


WINTER 2013

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becomes
all-consuming**
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to lead, not
just follow**
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ASSEMBLIES of GOD
THEOLOGICAL
SEMINARY

For most *Enrichment* readers, winter means lots of time indoors. That can make you feel cozy — or stir crazy. Thankfully, there's a way to fend off cabin fever. Simply curl up by the fireplace with a steaming mug of coffee and a good ministerial journal. (There's a great one we'd be happy to recommend.) And, read away. Our probing, practical Shop Talk columns and wry cartoon humor will help you forget all about the arctic chill — for awhile, anyway.

What is preaching? A college student defined it as “teaching, only louder.” Obviously, there's more to a good message than the volume level. In fact, every sermon should include three essential components. Read about them in our In Depth section on preaching, which begins on page 40. Whether you're just starting out [as a preacher or have been preaching for decades, we believe you'll benefit from these articles. Your listeners will, too. (Tip: Read one article per week from this section. By the time your next *Enrichment* arrives, you will have read all the articles — and winter will be over!)]

If you haven't visited the *Enrichment* journal website recently, stop by. Along with this issue's articles, you'll find hundreds of archived articles on all sorts of topics. And check out EJ Online, a section of web-only articles (see the listing on page 13). Log on at enrichmentjournal.ag.org.

So, don't just “chill” this winter. Make your time indoors warmer — and wiser — with *Enrichment*. Press on! 📖



Feedback



**Fall 2012
Faith & Science:**
Interpreting
God's Word
and God's
World

It means a lot to see this discussion happening in the Assemblies of God.

Kevin Kurian
Pasadena, Calif.

What a wonderful issue! This one was especially relevant to my family. My husband, who is a chemist, decided there were several articles he would like to read. Thank you for incorporating the Pentecostal faith with topics that are relevant to our

society. It is nice to hear about String Theory, physics, and astronomy from an educated Christian source instead of PBS for a change.

Heather Zimmerman
Irondale, Mo.

I just finished reading through the current issue of *Enrichment*. As both a student of apologetics and a student ministries pastor, I cannot tell you how much I appreciated the focus on faith and science. As pointed in out in one of the articles, many people are exiting the faith because of the perceived contradictions of these two categories. We need pastors, leaders, and lay people who understand the issues and can offer sound arguments.

I just wanted to say thank you for your work and for this issue in particular.

Sara Boyd
Biola University

I come from a family heritage of 90+ years in the Assemblies of God.

I've seen the power of God at work in many ways. I'm also a National Science Foundation Fellow with a Ph.D. in engineering from Stanford. Last year I had the honor to be invited as a presenter at the Faith & Science Conference, and I applauded the efforts by the leadership of the Assemblies of God to promote dialog on issues of science and faith.

For the scientifically-minded person, the ability to reconcile modern scientific knowledge about origins with a historically orthodox interpretation of Genesis doesn't hinder, but actually enables, acceptance of the authority of Scripture. For us, each new scientific discovery in astronomy, physics, biology, and genetics pushes us to embrace a fuller, richer, and more awe-inspiring view of God.

Phil Wala
Waseca, Minn.

■ *Letters to Enrichment journal may be edited for length and clarity. E-mail correspondence to EJeditor@ag.org or post comments on our Facebook page (Enrichment-journal).*



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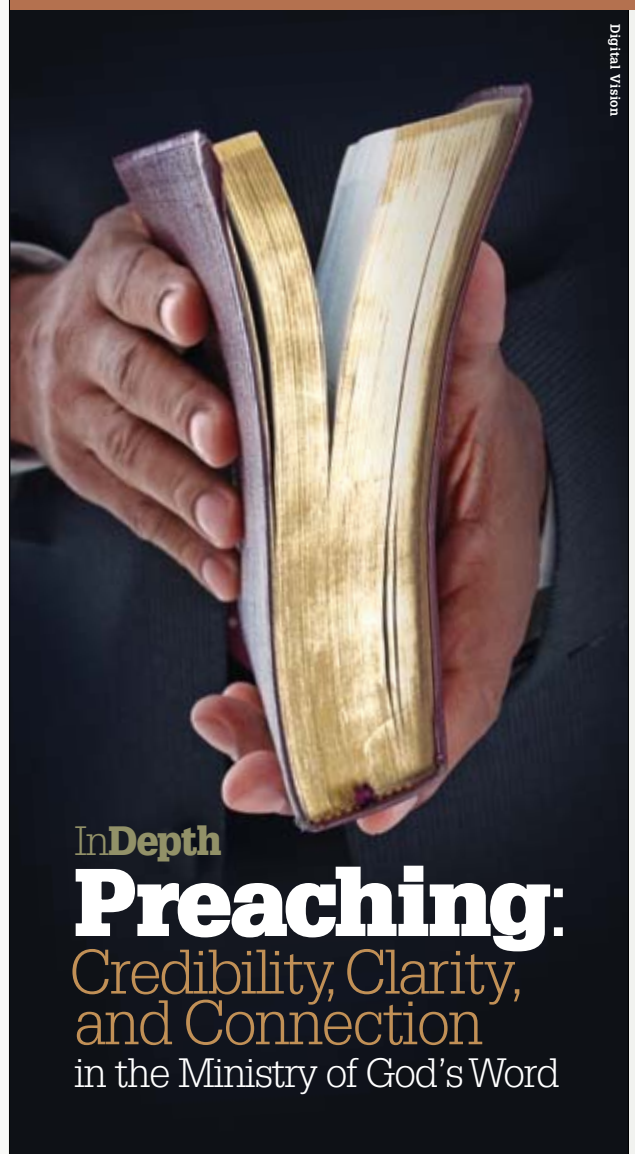
A balanced, biblical approach to technology offers useful guiding principles for this new field as well as other areas of medical ethics.

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By **MARC TURNAGE**

Jesus reflected a stream of thought that emphasized the holiness of the present day. Therefore, we should praise God for the present.



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BOOK NEWS & REVIEWS

Finding God in *The Hunger Games*

The original audience for *The Hunger Games* book series was young people, teens, and a bit older. But adults of all ages have devoured the volumes and made them runaway best-sellers. The movie set new box office records. Quick to respond from a Christian perspective, Ken Gire has written *Finding God in the Hunger Games* (eChristianBooks).

Corruption reigns in Panem. Opposing tribes ransack cities on a cruel whim. Rulers categorize, separate, and place citizens under extreme conditions. Prejudice flows in everyone's veins. And once a year, rulers choose two children from opposing tribes to kill each other, all for the sake of sport and game.

But Panem is not as far away or imagined as it seems; in fact, the author sets the story in a future North America. This hatred, cruelty, and discord provide a haunting gaze into a godless world. And that world may come to fruition sooner than we think.

In *Finding God in the Hunger Games*, Ken Gire takes the reader through a comprehensive adventure of the past, present, and future hunger we hold for God. First, he analyzes the mirrored cruelty between the Capitol and the Emperor Nero. He then demonstrates the need for God's presence today and how this yearning can no longer be ignored. Finally, using Jesus' Olivet Discourse, he predicts a dystopian world much like Panem to ignite a flame for change, for passion for Christ.

Though the past, present, and future look bleak, we can still find hope. Are we ready to look for it? Will we be able to cling to the movement of hope?

This book should interest anyone stirred by the story of *The Hunger Games*. It is an excellent resource for preaching, teaching, and one-on-one conversations about Christ.

— DAVE VEERMAN and KATIE ARNOLD, Naperville, Illinois

WHAT IN THE WORLD

THE LORD IS MY REINDEER WHISPERER

In his book, *Fifty Years in Alaska*, Carl Lomen describes Andrew Bahr, a Norwegian reindeer herder. Bahr left his native Norway to work with the herds that had been shipped from Siberia to Western Alaska. According to Lomen, this young man's way with reindeer was without peer. Bahr attested to the fact he could understand the "language" of the reindeer and the fact they could understand him. He was the first recorded "reindeer whisperer."

"Sometimes when I am driving a deer it becomes frightened. I walk up to it, place my arm around its neck, and pointing to the willows say, 'There is no bear over there.'"

"'Yes,' answers the reindeer, 'There is a bear over there.'"

"'No,' I repeat, 'There is no bear over there, and when I am with you, you don't have to be afraid for I will take care of you.'"

Bahr's example illustrates the familiar words of the 23rd Psalm, 3,000 years after David penned it. The object of the herder's care, compassion, and love are not sheep but reindeer. But the emphasis is the same. Those who lead have a more accurate perspective and act in accordance with the best interests of those being led. The Lord, like David and/or Andrew, speaks the language of those He loves.

Source: Carl Lomen, *Fifty Years in Alaska* (New York: David McKay Company, Inc. 1954).

— GREG ASIMAKOPOULOS, Mercer Island, Washington



FROM BOOMERS
TO ZOOMERS

GETTING TO KNOW MILLENNIALS

Befriending a millennial isn't rocket science, but one should go into the relationship with a good understanding of a millennial's worldview, i.e. what makes him or her tick — beliefs, values, history, passions, etc. Think of this venture much like a missionary's endeavor that requires her to learn about the new culture she is going to enter. Here are a few sources that might help:

- **Pew Charitable Trust** — This foundation does regular surveys with a generational focus.
- **"BiWeekly Social Trends"** — eJournal from historian Neil Howe. Subscribe at www.lifecourse.com/.
- **The Center for Generational Diversity** — another eJournal at www.generationaldiversity.com. Nothing replaces taking the up-close-and-personal approach. Start a conversation with a millennial and then do your best to just listen.

— RANDY WALLS, D.Min., director of continuing education, Assemblies of God Theological Seminary, Springfield, Missouri



just sub-tweeted you. Didn't you even read it?" After receiving this text, Jamie logged into Twitter to see what her friend was talking about. "You are just never there for me. #sooverit"

Really? "Being there for me" has been relegated to being on Twitter? To some students, if you are not available 24/7 through the social media of their choice, you are just "not there for me."

I get it, really I do. I am all about communicating with the Mosaic generation in the way they want to communicate. I tweet and text all day long; but, as the adults in their lives, we might really be missing something huge.

Teach your students to talk. Talking ... where you can hear someone's tone, hear his or her voice inflection. Better yet is being face-to-face so you can see his or her expression or read his or her eyes to see what the words are really saying.

We need to encourage our students to practice real conversations. Teach them that some information, like disagreements and breakups, is not meant to be imparted in short sentences. There is too much room for error and the beauty of words is simply lost.

Better yet, let us walk them through scenarios. Take them through Jesus' example of Matthew 18 on going to your brother when you have a problem, instead of updating your status. Teach them to speak the truth, emphasizing the "in love" part.

The way our students communicate with their peers is their habit, and these habits will continue through marriage and on to their own children one day. We cannot let love through language be lost. We must teach them how to talk and communicate effectively.

— LYNN COWELL, Charlotte, North Carolina



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UPSIDE-DOWN PERSPECTIVE

A BIRD'S EYE VIEW OF LIFE

Most mornings I sit on my deck and listen to the birds in my backyard. But one morning, I glanced into the trees and saw the strangest thing — a bunch of small birds chirping and swinging upside down on the tree branches like monkeys. At first glance it appeared that they did not mean to do it. Yet as I continued to watch, it became obvious that they did. Either way, they were singing together in glorious harmonies. Their position did not affect their condition.

Psalms 31 and 63 — two heartfelt prayers — are very different. Psalm 31 rises out of the depths of despair. Even in the midst of sorrow, the Psalmist trusts God — singing in verse 3, "You are my rock and my fortress." While Psalm 31 is a "come as you are" prayer for bad times, Psalm 63 offers a prayer rooted in good times. Here the Psalmist recognizes the blessings of God in his life and as a result, praises Him.

Someone said that life is a series of hills and valleys, ups and downs. Our life can be turned upside down in an instant. God hopes that we would be like the bird that swings upside down in a tree and continues to sing; continues to praise God despite how things are.

From the start of every morning people should hear our songs of praise and thankfulness, whether we are sitting upright and all is good, or we are hanging upside down, trusting God to come through according to His plan for our life. Our position should not affect our heart's condition. Someone may be watching and listening.

— PATTI ANN THOMPSON, Kansas City, Missouri





**Next time in
Enrichment:**

Small Church, Big Impact:

Leading Your
Congregation to
Oversized Influence

Approximately 33 percent of Assemblies of God churches are 49 or less in attendance in public worship and almost 63 percent are 99 or less. Most of these pastors face unique struggles different from their counterparts in larger churches. They may attend church-growth seminars and come away discouraged because most of the principles they hear are geared toward larger churches. Many small-church pastors often feel disconnected from district events because they are bivocational out of necessity. But while these churches may be small, they can be healthy and have a significant impact in their communities. The spring 2013 issue of *Enrichment* is designed to encourage small-church pastors and also provide practical ideas for reaching their communities. Read inspiring and insightful articles by Warren Bird, Michael Clarensau, Steve Donaldson, Alton Garrison, Tim Leathers, Lori O'Dea, Steve Pike, Peter Scazzero, Eric Swanson, George O. Wood, and others.

DID YOU KNOW?

JEWISH CALENDAR

In Western countries, including the United States, holidays like Easter and Jewish holidays move to different dates each year. On the Jewish calendar, however, Jewish holidays and the feasts are always on the same day. For example, Passover is always on the 14th of Nissan.

Why the difference? And why is it important?

We use the Gregorian calendar based on the sun (solar). The Muslims' (Islamic) calendar is based on the moon (lunar). The Hebrew (Jewish) calendar is based on both: the lunar cycle defines months and the solar cycle defines years.

On the Jewish calendar, months are 29 or 30 days, corresponding to the 29½ day lunar cycle. Seven leap years in a 19-year cycle insert an extra 30-day month.

The first of a Jewish month always begins on a "new moon." In America, "new moon" means when no moon is visible. On the Jewish calendar "new moon" means the first sliver sighted.

Why is this important? This is important for understanding when Jewish holidays occur, such as the seven feasts of the Lord. It may also be important for understanding numbers in the Bible like those in Daniel 12:11,12 and Revelation 11:3; 12:6. And it might be significant when eclipses — which can only occur during full moons — fall on feasts. Could these be "signs" as in Luke 21:25? I will talk more about coming lunar eclipses in the next issue.

THE FEASTS OF THE LORD — GOD'S PROPHETIC CALENDAR

Many people interested in prophecy may be curious about the seven feasts of the Lord. These feasts are historical, reminding the Jews of their history with God, and prophetic, pointing to future events. The seven feasts of the Lord in order of annual occurrence are:

1. Passover.
2. Unleavened Bread.
3. Firstfruits.
4. Feast of Weeks (Pentecost).
5. Feast of Trumpets (Yom Teruah. Also known as Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year).
6. Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur).
7. Feast of Tabernacles.

