message you have preached.
- If those of your team or leaders who have authority speak over your life with respect to your preaching and/or its content, listen to them because they are there for you (see Hebrews 13:17).

Therefore, having the correct heart attitude to all forms of criticism is important, because we are being changed from glory to glory (2 Corinthians 3:17-18), and our passionate desire should be of becoming vessels of gold fit for the Master’s best

service, (2 Timothy 2:20-21).

On the following pages is a sermon criticism sheet that you can use to analyse your sermons and see how you can improve.

Sermon “crit” sheet

As preachers, we need to be able to evaluate our own preaching and grow in the gift God has for us. This isn't about performance but we do need to grow so we can be more effective in what it is we do. Fortunately, these days we can listen to the recording of our message and evaluate rather objectively.

These three simple questions will help in evaluating your message appropriately.

1. How was the content?

Was it Scripturally based? Were the use of illustrations helpful? Did you reference properly to authors and preachers? Did you use accessible language?

2. How was it delivered?

Did you speak too fast or too slow? Was it too long? Was it boring? Was it interesting? Was it too intellectual? Was it funny? Was it too funny? Also, you should ask others for advice on body language and eye contact.

3. How was the anointing?

This may be difficult to assess, but others can also provide helpful input. The bottom line is - was it effective for the Kingdom? Did it glorify Jesus? If it was effective for building your own platform and success, consider it a failure.

Evaluating others

We learn from others as well and so we will find that we begin to evaluate the way others preach. PJ Smythe has a nice rule - try and mention three good good things for every one thing you feel they can improve on.

And when you are being evaluated, make sure you don't get defensive or depressed! Otherwise, how will you grow?



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