These seven feasts are outlined in Leviticus 23. In Leviticus 23:2, God told Moses, "Concerning the feasts of the Lord, which ye shall proclaim to be holy convocations, even these are my feasts" (KJV). A convocation is "a group of people gathered in answer to a summons; assembly" (dictionary.com). Note also these are not "Jewish" feasts, meant only for the Jews, but they are the feasts of the Lord and belong to everyone who belongs to God.

The first three feasts occur in spring. Then there is a break of 50 days until Pentecost. Finally, the last three feasts occur in fall.

Of the seven feasts, three required all males to attend (many men also took their families): Unleavened Bread, Pentecost, and Tabernacles (Exodus 23:14–17).

Speaking prophetically, Christ fulfilled the first four feasts in His first coming. The final three will be fulfilled in His second coming.

I will explore these seven feasts in more depth in later articles.

— DIANNE E. BUTTS, Pueblo, Colorado



Honey and apples are traditionally eaten during Rosh Hashanah.

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The Secret to Successful Discipleship

By Laurie Jones

Discipleship grows your church. As your people study the Bible together, they bond as believers. They also learn to apply biblical principles to daily life. The challenge is to find materials that allow you to share discipleship responsibilities while knowing accurate scriptural material is being taught.

For many growing churches, the best way to meet this need outside of the pastor's sermons is through Sunday School or small groups.

"I can trust the message of the material to line up with the Statement of Fundamental Truths of the Assemblies of God."

Pastor Chuck,
Spokane, WA



Disciple with sound content

Radiant Life and *Vida Nueva* curriculum are created specifically to meet the discipleship needs of English- and Spanish-speaking churches. Pastor Chuck Trimborn of Glad Tidings Assembly of God in Spokane, Wash., finds that the material gives peace of mind for busy pastors who are concerned about presenting a consistent message to their congregations.

"I can trust the message of the material to line up with the Statement of Fundamental Truths of the Assemblies of God. As a busy pastor, I do not have time to read through all of the Sunday School material every quarter."

Define the church's needs

A church can be vulnerable as it transitions to a new pastor or if it is a new church plant. That is a wise time to evaluate the needs of the congregation. Are the members primarily new converts, seasoned Christians, young, or old?

When they began leading Lifeway Church in Lemoore, Calif., 4 years ago, Marty and Cyndy Swift faced quite a few Christian education issues. In fact, they lacked a children's program altogether and found a great resource in *Radiant Life* curriculum. They combined resources from the Sunday School quarterly and *Young Explorers* to create a program that engages kids and is easy to teach.

"This is phenomenal Bible stuff. It's what we need."

Pastor Cyndy,
Lemoore, CA



“This is phenomenal Bible stuff. It’s what we need to teach kids,” says Cyndy. “They need to know Bible verses and stories, so we teach the curriculum on both Sunday and Wednesday to reinforce the message. We found that a conglomerate program incorporating Scriptures, stories, and activities also helps our preschoolers with problem solving. They love it!”

An adult education program offers even more flexibility in resources and greater potential for personal connection. New and seasoned converts can discuss biblical truths, offer encouragement, and grow spiritually as a group. Dr. David Rumley, pastor of Danville First Assembly of God in Danville, Ill., says *God’s Word for Today* devotional booklet works best as the primary tool for his adult education classes.

“Many of our people find the ongoing devotional as a practical and inspirational part of their ongoing spiritual growth with God.”

Pastor David,
Danville, IL



Embrace the church’s learning style

“Many of our people find the ongoing devotional to be a practical and inspirational part of their ongoing spiritual growth with God,” he says. “It gives them a functional format but contains God’s Word along with practical stories, all created in a way to add daily strength and encouragement to their lives.”

Pastor Dino Espinoza of Templo Emanuel in Crystal City, Tex., believes that the more traditional Sunday School quarterly offers his church the foundational principles. “I frequently visit our two adult classes, attended by many new converts, and I am delighted to hear their candid dialogue,” he says.

Offer a second language

Some concepts about Scripture and the Statement of Fundamental Truths of the Assemblies of God may be difficult to understand, particularly from the point of view of a new Christian. When instruction is only offered in a person’s secondary language, key points may be misunderstood. It puts the individual at a disadvantage. When early concepts provide the building blocks for long-term understanding and greater spiritual growth, missing the next new principle could prevent that person from victorious living while others in the church continue to grow.

Using both English and Spanish curriculum is working well for the bilingual congregation at Templo Emanuel.

“We are blessed to have *Radiant Life* and *Vida Nueva* coordinated so that both English and Spanish classes are deepening in their knowledge and interpretation of biblical principles,” says Espinoza. “Our classes are challenged to study relevant topics in light of sound doctrine, giving students a model for a Spirit-filled lifestyle.”

“Our classes are challenged to study relevant topics in light of sound doctrine, giving students a model for a Spirit-filled lifestyle.”

Pastor Dino,
Crystal City, TX



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Eleven Ways to Maximize Your Preaching Potential

By **T. Ray Rachels**



All preachers have known the “thrill of victory and the agony of defeat.” There are times preachers wish there was a trapdoor behind the pulpit so they could disappear from sight. The powerful sermon they envisioned in the study is not turning out so well. How does a pastor overcome these times and learn from them to become a more effective preacher? T. Ray Rachels provides practical encouragement for turning a poor sermon into a learning opportunity. Go to ej.ag.org/maximizepreaching.

Photos.com



Is There Not a Cause?

By **Sheila Harper**



January 2013 marks the 40th anniversary of the Roe v. Wade decision to legalize abortion. As believers, we are still waging the battle for the lives of unborn children. Pro-abortionists continue to perpetrate two lies: abortion is a woman's right to choose, and abortion is a political issue. They use these lies to remove men from the discussion and keep religion out of the abortion debate. Churches can become places where women find hope and healing when pastors and churches become involved in this battle. Go to ej.ag.org/notacause.

Hemera



The Pastor as a Change Agent: Remaining Relevant in a Constantly Changing Cultural Environment

By **Randy Helms**



Bringing a congregation through change involves several thought-out steps. Pastors and leaders must evaluate these steps as they work through the change process. Leaders must also be flexible in their leadership style as they lead their church through change. Effective change also includes those in the planning process who will eventually be a part of the change. While change may not always be easy, it is necessary to effectively fulfill the church's mission in the community. Go to ej.ag.org/changeagent.

Photos.com



Reaching With Our Preaching

By **Douglas K. Kinder**



Many people do not attend church because they do not believe the church is relevant or they will get anything out of the church service. One of the words people use to describe the service is *boring*. This includes the sermon. But this does not need to be the case. There are creative ways pastors can energize their sermons and make them attractive without losing their solid biblical content. The author contends pastors must be intentional in reaching the unchurched through their sermons. Go to ej.ag.org/reachingpreaching.

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On the Importance of Theological Training in Youth Ministry

By **Joseph Lear**



How much education does a youth pastor need? Since many youth ministries focus on activities followed by a short devotional, many believe youth pastors do not need a theological education. But today's youth are asking tough questions and are looking for solid answers. They want more than simply, “That's what the Bible says.” They want to know the deep answers to troubling portions of Scripture. Unless youth pastors are equipped to deal with these answers in a biblical manner, they will not be effective in reaching and retaining young people in their group and church. Go to ej.ag.org/theologicaltraining.



Church Life is All-Consuming

BY GABRIELE RIENAS



I am exhausted and I see no end in sight. Our church is very active in a small community. We believe in loving people and building strong relationships with the

community. My husband and I work closely together with our two children, but this means that ministry takes up 95 percent of our lives. Our days are full, and we are busy every weeknight and every weekend. We have had 3 days off in the last 6 months. We even came home early from vacation for a funeral. I love ministry, but I do not know how much longer I can keep up this pace. My husband does not see a problem, and I do not want to be unsupportive.



Those of us in ministry have to come to terms with our own God-complex — our desire to be all and to help all.

A It is nice to hear you work well together as a family in ministry, but I am concerned about what you describe. You may be extending beyond the limits of what you can sustain over time; something will give. I am talking about what happens when overload causes emotional, physical, or relational collapse. When that happens, the price is high and the consequences can be devastating to your family, not to mention the church.

Your exhaustion and implied stress level is a symptom that needs immediate attention. Let me talk about limitations. We all have them. Aside from God, none of us has unlimited strength, energy, resource, or time. When we attempt to extend past our limits, something will give. Use basic physics as an example. If I continually add weight to a table in 25-pound increments, the table will hold up until I reach its structural limit. After that it will not hold any more weight. No matter how gently I place the next weight on it, the table will collapse. In the same way, collapse will happen somewhere in your life if you exceed what God created you for.

Come to terms with your personal limits. These vary from person to person, which is why your husband may not be feeling pressure in the same way you are. God, however, is fully aware of your pressure and does not expect more than you can give. He expects you to manage your resources well, since it is He who made you.

Hebrews 12:1 compares life's journey to a physical race: "Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us" (NKJV¹). In ministry ("the race") the key is to run with endurance so we can cross the finish line victoriously. Endurance involves, pacing, training, resting, and managing one's body for maximum efficiency.

My good friend (who happens to be a pastor's wife) runs marathons. Even though running is her passion, she took a break

from it for several months when she sustained a knee injury. She missed the positive benefits of running, but she knew that unless her injury healed she was not going to be able to continue running over the long haul.

Assuming you want to be a team with your husband for a lifetime and not just short-term, you will need to manage with the end goal in mind. It is humbling to admit limitations, but it is absolutely necessary.

Those of us in ministry also have to come to terms with our own God-complex — our desire to be all and to help all. There is something powerful about helping people. It plays to our need to feel significant and important. Being indispensable feeds our insatiable need for recognition and affirmation. Fear of insignificance or irrelevance can drive us to overcommit and overextend ourselves in ways that risk overload. In no way am I judging your heart, but I encourage you to be open about this universal tendency and be willing to let it come to light if it is there.

I am also thinking about your family. They need to be a priority. If your family fails (i.e., you lose your children or your marriage), you will compromise your effectiveness with people and the community.

It seems that your family functions well together. I celebrate this. Take an honest look at what activities strengthen your bonds and what activities challenge them. Listen to what your children are saying and resist the urge to discount them or to spiritualize your response.

Speak honestly and directly with your husband about your feelings. In your desire to be supportive you may have missed clearly communicating what you are feeling and what you need. This kind of communication is important in a healthy relationship.

Take a hard look at everything you are doing, pray for wisdom, and begin to remove obligations that are stretching the limits of your endurance. Perhaps some things will need to be left undone, but if you prayerfully prioritize your life, God is fully able to fill in the gaps ... or leave them open if He chooses. Perhaps you can equip someone in your congregation to take part of the load.

Finally, find time for fun and relaxation. It sounds like there is currently no time for these things in your life. However, they are absolutely essential to good

Your exhaustion and implied stress level is a symptom that needs immediate attention.

self-management. You should be able to easily answer the questions:

1. **What do you do on a regular basis for fun?**
2. **What is the next enjoyable thing you are looking forward to?**

If you cannot answer these questions, drop everything and brainstorm until you can.

While ministry certainly requires effort and self-sacrifice, your output should be sustainable over time and circumstance. God calls and equips for maximum effectiveness. It is our job to manage well what He has entrusted to us. ■

Note

1. Scripture quotations marked NKJV are taken from the New King James Version. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.



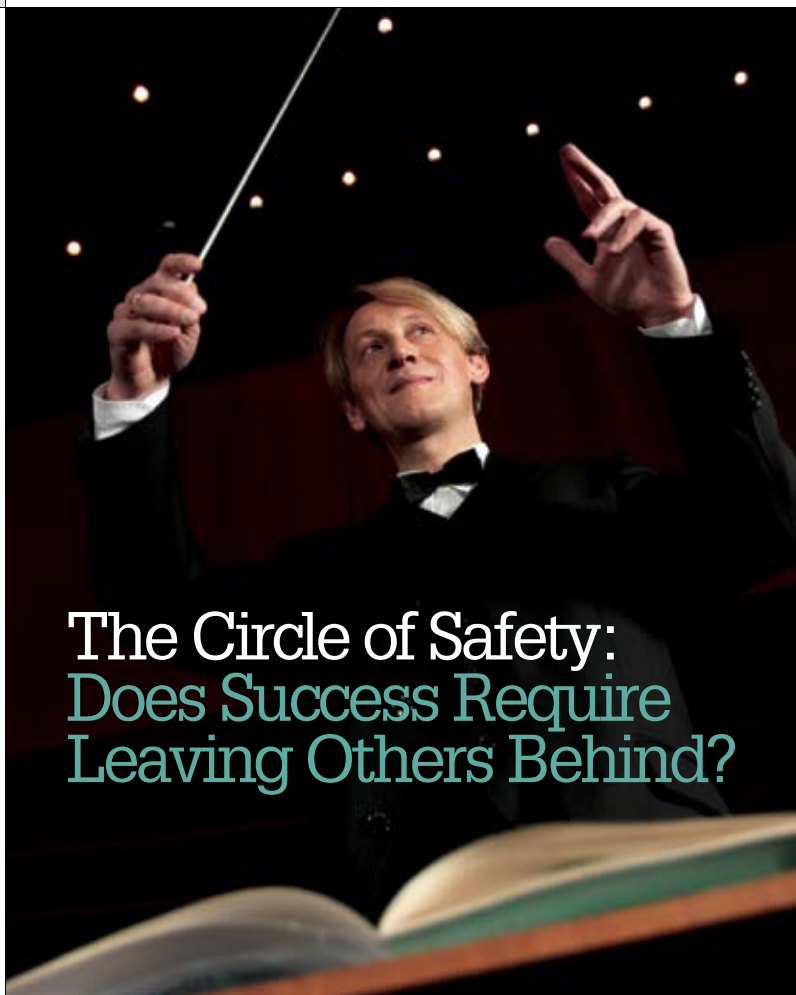
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To share or comment on this article or view Gabriele's video, go to ej.ag.org/churchlifeconsuming or scan the QR code.

YOU MAY BE TOO POLITICAL FOR THE PULPIT IF ...



you won't allow a donkey in the children's Christmas pageant.



The Circle of Safety: Does Success Require Leaving Others Behind?

BY SCOTT HAGAN

For many leaders, a silent and lengthy space occurs between the struggle and song. The conductor looks their way, tips his baton, but no sound follows.

God, however, is after that space of silence in a leader's life. God never designed the song to lag slowly behind the struggle. They are meant to be one moment in time. The example that alters an atmosphere or creates a culture is when a leader is able to absorb and reflect during crisis, yet still offer authentic praise.

Far too many leaders rely on outside leadership to help them worship. Their



When leaders combine a life of worship and a life of relationship, their circle of safety remains strong and enduring.

"cue" to worship goes something like this. At precisely the same time, as he did 7 days earlier, the rigid well-dressed gentleman stands up to say, "I invite you to turn to hymn 286. Please stand and join in as we sing the first and third stanzas." The gentleman behind the pulpit then inhales, lifts his right arm, and on the downward thrust everyone, including the leader of the church, joins in and sings.

But let's face it, without someone pointing out the page and without lifting that right arm, many well-meaning Christians would lose their starting point for worship. This is a sad commentary. On their way to seeing God, most people glance at their leader first. The leader sets the passion and priority for everything.

God delights in faithfulness. He despises rhetoric. He separates the two through conditions of trials and tests. Spontaneous praise in the face of real-life difficulty is God's way of teaching us to praise on cue. With our bow to the string ... with our lips to the reed ... with our eyes fixed on the maestro ... suffering becomes the downward stroke of the conductor's baton. Sudden suffering is God's cue that instructs the symphony of the redeemed to begin praising their measure. In other words, learning God's cues for spontaneous praise is what separates mature worship from religious repletion. And more important, it is what creates influence. When that happens, the singular influence of the leader soars exponentially.

Nineteen verses in Acts 16 play the above-mentioned symphony. For two badly beaten friends and leaders, the space between the pain and the praise was nonexistent. These verses involve a small cast. The primary two were men: Silas; the other, his friend, Paul. By the way, did that sound funny? This sounds unfamiliar to your ear because Silas is always the second half when it comes to himself and Paul. The New Testament mentions Silas (or Silvanus — same guy) 17 times. Only twice does the New Testament mention him by himself. Eleven of those times mention him with Paul, and four times in connection with Timothy. In all 11 references with Paul, his name comes in second.

Like the center on the football team, Silas put his hands on the ball on every play but never got the recognition for the touchdown. His role was supportive.

Twice the New Testament mentions Silas alone. It is nearly impossible to talk about Silas without mentioning someone else. Something tells me that this is the mark of a healthy leader. Silas only piloted with a copilot. The “faithful brother,” as Peter described him, had the ability to push people over the top toward greatness. But let’s face it, it is tough for any of us to be one of the invisible strands Solomon talks about in Ecclesiastes 4:12, “And though a man might prevail against one who is alone, two will withstand him — a three-fold cord is not quickly broken” (ESV).¹

Paul was a more celebrated strand than Silas. Yet Silas never abandoned his circle of safety. What is that circle? A life of worship and a life of relationship characterize this circle. When leaders combine those two, their circle of safety remains strong and enduring.

Jealousy could have destroyed Silas’ circle of safety. Instead, Silas served out his relational assignments joyfully. Sometimes standing out means standing with. And sometimes God asks us to submit our individualism to the blurry lines of togetherness. Never is that commitment to camaraderie more tested than when you are facing your last night on earth.

The intent of the magistrates who threw Silas and Paul in prison was death by daybreak. It would be a message — death to other would-be Christ-followers. Simply beating up Christians was a worn-out method. Bloodshed was the new strategy. Stephen took stones, James the blade. Now it was Silas and Paul’s turn to die. Bloody and beaten the magistrates place them in Roman stocks for security. These were not the kind you and I have put ourselves or the kids into at the theme park for pictures. These stocks stretched the legs and arms so the splits in the flesh caused by the flogging would not be able to close.

That would be the choir chair from which they would sing.

A life of worship.

A life of relationship.

The circle of safety was well in place

Sudden suffering is God’s cue that instructs the symphony of the redeemed to begin praising their measure.

for Silas and Paul. As they worshipped together that night, mesmerizing their fellow inmates, God sent a standing ovation. His Richter-ripping applause proved He could shake their planet without messing up their hair. God provided pinpoint accuracy. He split open iron chains, yet kept the clay walls intact.

Silas and Paul, for all we know, could have been cowards had they not had a comrade. Sometimes you find yourself alone and God’s presence is your partner. Doing life alone is a crazy choice. Doing leadership alone is even crazier. An effective leader must deal with two spaces. The first is the space between the struggle and the song. The second space is between one’s self and one’s brother. Great leaders close the gaps on both. 📖

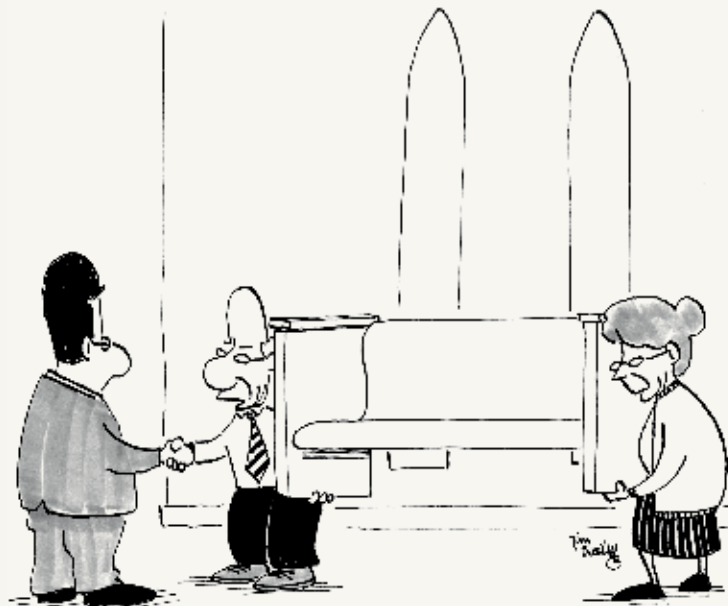
Note

1. The Holy Bible, English Standard Version Copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers.



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“Because we *always* sit in the same spot!”

Designing and Administering an Annual Performance Review in Your Ministry



BY CAL LEMON

So, how are you doing? You know: Are you a “success” in the ministry? Your first response may be, “Well, I must be doing okay because I am still here. Attendance has not tanked. The offerings look decent, and the annual business meeting was without drama.”

A second response, laced with fear, often happens in the middle of the night. We silently evaluate our ministry about 3 a.m. with a self-inflicted, haunting litany cascading into fitful sleep that may include, “You know your sermon didn’t make it to the first pew yesterday.” Or “Did you notice three people left the sanctuary before you were finished preaching?” And “Come on, you greeted her as Randi and her name is Candi.”

So, how are you doing?

You may never know the accurate answer to this question because the problem with self-evaluations is they are a *self* evaluation. You end up conducting a one-way conversation with the mirror. If you genuinely want to appraise your spiritual, emotional, and organizational expertise, ask those receiving your ministry ... your “customers.”

THE RIGHT ASSESSMENT INTERVAL

How often should you measure your



If you have committed your life to Christ and His church, the question, “So, how are you doing?” is a legitimate inquiry.

ministry performance? I recommend to my corporate clients that an annual assessment is the most effective. Specifically, if you are in pastoral ministry, I recommend that you administer and score this assessment of you, your staff, and church growth just before the annual congregational or ministry business meeting.

An annual meeting is an appropriate time to report an overview of the results generated from the annual assessment process. And, please note how to communicate this overview. The right words always produce the right result.

You can frame the statement at an annual meeting like this, “Here are some of the results from the recent staff assessment that will benefit the growth and health of our congregation (ministry).”

Notice I used “some” along with positive terms like *growth* and *health*. A performance review should always be remedial. The data collected should improve, inspire, and incent the evaluated staff person to develop additional competencies.

THE RIGHT ASSESSMENT PARTICIPANTS

A profound question, which can make all the difference about the efficacy of your ministry assessment is: Who will be evaluating your performance?

Normally, if you are the only professional clergy on staff, the evaluative body will be the church board. The people who sit on this elected council normally serve for a 1- to-3-year term and provide leadership for ministry, financial, and

administrative decisions. If you are part of a multistaff church or ministry, both clergy and laity may blend in the evaluation process.

Please note: There are emotional and professional liabilities of just clergy evaluating clergy. When laity is not present, it is easy for the psychological process of projection to make a cameo appearance. Projection means someone who is ordained clergy will value or devalue the performance of another minister based on what he or she has historically done, or would do, in similar circumstances.

I strongly recommend, in a church setting, laity do the evaluative process since they are the consumers. Clergy publicly create “deliverables” that a particular constituency embrace or reject.

THE RIGHT ASSESSMENT METHODOLOGY

Four assessment methods work well in an ecclesial environment.

First, if you are the person your church will assess, your evaluative body can schedule an annual conversation about your ministry performance. This method should not begin with, “Hey, how do you think it is going in our church this year?”

Replace that anemic inquiry with specific questions to clergy that may include: “What is your most important professional skill that makes you an asset to this ministry?” Or “What did you not accomplish this past year that you have moved to a priority next year, and how will we know if you were successful?” Or “If you were not on our ministry staff, what would we be missing?”

In this conversational assessment, someone should be taking notes (which will dictate part of the content for next year’s assessment). You, the minister, should have a preliminary copy of these questions prior to the meeting. Both you and the congregational representatives should have the right to add to or amend the agenda for this conversation.

Obviously, the advantage of this assessment method is spontaneity of thought and responses from everyone. The conversation will give both parties a full range of honest, not scripted, dialogue.

The second option is a variation of the

I strongly recommend, in a church setting, that laity do the evaluative process, since they are the consumers.



first. When the assessment questions arrive on your desk, you, the minister, compose written responses that you then send to all evaluative participants prior to a face-to-face conversation.

The liability of this approach is everyone may arrive at this meeting with a set of predisposed observations that often lead to impervious opinions cast in cranial concrete. It is my experience this methodology can morph into needless arguments about the meanings of words and their syntax in a sentence.

The third option is a positive amalgamation of the first two. This method uses numbers to record your responses.

For discussion purposes, look at this definitive statement, “This past year I have grown in my ability to communicate the Word in both teaching and preaching.” Under this statement you may find sequential numbers from 1 to 5. In the space before the 1 will appear “no growth” and after the 5 you will find “significant growth.” Your responsibility, as the assessed minister, is to circle the number that best represents your evaluation between those two extremes. The advantage of this approach is everyone in the room will quickly move to discussing your growth as an adept preacher and teacher instead of hunkering down for a confrontational diatribe around words.

The final option is the one I am convinced is your best option, although it is more labor-intensive. With many of my clients I conduct a 360 Evaluation. It works this way.

Assume you are the lead pastor of a congregation with approximately 400 in Sunday morning worship and education. A 360 evaluation means a variety of constituencies will assess you (hence an “all around” or 360 degrees with you at the center).

The 360 assessment I regularly use with clergy includes 46 line items categorized in four major segments (Organizational Savvy, Managing Tasks, Leading People, and Self-Development). To illustrate the content, here are sample statements you will find in each of the four competencies.

Organizational Savvy. “Positively interacts with a variety of people throughout our community” or “Models behaviors and

attitudes he or she expects from others.”

Managing Tasks. “Follows through on promises and obligations.” Or “Is considered by church staff to be an excellent administrator.”

Leading People. “Consistently explains why when communicating change.” Or “Holds himself/herself and others accountable for meeting performance measures.”

Self-Development. “Takes time for recreation and exercise.” Or, “Seeks feedback from others in the ministry about his or her own performance.”

Once you have formulated the content, the next decision is to identify three groups within the church who will score the pastor of this multistaffed church on these 46 line items. The first group may comprise randomly selected adherents who have worshipped at the church for at least the last 2 years. These congregants will be notified by mail that church leadership has chosen them to participate in this assessment of the pastor so the church can continue its strategic growth plans with strong pastoral leadership. The second group can be all of the church board members (eight people). The third assessment pool may be six staff members (both salaried and volunteer) who work closely with the pastor to accomplish and plan their ministry (youth pastor, Christian education director, etc.).

Each participant scores assessment by choosing the right number in the 1-5 scoring key. One will be the lowest score indicating this characteristic is totally absent or rarely observed and 5 indicates this skill set is frequently observed and practiced.

The evaluator will indicate a choice between 1-5 by circling a number or scoring the inventory on a safe Internet site (i.e., Survey Monkey). With either methodology, all scores and additional notes from the participants must be protected by strict confidentiality guarantees.

There is a fourth source of assessment scores in the 360 evaluation process: the pastor or ministry professional.

When all the scores are tabulated, the pastor compares how he sees himself against the aggregate scores of the other three categories. Note: Only the pastor, along with the church board, will have

It is the responsibility of the church board, or ministry oversight council, to report to the adherents the salient conclusions of the assessment process.

access to exact score results.

It is now the responsibility of the church board, or ministry oversight council, to report to the adherents the salient conclusions of the assessment process. This report should provide an equal balance of affirmation and challenge to both the spiritual leader and congregation.

When everyone in the body of Christ can “speak the truth in love” to each other, through a competent assessment process, any hidden pockets of resentment and misunderstanding will struggle to get an audience.

SO, HOW ARE YOU DOING?

If you have read this column and have committed your life to Christ and His church, the question, “So, how are you doing?” is a legitimate inquiry.

All of us have to be honest at this moment. So how honest are you willing to be? ☐



CAL LeMON, D.Min., president, Executive Enrichment, Inc., Springfield, Missouri, a corporate education and consulting firm

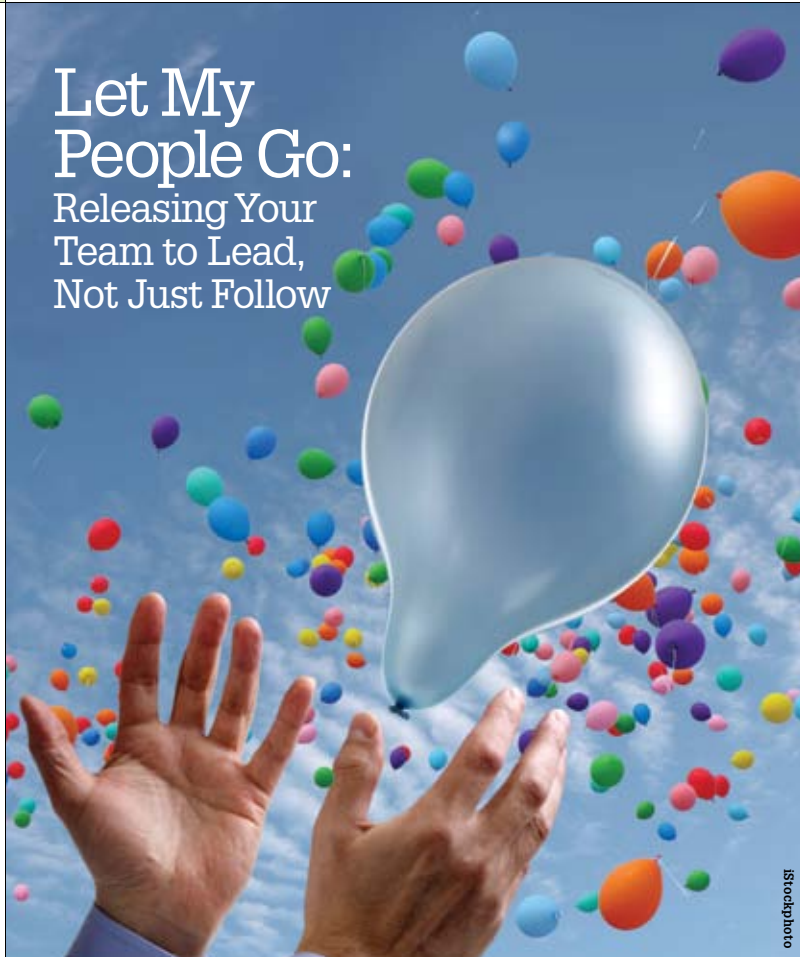
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“That’s Art. He’s our entry level youth pastor.”

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Let My People Go: Releasing Your Team to Lead, Not Just Follow



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BY GLENN REYNOLDS

The realization I could be the problem dawned on me slowly. After all, I taught lessons about leading differently at every level of the organization.

At conferences and seminars I told pastors about the need to reinvent themselves to lead effectively in new seasons. I read and reread the book, *What Got You Here Won't Get You There*.

Armed with that knowledge, I realized I could be the roadblock on the path to my church reaching its God-given vision.

As I analyzed the responsibilities vested solely in me (for example, approving every expenditure over \$200), the committees in which I participated (from



In an effort to release your team to lead and realign your role as the senior leader, you must take five steps.

service production teams to world missions leadership teams), and the lack of decision-making ability outside of my office, I began to understand I was hoarding too much of the organization's potential in my hands.

I was dangerously close to becoming what I taught against.

Over time, it became obvious I was leading the church from behind, relying on my past experience. Instead, I needed to lead the church into the future, from the level we sought to reach — rather than from the one we had already attained. Because of this, I felt like I was constantly pushing everybody forward, rather than each of us pulling together.

And that was tiring.

So in cooperation with my leadership team, we devised a plan for me to let go and for them to step up. Looking back, this had to happen at all levels of my ministry. As a church planter, I typed the worship folder, scheduled the ushers, and helped set up and tear down every Sunday. Somewhere along the way I learned to let go so other people could step up. I needed to learn the lesson all over again.

In an effort to release your team to lead and realign your role as the senior leader, you must take five steps.

STEP ONE: RAISE UP

You must raise up other leaders, not just attract followers. It is not easy, but the pattern is the same at every level — identify, recruit, train, deploy, and coach other leaders. To identify them, you must know them and connect with them. To recruit them, connecting their gifts to the church's vision is essential.

Training is an ongoing and purposeful process where you help them develop not only skills, but also an understanding of the principles behind the tasks. To deploy them, you release them to do what they do best — with your authority. Coaching them implies that deployment comes with accountability and continued support. In other words, you delegate responsibility and authority. You do not simply dump them off to do a job you no longer want to do.

I had an incredible team of senior

leaders waiting for me to deploy and coach them. Mistakenly, I managed them instead of leading them. As the church grew and experienced the pains of growth, I vested more and more authority to the one person I trusted most — me. In effect, I neutered a powerful team that I should have released, rather than leashed.

Your situation may be more like the early days of my church plant in Des Moines, Iowa, where the leaders were volunteers, instead of paid staff. The principle remains constant, though. To keep growing your organization, you must raise up leaders.

STEP TWO: LET GO

Once you raise up leaders, you have to divest responsibility and authority. If you continue to micromanage their work, one of you is not necessary to the process. Instead, you must get to the point where you are comfortable releasing leadership to your fellow leaders.

Before you let go, make sure you can check these three boxes.

First, your fellow leaders must share your heart. In other words, they must know what's inside you. Help them understand the why of what you are trying to accomplish in the organization. This only happens over time as you explain the motivation for the vision that is in your heart for the organization. It happens as you connect as friends and not just colleagues. You must let them in before you let them go.

Second, your fellow leaders must know what's in your head. They not only need to know how you feel about something, they need to understand how you think about something.

The Walt Disney Company lost its moorings after its founder and guiding visionary died in the late 1960s. At risk of a hostile takeover by corporate raiders, the board fired Disney's son-in-law, and Michael Eisner became the CEO nearly 20 years after Walt's death.

Disney was devoid of imagination, losing money, and facing being chopped up and sold as parts to the highest bidder. When Eisner arrived, he found the most

Mentors have never come to me. I have always had to seek them out.



Stockbyte

frequently asked question was, "What would Walt do?"

Asking what Walt would do seems like a good idea on the surface. But when you dig deeper, you find the company rejected Walt's innovative thinking process, choosing instead to face the problems and opportunities of the 1980s with a company frozen in 1966.

It is important to never let your staff ask essay questions: What would you do about this problem? Instead, they must ask multiple-choice questions, describing the problem and offering solutions. As the leader, you help them learn how to think through solutions, rather than just giving them an answer. In this way, they not only learn what you think, they learn how you think, which is much more valuable and necessary as you release your authority to them.

Third, your fellow leaders must be your hands. I wondered why both a direct report and I were sitting in on the first interview of a potential new hire. Why were we on the same committee? I was paying both of us when we only needed one of us for that task or team. I had to review and decide what and where I needed to be and when and where my fellow leaders needed to be my hands.

I limited my involvement to staff chapel, senior leader's meeting, staff meeting, and the creative planning team. Limiting my involvement freed my fellow leaders to lead, rather than just sit beside me in a meeting.

STEP THREE: MOVE OVER

Letting go of certain duties to your fellow leaders allows you the freedom to complete the primary roles of the senior leader — focusing on vision, developing strategy to complete the vision, communicating the vision, and raising up and coaching new leaders. Letting go of some work never frees you from work; it only allows you to move over to the appropriate priorities for the senior leader. This was why the apostles selected deacons — not to free them from work, but to free them to work on what was their task alone (prayer and ministry of the Word).

STEP FOUR: CHECK IN

Even with fellow leaders, Zig Ziglar's rule still applies — you do not get what you expect; you get what you inspect. There must be an accountability system for you and your fellow leaders. Still, be careful not to devolve back into a managerial system.

Our direct reports meeting (the meeting with me and those who report directly to me) devolved into a management meeting. To move forward and make better use of their time, we devised a written system of communicating weekly goals, while reserving the face-to-face meeting for big decisions and strategic thinking. They added a meeting without me to discuss issues they did not need to bring to my attention.

STEP FIVE: LOOK AROUND

Finally, look around for someone at the next level to mentor you. Mentors have never come to me. I have always had to seek them out. One mistake I made as I

As you keep growing as a leader and as a church, you will need to keep reinventing how you lead.

continued my leadership journey was to stop seeking mentors. I had plenty of colleagues, but I stopped seeking people at the next level. It was a mistake that contributed to the problem these five steps were designed to solve.

As you keep growing as a leader and as a church, you will need to keep reinventing how you lead. To do that, you will need to connect with people in front of you, not just beside you.

Slowly, I realized I might be part of the problem, but quickly with these five steps and the help of my team I am back on a journey to becoming part of the solution for taking our church to a new level. You can, too. 📧



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If God's Creation Was "Very Good," How Could Evil Arise?

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BY PAUL COPAN

Genesis 1 ends with God pronouncing His creation "very good."¹ Where did evil come from, then? James 1 says God is neither the instigator

nor the source of sin; He does not tempt, nor can He be tempted (verse 13). Rather, *every good* thing comes from God (verse 17). So evil did not originate with God but apparently with moral creatures (whether angelic or human) whom God created good. But isn't this odd? Creatures in a perfect environment still going wrong? How *did* that first sin emerge?

In this article, I first review certain biblical passages that allegedly suggest that God is the source of evil, which, if true, would contradict other Scriptures affirming God's intrinsic goodness. Second, I examine one theologian's problematic attempt to account for evil's origin and then address the general Calvinist arguments to do so. Finally, I present what I take to be a successful account of primeval sin, which follows the book *On*



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the Free Choice of the Will by the notable theologian Augustine (A.D. 354–430). His approach adequately upholds both God's goodness and genuine creaturely freedom.

What do I mean by freedom? I mean that the moral buck stops with the agent. Our actions are *up to us*. They are not simply the result of external influences (e.g., environment) or even internal states (e.g., moods, emotions). We cannot say, "I just couldn't help doing what I do" or "My genes made me do it." As 1 Corinthians 10:13 indicates, no temptation comes to us from which we cannot find a way of escape, with God's help. Or, as God tells Cain, "sin is crouching at the door; and its desire is for you, but you must master it" (Genesis 4:7, NASB²). We are responsible for our actions, and we cannot blame God or someone else for our wrongdoing. *Ought* implies *can*, with the ever-available grace of God. Our ultimate point will be that sin originates in creatures, not in God, even if God's purposes permit and redemptively bring about good from creaturely sin and failure (e.g., Genesis 50:20).³

SOME PERPLEXING BIBLICAL PASSAGES

The King James Version causes some confusion at this point, apparently attributing evil's origin to God in several verses: "I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the Lord do all these things" (Isaiah 45:7). "Who is he that saith, and it cometh to pass, when the Lord commandeth it not? Out of the mouth of the Most High proceedeth not evil and good?" (Lamentations 3:37,38). "Shall a trumpet be blown in the city, and the people not be afraid? Shall there be evil in a city, and the Lord hath not done it?" (Amos 3:6). The obvious answer to this problem is that the KJV's rendering of this word *evil* is inaccurate. We can also translate the word for "evil" or "wickedness" (*ra'ah*) as "trouble," "disaster," or "calamity."

What about KJV's rendering of Proverbs 16:4 — that God makes "the wicked for the day of evil [doom]"? We best understand this verse along the lines of Genesis 50:20: " 'You thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good.' " Likewise the Lord creates an "evil day"

(captivity/exile) for the southern kingdom of Judah. However, God was punishing Judah for disobedience to God. This is why the Lord “delivered” Judah into Babylon’s hands (Daniel 1:2). Likewise, in the New Testament, God is able to use evil free human choices (Pilate’s/Jewish leaders) to bring about good ends (redemption through Jesus’ death [Acts 2:22–24]). These are statements not of divinely originated evil, but of divine sovereignty, which can use creaturely evil to bring about good (Romans 8:28).⁴

Here’s a tricky passage: In 1 Kings 22:22, God sends “lying spirits” to Ahab, allowing him to be further deceived. What’s that about? The simplest answer is that this is divine *permission* for continued deception since Ahab was already self-deceived, for which he was already fully guilty. God is not instigating lying.⁵ Such an act is akin to God’s hardening *already* resistant human hearts or further blinding eyes in response to self-hardening or self-blinding (e.g., Jeremiah 5:21–25).

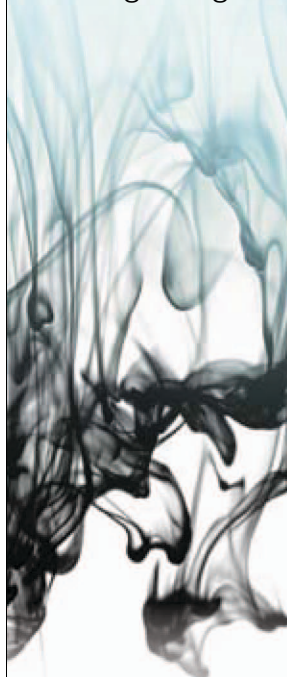
In 2 Thessalonians 2:9–11, God sends a “strong delusion” (NASB). But this is because they “did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved” (NASB). This *self-hardening* may lead to *divine* hardening — namely, God’s withdrawal of particular graces, giving people over to the stubbornness of their hearts. Just as God does not harden soft — or potentially soft — hearts, neither does He permit deceiving spirits to come to those who are not already self-deceived.

God is no more the literal cause or “creator” of evil than certain Old Testament figures like Jeroboam, son of Nebat, who “caused Israel to sin” (1 Kings 22:52; cp. Numbers 31:16; 2 Chronicles 21:11–14; Nehemiah 13:26). The devil, not God, is the beginning of sin — a “murderer from the beginning. . . and the father of lies” (John 8:44, NASB). The God and Creator of free moral agents is no more the author of sin than the Wright brothers are the authors of airplane crashes.

ONE PROBLEMATIC PROPOSAL

Unlike his more moderate Calvinistic father, who claims that the origin of evil is a mystery, R.C. Sproul, Jr.’s, book *Almighty Over All* goes for broke, claiming that God is the *author* of evil.⁶ To his

We are responsible for our actions, and we cannot blame God or someone else for our wrongdoing.



credit, Sproul, Jr., is attempting to be consistent.

John Calvin — probably the best Calvinist there ever was — put it this way: “since God’s will is said to be the cause of all things, I have made His providence the determinative principle for all human plans and works.”⁷ It was “by the predestination of God, Adam fell.”⁸ Calvinists will commonly point out that, if God chooses to save some, He does no wrong to the rest who deserve to be condemned. But on closer inspection of Calvin, humans are not ultimately condemned because they are sinners. They are condemned because God has willed their condemnation — yes, independent of any sin they have committed.⁹ As Calvin puts it, “If we cannot assign any reason for His bestowing mercy on His people, but just that it so pleases Him, neither can we have any reason for His reprobating others but His will. When God is said to visit in mercy or harden whom He will, men are reminded that they are not to seek for any cause beyond His will.”¹⁰

Yet Sproul, Jr., goes where other Calvinists fear to tread. In the pursuit of theological consistency, he concludes that God must be the *originator* of evil, the creator of sin. Ironically, this is a view Calvin himself repudiated.¹¹ In Sproul, Jr.’s, third chapter (entitled “Who Dunit?”), he explores the possible sources (the “suspects”) for evil’s origin. There are only five alternatives: Adam, Eve, Satan, the environment, and God. Well, God created a good environment (“it was very good”), and Adam, Eve, and Satan were originally created good. Thus their strongest desire or inclination must also have been originally good since this dictates how any human will choose. This, then, means that none of the first four candidates can be the source of sin. Who is the “culprit”? God himself. He “introduced evil into this world.”¹²

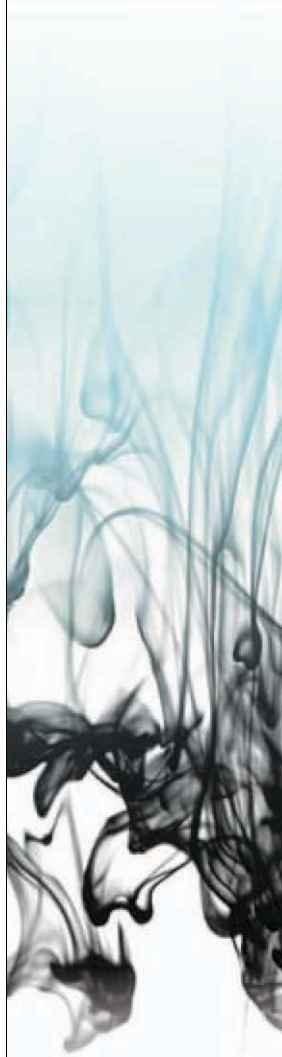
It gets worse. God *had* to create human beings who would fall into sin because of God’s eternal attribute of wrath: “God is as delighted with His wrath as He is with all of His attributes.”¹³ So in light of this eternal attribute of wrath, God must necessarily create objects of judgment — “something on which I can exhibit the glory of my wrath.”¹⁴ If God had not created human beings and angelic creatures who would necessarily fall into sin, then

God would not have had opportunity to display His glory in this way. So Sproul, Jr., asserts something rather startling: "It was [God's] desire to make His wrath known. He needed, then, something on which to be wrathful. He needed to have sinful creatures."¹⁵ In the end, Sproul, Jr., though acknowledging that God cannot sin, states that God *created* sin.¹⁶ Are you as shocked as I am?

There are three fundamental problems with this account of evil's origin. First, *it undermines God's goodness*. Sproul, Jr., claims that a sovereign God can "do what He wants."¹⁷ But there are some things God *cannot* do because His nature is intrinsically good. He cannot break His promises or lie (Romans 3:4; Titus 1:2; Hebrews 6:18). James chapter 1 says that God creates only *good things*, not evil things. Jesus affirms, "If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him!" (Matthew 7:11, NASB). God cannot command what is intrinsically evil — say, affirming rape or torturing babies for fun.

Second, Sproul, Jr., views evil as a *thing in itself* rather than a defect in a good thing. Evil is a corruption of God's good creation — like adultery is a corruption of the good gift of sex. St. Augustine rightly opposed this idea of the heretical Manichees, who believed that evil is an entity rather than a defect of an entity. However, Sproul, Jr., is perpetuating this heretical idea. But this is wrong: "everything created by God is good" (1 Timothy 4:4, NASB).

Third, a *needy God is an inferior deity*. For a staunch Calvinist to say God needs something outside himself defies the very doctrine of divine sovereignty to which they lay claim — not to mention general Christian orthodox belief. No, God *did not* need to create anything at all; He freely created. A needy deity is *not* the God of Scripture: "If I were hungry I would not tell you, For the world is Mine, and all it contains" (Psalm 50:12, NASB). What's more, if wrath is an eternal, necessary attribute of God, there's a big problem: no matter what world God created by necessity, He would be *required to make creatures to damn* since the attribute of God's wrath must be acted on and cannot be frustrated.



Sin or evil is a kind of absence of what ought to be there or a corruption of God's originally good creation.

I have reviewed a couple of views that pose certain theological and moral problems. We should seek an alternative picture more in line with Scripture.

A MORE FRUITFUL ALTERNATIVE

We can find a more intelligible explanation for evil's origin — one that's not rooted in a good God or one that does not have to cry "it's a mystery" in the absence of explanation. The explanation: particular finite, rational, free creatures brought evil about.¹⁸ Let me quickly add that I am not trying to eliminate all mystery. Indeed, God's ways are higher than ours, and so we should expect mysteries given our creaturely limitations. The point is that how sin emerged in a good world is not a mystery; it is explicable understood in terms of moral creatures abusing their freedom. This explanation avoids the strong implication of a sovereign God as the author or originator of evil, offering a clear line of demarcation between God's moral goodness and the evil originating in finite moral agents.

So, let's break this down, as we follow themes in Augustine's *On the Free Choice of the Will*.

1. Sin is a defect. It is not a thing itself, and God did not create it. First, it is helpful to understand what sin is. Sin or evil is a kind of absence of what ought to be there or a corruption of God's originally good creation. It is like a pothole in a road: the pothole is the absence of a road that ought to be there. Evil is like blindness — the absence of sight that one should have. Evil is parasitic on what is good; it is like rot in a log or rust on a car. Without the log, there would not be rot. Yes, our first ancestors were created good — without moral defect. But their choice to disobey was the result of misusing the good gift of creaturely freedom.

2. The first sin was voluntary. Augustine wrote that "sins originate with souls which God has created" (1.2.4). Though created without moral defect, moral creatures became the sinners. Adam and Eve could have freely resisted this first sin; nothing about their divinely created (human or angelic) nature *compelled* them to sin. If their nature required them to sin, then they would have done as they ought (3.17.47). But that could not be since God

would have been blameworthy for an intrinsically flawed creation. No, what God made was “very good” (Genesis 1:31). By the free will’s action, a radical, new occurrence broke into God’s good created order.

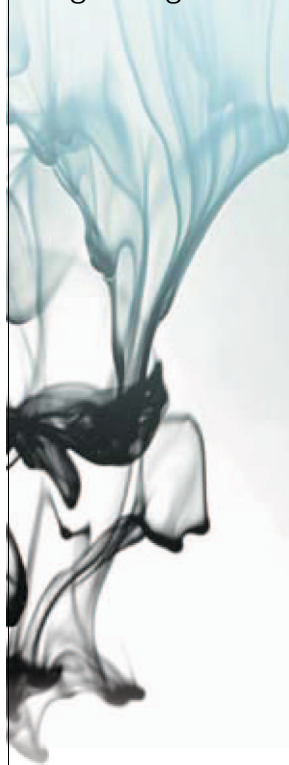
3. The first sin was a turning away from God to the creaturely. It was a creaturely turning away from the greatest good toward a lesser-created good. Why turn away from an all-good, loving Creator in a perfect environment?

Augustine said that a person sins insofar as one “turns away from the Creator” (3.17.47). According to him, evil entered creation because free-willing agents turned away from the ultimate, unchangeable good — God — and turned toward changeable, finite goods (2.19.53). Certain angels and the first humans sinned when they voluntarily directed their affections *toward* the creaturely and *away from* God — a misdirected, disordered love (2.19.53). They moved toward a preoccupation with their own selves — and, in the case of humans, to one particular fruit tree God made. Sadly, they sinned because they came to believe that lesser, finite goods could produce that supremely ultimate and most desirable state of affairs — one that only God could bring about. Creatures came to be captured by lesser, created beauties rather than fixing their eyes on God’s uncreated beauty.

4. The first sin was a failure of focus. It was a failure to pay attention to the reasons for loving God supremely and to regard Him as the highest good. Why did the originators of sin desire lesser goods over the greatest good — God? Were they just *irrational* or maybe *misguided* or *mistaken* in their thinking? Now if the first sin were just some blunder or oversight, then how could God hold these creatures accountable for their actions? Or what if these creatures were just weak-willed?

In response, the first sinners were guilty for failing to attend to the reasons for considering God as the supreme good. They were guilty of neglecting “eternal things” and pursuing, “as if they were great and wonderful, temporal things which ... can never be possessed with complete certainty” (1.16.34). If the first sinners had, instead, focused on the very obvious reasons for loving God above all else — which they *could* have readily recognized — they would have

The first couple had come to love the finite over the Infinite and so became guilty for ignoring reasons for considering God the highest good.



chosen to act wisely and would have refused to dishonor their Maker. As it turns out, these first sinners, though not being able to ignore God in their rationalizations, focused their attention on certain *aspects* of God — His prohibition, His threat of death, His talk of good and evil — while ignoring positive aspects of God’s care for them.

In fact, this is just what the Genesis story suggests. The serpent distracted Eve away from certain truths about God — His love, His friendship, His kind intentions, His gracious provision. Instead, he directed her thinking toward God’s prohibition: “Indeed, has God said, ‘You shall not eat from any tree of the garden?’” (Genesis 3:1, NASB). Now, Eve was thinking about God: “ ‘God has said, “You shall not eat from it” ’ ” (verse 3, NASB). But she failed to focus her thoughts on God as the highest good. What is more, she went *beyond* God’s explicit command by highlighting the fruit’s untouchability — something God *had not* mentioned (verse 3). She displayed a thought pattern that was fixated on God’s prohibition, but she overlooked His goodness and bountiful care.

By focusing on *one* prohibition and becoming more focused on a created thing rather than the Creator, Eve found the tree of the knowledge of good and evil — a good creation in itself — to be all the more intriguing and alluring (3:6). The first couple had come to love the finite over the Infinite and so became guilty for ignoring reasons for considering God the highest good.

These creatures made sinful free choices by failing to focus on certain important features about God, the highest good. They came to focus on God’s prohibition and a lesser good (i.e., a tasty, attractive fruit to make one wise). This was no irrational slip-up; it was *conscious choice* that was not rooted in some pre-existing moral defect or character state. Because angels and humans were ultimately created out of nothing by the power of God’s spoken word, they are finite, changeable, and utterly dependent on God. That is just the condition of all creatures. By contrast, God is self-sufficient, necessarily good, incorruptible, and infinite. But our inherent creaturely limitations are not the same thing as moral flaws or deficiencies that inevitably lead to sin.

5. The first sin was a process. It was not a sudden turning away from the greatest good. Most readers of Genesis assume Adam and Eve *suddenly* turned away from God. However, orthodox belief does not require this; and, as we saw in the previous point, Genesis 3:3 (Eve's exaggerated addition — "or touch it" — to God's original prohibition) gives a hint of something more gradual. As with the previous two chapters, Genesis 3 presents a *telescoping* of events — in this case, a gradual separateness between creatures and God that climaxed in an intentional, thought-out choice to turn away from God.

Think of how initial careless thoughts develop into a pattern of careless thoughts, eventually leading to a fixed mindset that produces decisive, significant evil choices. If a spouse fails to nurture a marriage and gradually shifts from a pattern and mindset of marital intimacy, adultery becomes a serious possibility. Adultery does not just happen. As one philosopher writes about the first sinners, "The evil angels and the first human beings will have introduced genuine and deep evil into creation only when their irrationality has solidified into a decisive and enduring state of will — that is, only when they have finally and utterly turned away from God."¹⁹

Being *careless* about our duties is truly a moral failure. What if you promise your children to take them on an outing on the weekend, but then you spontaneously decide that attending a conference might be good for you professionally, and you ignore the earlier promise? We intuitively recognize this decision to be wrong — even if the parent can cite reasons or motives for breaking his or her promise. Similarly, Adam and Eve *failed to focus on the most crucial reasons* (which is a defect) and *volitionally acted* (an effect of the failure). *Both* of these were completely up to our first parents, and they could have chosen otherwise. Their choice was free, not necessary.

No, God is not the source of evil, but rather moral creatures were. The first sinners did not just make some sudden choice without any motive whatsoever. Their sin was *voluntary, culpable, and avoidable*.

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To my mind, the account I have given offers a superior understanding of evil's origin in a good world. So we should not pin evil on God (R.C. Sproul, Jr.), nor do we need to appeal to mystery — though we can readily acknowledge other theological mysteries — to account for their origin (as Calvinism tends to do). Every good and perfect gift comes from our Heavenly Father, but evil began with free moral creatures who abused their God-given freedom. ■

Notes

1. This essay is a summary of "Evil and Primeval Sin," in *God and Evil: The Case for God in a World Filled With Pain*, eds. Chad V. Meister and Jamie K. Dew, Jr. (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2013). See ivpress.com/cgi-ivpress/book.pl/code=3784
2. Scripture quotations marked NASB are taken from the New American Standard Bible®, Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission (www.Lockman.org).
3. See William Lane Craig, *The Only Wise God* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 1999); Kenneth Keathley, *Salvation and Sovereignty: A Molinist Approach* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2009).
4. Tremper Longman III, *Proverbs*, Baker Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 329.
5. We could add the Davidic (Satan-inspired, God-permitted) census into this cluster of texts to consider (1 Samuel 24:1; 2 Chronicles 21:1).
6. R.C. Sproul, Jr., *Almighty Over All* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999). By contrast, R.C. Sproul, Sr., does not know how good creatures with free will chose to sin. *Chosen by God* (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale, 1986), 30.
7. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* 1.18.2.
8. *Ibid.*, 3.23.4; also 3.23.7,8.
9. Fred Klooster, *Calvin's Doctrine of Predestination* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1977).
10. Calvin, *Institutes* 3.22.11.
11. *Ibid.*, 3.23.8.
12. Sproul, Jr., *Almighty Over All*, 51.
13. *Ibid.*, 52.
14. *Ibid.*, 52.53.
15. *Ibid.*, 57.
16. *Ibid.*, 54.
17. *Ibid.*, 53,56.
18. Some of these comments follow Scott MacDonald, "Primal Sin," in *The Augustinian Tradition*, ed. Gareth B. Matthews (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 110–39.
19. MacDonald, "Primal Sin," 130.



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How to Maximize a Pastors' Conference



BY JUSTIN LATHROP

My position affords me the chance to meet influential church leaders, thinkers, and writers. One such leader is Leonard Sweet. I made a trip to the airport with him. He

said something I refer back to often, "The greatest distance between any two numbers is 0 and 1." It struck me as an accurate mathematical description of the power of networking in ministry. There is no power in zero. It's a place to begin, not a place to stay. We cannot multiply our influence until we connect with others.

In my first two articles, I discussed the value of a broad base of ministry connections and how to build that network in a healthy and profitable way. Leadership development is one important activity a pastor can invest in personally and professionally. I am not convinced, however, pastors understand how to maximize these opportunities to expand their base of personal connections while



Here are 15 suggestions to consider as you prepare and plan for your next pastor or leadership conference.

exposing themselves to new and innovative approaches to ministry.

Here are 15 suggestions to consider as you prepare and plan for your next pastor or leadership conference:

BEFORE THE EVENT

- 1. Determine what you want to accomplish by attending this event.** I have at least one goal for every event I attend. If I do not have expectations going into the event, I will likely miss an important opportunity to expand my network and increase my influence.
- 2. Review the speakers' list in advance.** Do not wait until you register at the event to review the main speakers. Go to the event's website. Determine who you are most interested in hearing. This will help you plan your time to make connections.
- 3. Ask for a list of churches or people who will be attending.** Sometimes event organizers will post a list of churches or organizations that have registered. This may or may not be available. When it is, pick out a few people with whom you want to connect or reconnect.
- 4. Connect before you get to the conference.** Schedule time with people in the

general geographic area who might not be attending the event. Do not limit yourself to just what happens at the event itself. Consider a reasonable radius around where the event will take place.

- 5. Post via social media what event you are attending.** See who responds. You might discover people who are following you online that you did not know were paying attention. People who are connected online are usually people you will want to connect with in person. They are likely to share the same goals you do.

DURING THE EVENT

- 1. Determine to make the most of the event.** Do not sleep in, take 3-hour lunches, or cut out early for dinner. Your organization spent money for you to attend for leadership development and personal enhancement.
- 2. Seek workshop or breakout leaders.** They are often easier to connect with than the main speakers. Ask to meet them for coffee or lunch. Never waste

I am not convinced pastors understand how to maximize opportunities to expand their base of personal connections while exposing themselves to new and innovative approaches to ministry.

a meal by eating alone.

- 3. Put yourself in a position to meet new people.** Reuniting with friends is good, but expand your network with new connections. Attend at least one social mixer.
- 4. Visit the exhibit area.** Preview products and services that might help you be more effective. I have discovered wonderful products, services, and people who have been important connections for me simply because I walked through the exhibit hall. I usually end up with some free stuff for the kids.
- 5. Search social media sites to see what others are saying about the event.** Event organizers will often designate a hash tag (usually a word or phrase preceded by the “#” sign) designed to make it easy for participants to see what other people are saying about an event. Perform this search a couple times each day to help you stay on top of what is happening and what others are excited about.

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AFTER THE EVENT

- 1. Purchase the audio package of main speakers if it's available.** Many leadership events now make the audio (and even video) of all the main speakers available to event participants and the general public. Do not miss the opportunity to make a new connection because you opted to hear your favorite speaker live. You can always catch the audio on the plane ride or drive home.
- 2. Send a personal note to the new connections you made.** Whether electronically or by hand, send a note after the event to make a lasting impression. Try to do this within 2 weeks of the event. Include your contact information.
- 3. Add those new people to your social network lists so you can follow what they are doing.** Whether you are using Twitter, Facebook, Google+, LinkedIn, or all four, find the people you met at the conference online. Social media makes it easy to stay connected on what's new in their ministry.
- 4. Develop a follow-up system that will ensure you stay connected between conferences.** I have a process that works for me. It gives me a plan to follow that helps me stay connected. If I did not have a plan, I would not be able to stay in touch with anyone.
- 5. Evaluate within 30 days whether or not you should attend the same conference next year.** Try new conferences and events. If you have been in ministry for any length of time, you probably have a few favorite events you like to attend each year. Evaluate every event, every year. Determine whether or not it is helping you make new connections and helping you grow in your leadership skills. If you decide to attend again, book the event in advance. Organizations will often extend a discount to participants who register early.

CONCLUSION

I hope you are beginning to see and experience the value of expanding your network of influence. Ministry is about connecting with people, learning from others, and joining with others as we

If you are doing ministry alone, you are missing out on part of God's blessing.

work together to maximize our impact in this season of our leadership.

Building a ministry network is not about moving our professional careers forward. It is how God designed us to build His kingdom and carry out the Great Commission. If you are doing ministry alone, you are missing out on part of God's blessing.

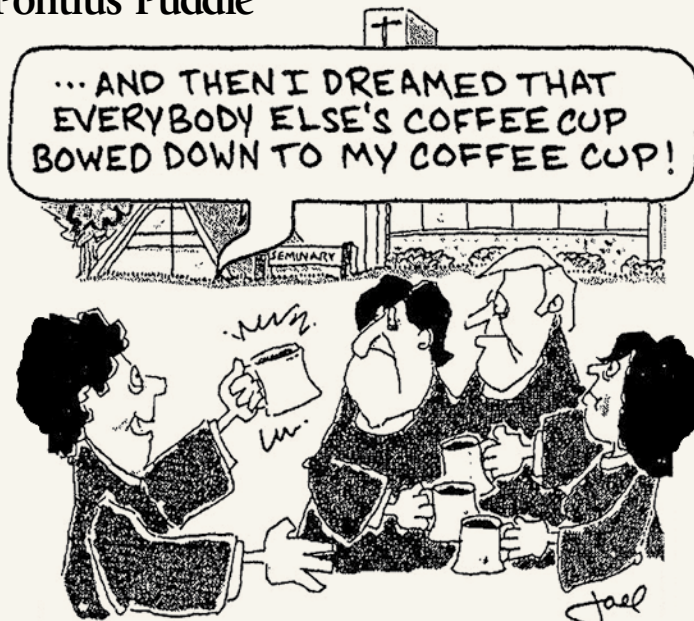
Intentional habits that lead to new and long-lasting relationships are the key ingredient for those who leave a legacy in ministry and those who simply perform a specific duty, for a specific congregation, for a specific period of time. Jesus showed us how to do this by demonstrating He could change the world with 12 ordinary men. God never intended us to do ministry alone. Commit to a lifestyle that results in building relationships and making new connections and you will multiply your impact. ■



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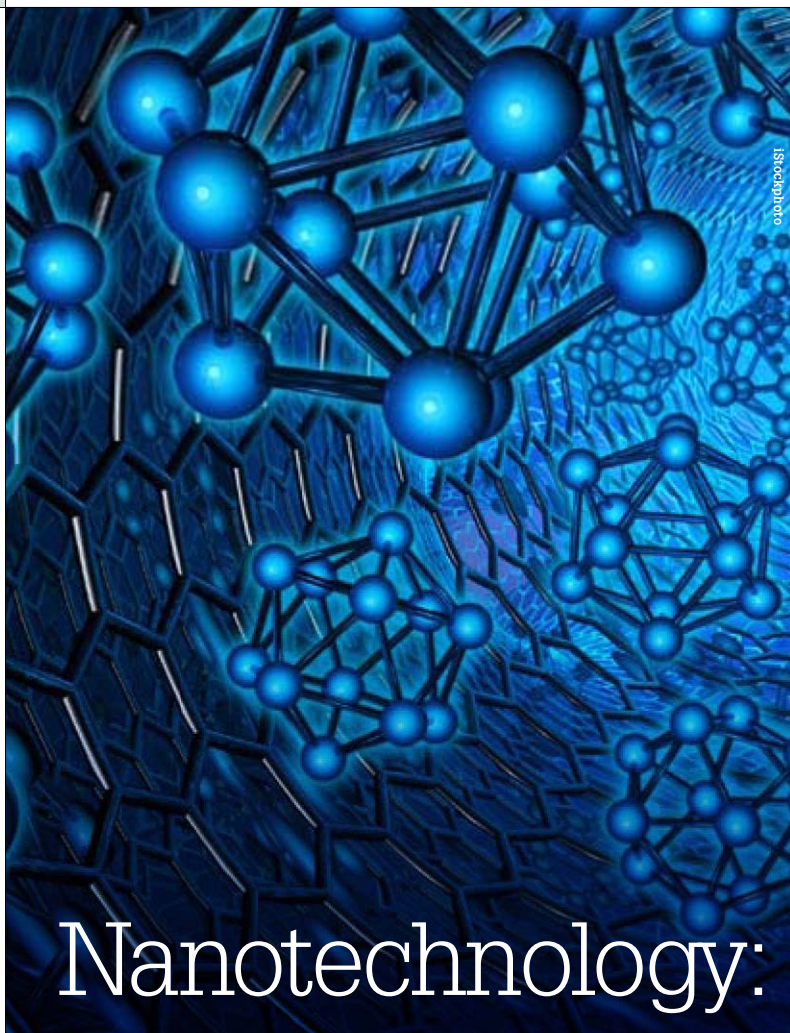
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Pontius' Puddle



Joseph the seminarian and his multicolor mug.

BY CHRISTINA M.H. POWELL



Nanotechnology:

Small Objects of Great Importance



Nanoparticles may be small, but the ethical lessons are of great importance.

Science not only helps us explore the vastness of the universe, but science also reveals the wonders of a world too small to be seen with a light microscope. In fact, many exciting discoveries concern ways to build objects on the nanometer scale. A nanometer, one-billionth of a meter, is about 80,000 times smaller than the diameter of a human hair. Yet technology on this scale has made the iPad and other high-capacity disk drives possible. Common products, such as vanishing sunscreen and other cosmetics, use nanoparticles. Nanotechnology offers an exceptional opportunity to make major advances in cancer diagnosis and treatment.

Beyond the real-world applications currently under development, many may be familiar with the science-fiction version of nanotechnology. The food replicator in *Star Trek* that produced everything imaginable, including Earl Grey tea, is one futuristic application of nanotechnology principles. Of course, as with any new scientific frontier, ethical concerns emerge. Yet pastors will find that a balanced, biblical approach to technology offers useful guiding principles for this new field as well as other areas of medical ethics. Nanoparticles may be small, but the ethical lessons are of great importance.

BUILDING SMALL WONDERS

Nanotechnology brings together many different scientific disciplines, such as engineering, molecular biology, and clinical medicine. Measuring, imaging, and manipulating matter from 1 to 100 nanometers in size requires interdisciplinary collaboration. While nanotechnology is changing many fields, including electronics, information technology, and materials science, some of the most amazing applications involve finding new ways to diagnose and treat human diseases.

The nanoscale is the scale of most large biomolecules, such as DNA and antibodies. Most important biological processes

within the cell, including the development of cancer, occur on the nanoscale. Nanotechnology allows researchers to observe and direct those processes on the same scale as natural biomolecules. For example, nanoparticles can help surgeons locate and remove cancerous growths by improving the accuracy of imaging. Medical personnel can target small magnetic particles to bind only to cancer cells, allowing precise visualization of the location of malignant growths.

Medical personnel can also target nanoshells, shaped like hollow spheres, to cancer cells and use them to deliver heat directly to these cells, killing only the cancer and sparing normal tissue. They can also build nanodevices in a variety of useful shapes, such as tubes, spheres, wires, and hinges. Through the technique of DNA origami, a researcher succeeded in engineering DNA structures in the shape of smiley faces, demonstrating the precision possible in constructing various shapes of nanodevices. They can use these nanodevices to deliver therapeutic drugs directly to cancer cells, protecting normal cells from side effects.

Researchers could also theoretically use nanodevices to repair cells, correcting DNA damage or enzyme deficiencies. Someday advanced nanodevices controlled by a nanocomputer could possibly perform surgery on the cellular level, mimicking the body's own natural healing mechanisms. Nanotechnology already has enhanced regenerative medicine by providing new ways to isolate, trace, and regulate adult stem cells.

CROSSING BARRIERS

What makes nanotechnology so powerful also creates potential safety concerns. At the nanoscale, the properties of a material can change drastically as quantum mechanics take effect. For example, carbon in the form of graphite, such as the lead in pencils, is soft and malleable. Carbon at the nanoscale, however, can be six times stronger than steel. The zinc oxide found in typical sunscreens is white and opaque. Nanoscale zinc oxide is transparent and capable of vanishing into the skin. While these changes from the bulk form to the nanoscale form are positive, scientists are concerned that quantum effects could make



some nanoparticles toxic. Thus, even if research shows a material is safe in its bulk form, researchers should still conduct toxicity studies on the nanoscale form.

Nanoparticles not only cross the barrier from classical mechanics to quantum mechanics, but they also become capable of crossing the blood-brain barrier because they are so small. The blood-brain barrier is a membrane that normally protects the brain from harmful chemicals circulating in the bloodstream. Researchers can harness the ability of nanoparticles to cross this barrier to treat brain tumors. Of course, the flip side of the ability to cross this barrier is the realization that nanoparticles in our environment could be potentially poisonous to us.

A final barrier that nanotechnology may someday cross is the human enhancement barrier. Nanotechnology in medicine could give us new abilities, such as night vision, rapid healing, or increase our natural abilities to make us smarter and stronger. Such technology could have serious social implications. For example, wealthier individuals could have access to technologies that give them a dramatic advantage over individuals unable to afford the enhancements. The possibility of making irreversible, inheritable modifications to humans raises questions about the dangers to future generations. Finally, any futuristic uses of nanotechnology for human enhancement must consider the impact of the technology on human dignity.

BALANCING RISK AND REWARD

Both the nanotechnologies in use today and the speculative nanotechnologies that are closer to science fiction than product development underscore the importance of thinking through ethical issues raised by scientific advances. While the Bible does not speak of biomolecules, the Bible does address truths about the human condition that impact all technologies.

A Christian could point to Genesis 1:26–28 where God gives mankind dominion over the rest of creation to support the research enterprise. Yet another Christian viewpoint might view nanotechnology as mankind's attempt to "play God," altering the building blocks of creation to create new biomolecules and new forms of materials. Perhaps

a better approach to developing a Christian view of nanotechnology recognizes that mankind has a responsibility to good stewardship. Developing new technologies to cure diseases and solve problems comes with the responsibility of considering the impact of the technology on human health, on the environment, and on subsequent generations.

The biblical principle of accountability can provide useful safeguards for new technologies without hampering scientific progress. Proverbs 27:17 teaches, "As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another." In the world of medicine, appropriate regulations provide such accountability. Regulations also protect against negative social impact from technologies. Scientists can help society understand what changes are possible through new technology. Society, in turn, can decide what changes should be made and how those changes will impact human flourishing.

The Bible teaches the need for humility in our spiritual lives. For example, Proverbs 11:2 cautions, "When pride comes, then comes disgrace, but with humility comes wisdom." Humility in developing new technologies means acknowledging human limitations and the possibilities of errors and oversights in current thinking. A cautious approach to crossing barriers with new scientific developments prevents costly mistakes and potential harm to both humans and the environment. Humility in research means a respect for human dignity and a restraint in designing technologies that will alter the genetic code of future generations.

The Bible also teaches the reality of evil. Luke 6:45 states, "A good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart." We can use a powerful new technology that can alleviate suffering and improve human lives to create weapons and means of destruction. As a result of the reality of evil in this world, scientists and engineers must take precautions to prevent people from using new discoveries for evil purposes.

Finally, the Bible teaches the importance of balance and avoiding extremes (Ecclesiastes 7:18). Applied to nanotechnology, this principle reminds us to weigh the risks

As a result of the reality of evil, scientists and engineers must take precautions to prevent people from using new discoveries for evil purposes.

and rewards when designing materials on the nanoscale. Nanoparticles that provide convenience or a cosmetic benefit, such as a vanishing sunscreen, are worthwhile only if the risk of toxicity remains low. A cancer treatment that provides a life-saving treatment when no other option is available may be worth trying even if a risk of toxicity is present.

Pastors have the opportunity to set a healthy tone for parishioners interested in a biblical approach to new technologies, such as nanotechnology. By emphasizing biblical principles such as responsibility, accountability, humility, goodness, and balance, pastors can lay groundwork useful for exploring the ethical implications of any new technology. Science can help us build small wonders, while biblical wisdom can help us determine what wonders are worth building. ■



CHRISTINA M.H. POWELL, Ph.D., an ordained minister, author, medical writer, and research scientist trained at Harvard Medical School and Harvard University. She speaks in churches and conferences nationwide and addresses faith and science issues at www.questionyourdoubts.com.

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"I was surprised. The 'pews' don't smell half bad!"

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Don't WORRY

BY MARC TURNAGE

Jesus lived during the **tumultuous days** of the first century, in which the Jewish people lived under Roman occupation: a situation that created political, economic, and social unrest. In the midst of this turmoil, He instructed His followers, “Do not be anxious about your life ... do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Let the day’s own trouble be sufficient for the day” (Matthew 6:25,34¹). He reflected a stream of thought that emerged within Judaism that emphasized the holiness of the present day. Each day contains its own sanctity; therefore, we should praise God for the present. This ideology did not come from a utopian ideal; rather, it emerged from a creative exegesis of Exodus 16:4 and a profound conviction about the character and nature of God, who is intimately a part of human history and the source for all sustenance.

The contemporary, first-century B.C. sages, Shammai and Hillel, provide a contrast of ideologies regarding the sanctity of the present day: “It was told of Shammai the Elder: Whenever he found a fine portion he said, ‘This will be for the Sabbath.’ If later he found a finer one, he put aside



Jesus reflected a stream of thought that emphasized the holiness of the present day. Therefore, we should praise God for the present.

the second for the Sabbath, and ate the first; thus, whatever he ate, was meant for the honor of the Sabbath. But Hillel the Elder had a different way, for all his works were for the sake of Heaven; he used to say: ‘Blessed be the Lord day by day’ ” (*b. Betzah* 16a).

Hillel’s actions stemmed from his view that one should praise God for the present because of the sanctity of each day, which he derived from Psalm 68:19, “Blessed be the Lord, day by day.” Hillel’s emphasis on the sanctity of the present day expresses a firm belief and an unrelenting trust in God. Hillel’s understanding of praising God only for the present day and its provision is reflected in his interpretation of another psalm: “Hillel the Elder used to say: ‘Bad news shall have no terror for him (i.e., the righteous man), because his heart is steadfast, trusting in the Lord’ (Psalm 112:7). He who is trusting in the Lord, bad news shall have no terror for him” (*y. Berachot* 14b). Whether or not the bad news is true, according to Hillel, one who trusts in God becomes immune to bad news because such a person cannot be “anxious about tomorrow” (Matthew 6:34).

Hillel’s emphasis on the immediacy of the day and God’s provision recalls the miracle of manna in the wilderness (Exodus 16:4–10) where God commanded the Children of Israel to go out “and gather enough for that day.” The people had to depend on God for their daily sustenance: “In that way I will test them, whether they will follow my instruction or not” (Exodus 16:4). Later, Moses recalled the ordeal of the Children of Israel in the wilderness recounting God’s provision for them: “Remember the long way that the Lord your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, in order to humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commandments. He humbled you by letting you hunger, then by feeding you with manna ... in order to make you understand that one does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord” (Deuteronomy 8:2,3; cf. also Luke 4:4).

Commenting on the phrase “a day’s portion every day” (Exodus 16:4), Rabbi Eleazar of Modiin said, “This means that a man may not gather on one day the portion

for the next day. ... He who created the day has also created its sustenance. ... He who has enough to eat for today and says, 'What will I eat tomorrow?' Behold he is of little faith" (*Mekhilta de-Rabbi Ishmael* on Exodus 16:4). Similarly, Rabbi Eleazar the Great said, "Everyone who has food in his basket today and says, 'What will I eat tomorrow?' — behold, he is among those of little faith!" (b. *Sotah* 48b).

Philo, the first-century Jewish historian who wrote from Alexandria, Egypt, interpreted the episode of the manna as an expression of faith: "He that would fain have all at once earns for himself lack of hope and trust, as well as a great lack of sense. He lacks hope if he expects that now only, but not in the future also, will God shower on him good things; he lacks faith, if he has no belief that both in the present and always the good gifts of God are lavishly bestowed on those worthy of them" (*Leg. All.* 3.164).

Philo, Eleazar of Modiin, and Eleazar the Great, like Jesus, all identified those worrying about the sustenance of "tomorrow" as "those of little faith," while in contrast, faith is an unrelenting trust in God for today as the giver and sustainer of life, letting "the day's own trouble be sufficient for the day" (Matthew 6:34). In another passage, Philo articulated the essence of this conviction: "We have gladly received and are storing the boons of nature, yet we do not ascribe our preservation to any corruptible thing, but to God the Parent and Father and Savior of the world and all that is therein, who has the power and right to nourish and sustain us by means of these or without these" (*Spec. leg.* 2.198).

Jesus embraced this worldview: "O you of little faith! Therefore do not be anxious, saying: 'What shall we eat,' or 'What shall we drink,' or 'What shall we wear?' ... For ... your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. ... Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Let the day's own trouble be sufficient for the day" (Matthew 6:25–34; see Luke 12:22–31). The first part of Jesus' saying, where He highlights God's care for the "birds of the air" and the "flowers of the field" is similar to a saying of Rabbi Shimon ben Eleazar: "In all the days of your life have you ever seen a wild animal or a bird laboring in a vocation? Yet, they are provided for

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What would the impact be on our world if people around us saw us reflect the deep and unrelenting trust in God expressed in the words: "Give us this day our daily bread"?

without anxiety. They were created to serve me, but I was created to serve my Maker. How much more then should I be provided for without anxiety" (m. *Kiddushin* 4:14). By recalling God's provision for animals, both Jesus and Rabbi Shimon ben Eleazar emphasize God's care for humanity, and, by extension, enjoin their followers not to be anxious.

In the Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6:11), Jesus drew a more radical conclusion from the idea that the present day contains its own blessing: "Give us this day our daily bread." He instructed His disciples that when they pray, they should pray only for the food of today. Jesus' mention of "daily bread" recalls God's daily provision for the Children of Israel through the miracle of manna. Behind the Greek phrase "daily bread" lies the Hebrew idiom, לחם חוקינו, literally "the bread (or food) that is needful for us."² By instructing them to pray, "give us this day our daily bread," He articulated their dependence on God and a deep trust in Him as the daily source of provision. To seek His provision beyond the day expresses anxiety, which, for Jesus, marks one as being "of little faith."

Jesus' outlook stemmed from His deep trust in God as the source of all provision. He expected His followers to concern themselves with those things that mattered to God, for it was God's responsibility to care for the daily needs of His children: "But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things (i.e., what we shall eat, drink, and wear) shall be yours as well" (Matthew 6:33). According to Jesus and His Jewish contemporaries, God's reign (Kingdom) was established wherever His people obey Him, and His righteousness appears wherever His people show charity (almsgiving) to others in need. According to Jesus, if we focus on those things important to God, He will take care of our daily needs. Jesus' message grew out of His conviction of blessing God for the present day.

Like Jesus, Hillel used to stand in the gate of the city seeking to bring others near to the Torah: "He [Hillel] stood in the gate of Jerusalem and met people going to work. He asked, 'How much will you earn today?' One said, 'A denarius,' the other said, 'Two denarii.' He asked them, 'What will you do with the money?' They answered, 'We

will pay for the necessities of life.' Then he replied, 'Why don't you rather come with me and gain knowledge of the Torah, that you may gain life in this world and life in the world-to-come?' Thus Hillel was wont to do all his days and has brought many under the wings of Heaven" (*Avot de-Rabbi Nathan* version A 27, version B 26). Hillel, like Jesus, did not want people to act irresponsibly in their duties; rather, he sought to remind his contemporaries that their first responsibility was to God, the true sustainer of the day (Matthew 6:33).

Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai commented on Exodus 16:4, "Only to those who have manna to eat is it given to study the Torah. For behold, how can a man be sitting and studying when he does not know where his food and drink will come from, nor where he can get his clothes and coverings?" (*Mekhilta de-Rabbi Ishmael* on Exodus 16:4). Rabbi Shimon's saying uniquely conveys the idea: only the one who rightly understands God's daily provision can be a true student of the Torah. The one worrying about the necessities of the day misses the heart of the Torah, which communicates God's character, nature, and desires.

We live in challenging days, in a world gripped by fear and restless anxiety. Into such a world, Jesus said, "Do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself." To His first-century audience, He compared those "of little faith" to Gentiles, pagans, who did not believe in the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

I was sitting in the Jerusalem home of the late Professor David Flusser and listening to him say, "All of Jesus' teaching can be summarized in one word, 'Relax.'" This is not born out of the "power of positive thinking," but rather comes from a deep and abiding confidence and trust in God. By looking at Jesus' words within the context of first-century Judaism, we gain insight into the character of His faith and the source of His convictions.

If those who follow Jesus allow the anxiety and worry generated within our world to overcome them, how are we any different from those around us? What difference does our relationship with God make? When Jesus commanded His disciples, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your

In everyone's life, God leads us into the wilderness. Even in these times, Jesus taught us to "not be anxious about tomorrow."

Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 5:16), He expected that His disciples' relationship with God would stand out as a beacon to those around them. What would the impact be on our world if people around us saw us reflect the deep and unrelenting trust in God expressed in the words: "Give us this day our daily bread"? In everyone's life, God leads us into the wilderness. Sometimes it even feels like He abandons us there. Even in these times, Jesus taught us to look to God as the source and provision of life, to "seek first his kingdom and his righteousness," to "not be anxious about tomorrow," and finally to pray, "Our Father in heaven. ... Give us this day our daily bread!" So, relax, and be well.

Notes

1. All Scripture verses are author's translation or paraphrase.
2. This unusual Hebrew phrase appears in the words of Agur from the Book of Proverbs: "Remove far from me falsehood and lying; give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with the food that I need (לחם חוקי)" (Proverbs 30:8). Jesus' allusion to Proverbs 30:8 most certainly recalled the entire context of Proverbs 30:8,9 into the minds of His disciples.




MARC TURNAGE, director, Center for Holy Lands Studies for The General Council of the Assemblies of God, Springfield, Missouri

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"You jog with a pedometer, compass, and GPS. Without them you don't know where you're going or how you're getting there. And you call yourself a pastor!"

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As a church leader and an aggressive church planter, Tsetu saw a desperate need for the *Fire Bible* in his native Hausa language and led the project team. Though he was killed before its completion, today the Hausa *Fire Bibles* plus the Igbo and Yoruba *Fire Bibles* are being distributed across Nigeria. And the churches Tsetu planted are thriving.

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2 CORINTHIANS 4:8, 9, NIV

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Preaching:

Credibility, Clarity, and Connection in the Ministry of God's Word

INTRODUCTION By **George Paul Wood**



In 1 Thessalonians 2:13,

the apostle Paul wrote a sentence that should revolutionize the way we preach: "And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as a human word, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is indeed at work in you who believe." The Second Helvetic Confession accurately sums up the gist of this sentence when it declares, "The preaching of the Word of God is the word of God." Preaching is God speaking to our churches and communities through us.

If this is what preaching is, three questions naturally follow:

First, do our lives lend *credibility* to our sermons?

People see us before they hear us. If what they see is inconsistent with what they hear, they will conclude that we are hypocrites. And nobody pays attention to a hypocrite. Would you listen to a gossip talk about confidentiality, a glutton about self-control, an adulterer about sexual morality? No, of course not. It is imperative, therefore, that we practice what we preach, live what we teach, and walk how we talk.

This does not mean preachers must be perfect, by the way. For about a year in the mid-1990s, I suffered clinical depression. I have found that speaking openly about this dark period in my life actually enhances my credibility. It humanizes me. It lets my audience know that I am with them, not above them. And because I am with them, I can show how God led me through sadness to joy in the Lord, and how God can do the same for them. Authenticity, about both our triumphs and our struggles, enhances our credibility as preachers. (See *"The Preaching Life: An Interview with Dan Betzer, Saturnino Gonzalez, and Bryan Jarrett,"* page 43, for more on this topic.)

Second, do our sermons set forth God's Word with *clarity*?

I have worn glasses since I was 2 1/2 years old. Without them I cannot see anything clearly that is more than 2 or 3 inches from my face. When I put on my glasses, however, the world comes into focus. Our preaching of the Word of God should be like corrective lenses for spiritually unfocused eyes. When we preach, people should see the beauty of holiness and the sinfulness of sin in sharp relief. They should see the grace

of God to forgive and the power of the Spirit to transform. Above all, they should see Jesus Christ, who himself is the Word of God (John 1:1-3, 14), the fulfillment of all God's promises (2 Corinthians 1:20), and the whole point of Scripture (Luke 24:27). If we are not preaching Christ, we are not preaching at all. (See *"We Preach Christ Crucified: Rhetoric in the Service of Jesus Christ"* by Deborah M. Gill, page 110.)

Third, does our preaching make a *connection* with our audience?

Proverbs 15:23 says, "a word spoken in due season, how good is it!" (KJV). When we preach, we preach to particular people in particular places at particular times. We do not preach funeral sermons at weddings. We do not deliver learned disquisitions on complex theological themes to first graders. We do not use rural examples with city dwellers. We match tone, content, and illustration with occasion, learning, and experience. Why? Because that is what God himself does when He speaks to us through Scripture. He used the language of the people to talk about the pressing issues of the day. He spoke a word in due season.

Making a connection with our hearers is not the same thing as scratching their "itching ears" (2 Timothy 4:3). Preaching the Word of God means preaching what our churches and communities *need* to hear, not necessarily what they want to hear. It entails afflicting the comfortable and comforting the afflicted. But we cannot do either of these things if we do not know the language, education level, or life situation of our hearers. If we want to be heard, then, we must know our audience.

If preaching is God speaking to our churches and communities through us, then effective preaching happens when credible preachers deliver clear messages that make a connection with their audiences' needs. As an aid to help us develop more effective pulpit ministries in our churches, the editors of *Enrichment* offer the following articles, which I have grouped together under the banner of credibility, clarity, and connection:

- **Credibility:** Rick Warren, Jodi Detrick, Herbert Cooper, and Tom Lindberg.
- **Clarity:** George O. Wood, Doug Green, and Doug Clay.
- **Connection:** Stephen Lim, DeLonn Rance, and Dick Foth.

May God bless your preaching of His Word. ☛



GEORGE PAUL WOOD,
executive editor of *Enrichment* journal,
Springfield, Missouri

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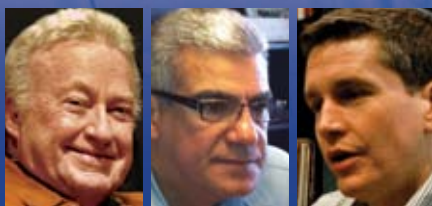


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PREACHING

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THE PREACHING LIFE:

An Interview with
Dan Betzer, Saturnino Gonzalez,
and Bryan Jarrett

In **1 Corinthians 9:16**, the apostle Paul said, "For though I preach the gospel, I have nothing to glory of; for necessity is laid upon me; yea woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel." Name any profession: schoolteacher, counselor, politician, surgeon, lawyer, businessman, or whatever other profession you wish, and preaching is more significant because preaching turns sinners into saints, and gives guidance to life not only for time, but also for eternity. What other work can be more important than that of the preacher? For this reason, Enrichment journal's staff chose preaching as the theme of the winter 2013 issue. Rick Knoth, Enrichment journal managing editor, interviewed three Assemblies of God executive presbyters about the importance of preaching. ▶

DAN BETZER serves as the Southeast area executive presbyter, a post he has held since 1995. For the past 25 years he has served as senior pastor at First Assembly Ministries, Fort Meyers, Florida.



SATURNINO (NINO) GONZALEZ serves as the East Spanish Language area executive presbyter, a position he has held since August 2009. He is currently lead pastor at Iglesia El Calvario in Orlando, Florida and superintendent of the Southeastern Spanish District.

BRYAN JARRETT is an executive presbyter representing ordained ministers under the age of 40, a position he has held since August 2009. He presently serves as senior pastor at Northplace Church in Sachse, Texas.



People are hungry for the greatness of God. In your preaching, how do you make sure your people are being fed spiritually?

JARRETT: A wise pastor advised me to spend as much time preparing for the altar response or the application as I did the message. When the Holy Spirit directs me to a passage or a topic, I begin with the end in mind. I ask myself, *What does this look like if it is effective in the lives of God's people?* Then I backtrack on how to accomplish that task.

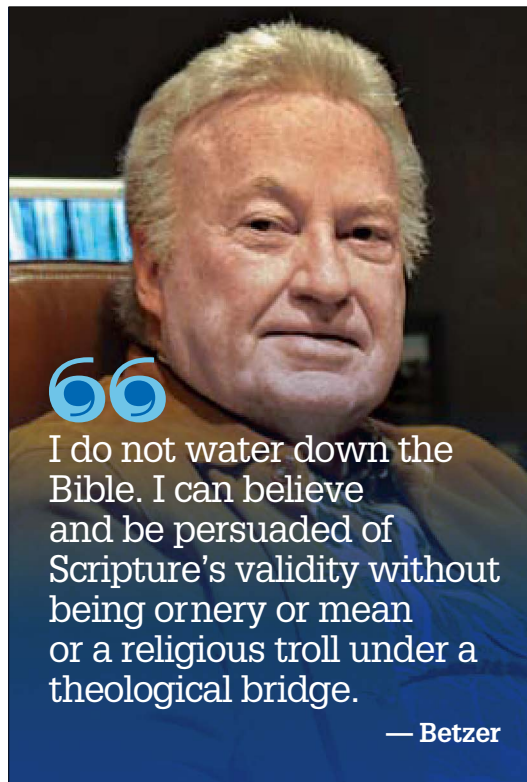
It does not matter how eloquently you preach; if listeners are not hungry to apply it, it has limited impact.

I preached a message on hunger for God. In the middle of the message, I had helpers frying bacon by the ductwork of our building. I did not mention what was happening until I saw people talking among themselves. Some studies show that the sense of smell is the greatest recall mechanism in the human brain. Of all the messages I have preached, people remember more of that message. I used that illustration to equate hunger for food with hunger for God.

One thing we do is resource people. We let people know that the church or pastors are not the primary disciplers of the family. They are responsible. The church can provide the water, but

the family has to be the soil where deep, abiding roots grow.

I am in a series on the family. We have created a kiosk called "Homeplace." Each week when I speak on a different family element, we fill the kiosk with resources for further study of the Word of God where people can go deeper in their devotions as a family. We attempt to teach people their responsibility for spiritual development between Sundays.



GONZALEZ: When I was a student at Central Bible College, I read an article on preaching — "The Sweet Torture of Sunday Morning" — by Garner C. Taylor, a well-known black preacher from New York City. Preaching has always been an intense moment. I don't take it lightly. As a preacher I represent a divine moment in the lives of people who come from different backgrounds, having had different moments in their lives during the week. They come to hear the Word of God. I speak a lot on the Holy Spirit, winning the lost, finances, the family, the Second Coming, and how to live the gospel. My illustrations are applications around relationship, finance, workplace, and the Christian life.

BETZER: The Word feeds people and the Word changes people. Sometimes I hear of carnal congregations, but the Word can change that. It is important that we not preach just sermonettes; we must give people a steady diet of healthy food from the Word. The Word should quicken our hearts.

My favorite time of the week is Wednesday night Bible study. It takes me a long time to get ready for this service. It's not unusual for 2,000 adults to gather to hear the teaching of the Word. The results? We are seeing changed lives and marriages. What could be more pleasing to a preacher than that?

How do preachers abuse authority when their sermons are not authentic? How can we bring our preaching and our lives closer together?

JARRETT: I am a Gen Xer. We call those who come after this generation Millennials. Millennials are skeptical of authority, anything institutional — this includes the government and church — because of failures they have seen.

Listeners in our pews can smell a fake a mile off. The younger they are the quicker they can point one out. I grew up in an era where you did not want anybody to see the kinks in your armor. This was almost a perceived perfectionism or a prerequisite for being a leader worth following. Today's younger generation will write you off immediately. As pastors, be willing to be vulnerable and transparent about your own issues, struggles, hurts, and pains without crossing

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the line of being too transparent and too vulnerable. But we need to let our guard down. The gospel is still working on us. As preachers we are still people in process. Walking as a pilgrim on the journey and teaching what we are learning should never come from the perspective that we have already arrived. Both have a way of inviting people in by being vulnerable and authentic.

Pastoring has saved my life because living in Christian community reveals the real you. The one thing that gives what I say credibility is the fact the story of God's miracles are being lived out and tested in a community of faith. God did not send me to pastor because I had something great to give my people. He sent me to pastor because I needed them in my life, so my heart would stay humble.

The community of faith provides checks and balances. Pride, arrogance, or relying on my own giftedness would be the end of me if it were not for the daily accountability to people and having to daily walk the talk. The community reveals who you really are. I enjoyed being the evangelist, but I needed to pastor to keep me from becoming unauthentic, closed in, and selfish.

GONZALEZ: In Jesus' discourse to His disciples, He promised to give them the Holy Spirit who would be with them forever (John 14:16). The Holy Spirit is the best witness if the preacher is living or not living what he or she preaches. Preaching is the business of the pastor. The pastor could have other gifts, but speaking the Word with the authority of Christ is basic to the preacher's calling.

The church is a spiritual entity. People know when there is dysfunction between what we preach and how we live. Preaching is much different from a motivational speech or political discourse. Because preaching is spiritual, the Holy Spirit must be part of the process. Unity must be present in our public ministry (preaching) and our private lives. When these two are in sync, there will be supernatural authority in the pulpit. Miracles will take place, and the Word will change and transform lives.

BETZER: A real pastor would rather die than bring reproach on the gospel, his or her family, or on the congregation. Therefore, a pastor must have a deep, true love for the people he or

she is pastoring. People are so beaten up out in the world. They do not need me to pound on them when they come to church. I care for the people in my church. None of us is perfect. We have moments when we probably drop the ball, but not in a way that is going to cause disruption in homes and families.

The fact Darlene and I have been married for over 56 years is also a witness to that message. People in the congregation watch how a pastor treats his wife, how he talks about his wife. I do not make jokes about my wife. She is precious to me. My preaching becomes more authentic when people see that I treat my wife with love and respect.

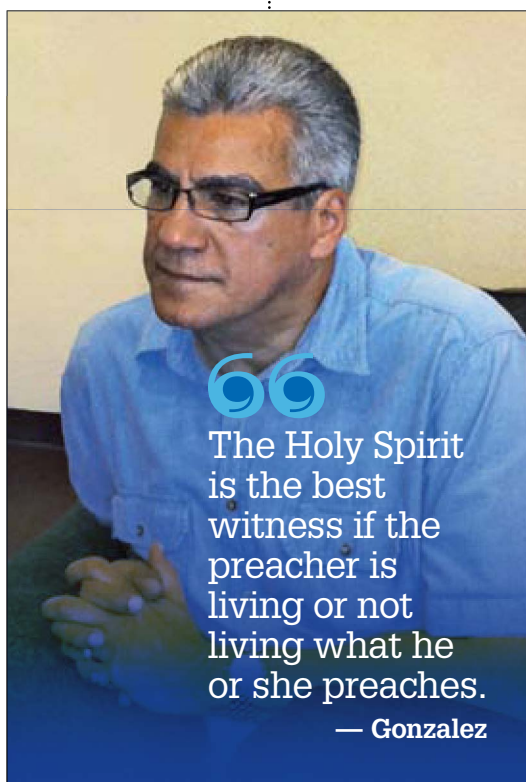
For years we have been on television 7 days a week. Being on television means that people know what you look like. People will come to our table at a restaurant or up to us in a mall to talk. So, I had better be living what I am preaching because people are watching what I do.

One of the best things a preacher can do is to find a great evangelical theologian or a preacher and immerse himself or herself in that person's writings and life. Who has been that person to you and how have you been challenged to be a better preacher and a better person?

GONZALEZ: Two pastors impacted my life — David Wilkerson and Tommy Barnett. Wilkerson's messages and books on holiness, God's presence, and integrity have tremendously marked my life. I have interviewed him. I saw his prayer life. I watched his priorities, his testimony, his life, and what God did through his ministry all over the world.

Barnett has been an inspiration to me as well, especially when he helps me dream big and see preaching in new, creative ways.

BETZER: The author who has most influenced my life has been Leonard Ravenhill. He was like a father to me. I often spent time in his home in Texas. He wrote such classics: *Why Revival Tarries*, and *Meat for Men*. He challenged me to live and preach the eternities. He demanded a lot from all of us who sat at his feet. He was not easy, but he really changed



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my life, especially in the area of discipline.

The other author who greatly influenced me was Oswald J. Smith of the Peoples Church in Toronto, Canada. When he died a number of years ago, Billy Graham preached his funeral and said of him, "We are here to honor the greatest missionary mind of the 20th century." When I was pastoring a little church in Ohio, Smith invested a week of his life in me. He instilled in me a raging fire for missions that has never gone out.

JARRETT: Early in my ministry, I almost began to mimic and model one person. I was so enamored by him that I began to be unintentionally compared to him. I did not want to be a carbon copy of somebody else, so I chose not to immerse myself in one person, but to try to find the best in multiple people and sources. A smorgasbord of people have spoken into my life from the way I study, to my delivery style, to the content of my messages.

Black preachers heavily influenced me because of where I grew up. There is a specific art and style to delivering a sermon in the African-American context. The late S.M. Lockridge is a black Baptist pastor who was phenomenal in the art of black preaching, as is T.D. Jakes.

Maurice Lednický was president of Central Bible College when I attended. Lednický always gave me substance. He had 56 Scripture references in one sermon. I questioned him about it. He said, "If I put a lot of Word in my sermon, I will know that I said at least something that was anointed." I have never forgotten that. Now, the Word of God drives all of my messages.

Father Henry Nouwen is a Catholic priest, but he had more influence among evangelicals. I do not agree with Nouwen's theology, but he coined the phrase, "wounded healer." He taught me about the brokenness of the spiritual leader.

A.W. Tozer is one of my favorite writers. And Timothy Keller keeps me coming back to the gospel and shows me what it means to live it out. It always comes back to the Cross.

The next generation is learning more through parabolic delivery like stories. Through David Jeremiah and Chuck Swindoll I have learned the power and the art of telling a story.

Three Pentecostal preachers

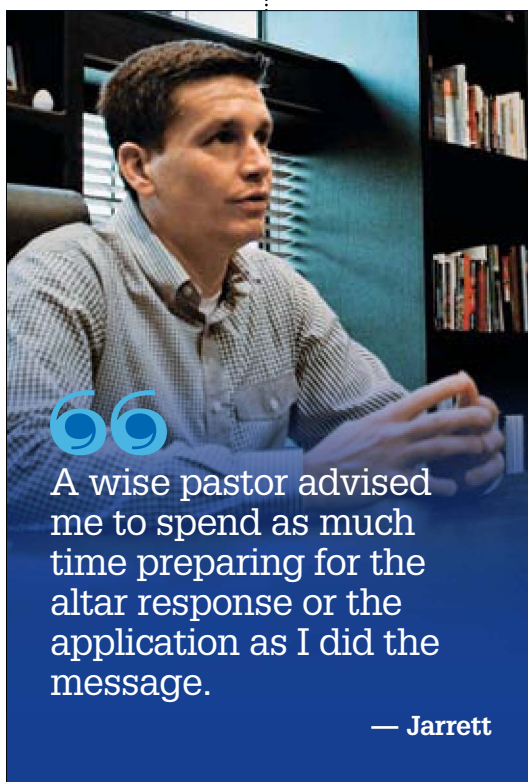
who have shaped my preaching are: John Hagee, for his use of manuscript in his delivery; Dan Sheaffer, for his passion and unpredictability, and Maurice Lednický, who I previously mentioned, for his Word-centric content.

Preaching takes place in an over-communicated society. How can today's Pentecostal preacher make sure his or her message is being heard above all others?

JARRETT: At the end of the year I ask God, "How do You want me to present the gospel to this congregation in the coming year?" I come up with a tentative preaching calendar and give it to our team. I also base my sermons on needs that have come to the surface and the Word that is stirring in my heart. Ultimately, the Spirit of God has the right at any moment to interrupt our plans. Slick marketing and series packaging sicken a segment of people walking through the doors of our church. When we do this, some people are skeptical. Some younger ones respond to that old-fashioned moment where we throw the agenda out the door and go back to the way my grandfather did it almost every week. In those moments, I tell the creative geniuses, "I know you have spent a lot of time getting the graphics and the videos ready. I apologize. The Lord woke me up in the middle of the night and this is the Word for the people today." This element is available through the Spirit and power of a Pentecostal preacher. If we are so locked into

our planning that we cannot take advantage of that revelation, we are limiting ourselves.

BETZER: To make the message heard, the sermon has to be interesting. I spend a great part of my preparation on not only what the Lord has laid on my heart, but how I am going to present it. But the Word itself is incredibly powerful. I must present it in a way that relates to people. It is surprising how many times in the Word you find the word, *reasonable*. How can a person have faith in something that is not reasonable? The gospel is reasonable. It came from the heart of the Creator of reason. So, I am not going to get in the pulpit and say things that are crazy or try to make predictions that Jesus is coming this year. The message has to be interesting and reasonable.



“A wise pastor advised me to spend as much time preparing for the altar response or the application as I did the message.”

— Jarrett

Crafting sermons that effectively communicate the Word of God is an immensely important task. How do you stay emotionally and spiritually on top of your preaching week after week?

JARRETT: A statement I heard early in the ministry helped me: A preacher cannot live off of the aroma of the bread he serves to other people. Years ago I did not have any “me” time. Everything I was looking at was for the people. I was trying to live off the aroma of the bread I was serving. It shifted for me when I realized I needed ways where the Word of God fed me and where prayer time was for intimacy with God, and not to get a sermon.

There have been times when I was spiritually low. What I had defined as success was not happening as quickly as I wanted it to. I took the blame. I preached because I had to. I was walking under this cloud of self-defeat. So I had to learn the John 15 principle that my fruitfulness comes only from abiding in the Vine. Success was ultimately going to come by staying connected to the Source. And as I returned to the basics of prayer and the Word, life came back into me because ministry stopped being something I did and became an overflow of who I was. I regained my vitality by understanding that principle.

BETZER: I have an insatiable curiosity. I am dealing with people every day from all walks of life. If you have a tremendous amount of input into your life, there has to be an output. If you do not have input, then there cannot be output. I devour books. I try to read a biography, autobiography, and a history book every week. And there is just so much coming in, that I do not have time to get it all out.

GONZALEZ: Almost 3 years into my pastoral ministry one of my ushers lost his life in a very serious situation. I was not prepared for this. For months it was hard for me to come back into the flow of ministry. It was like the kingdom of darkness showed up in every service, laughing in my face. I needed help. My staff, pastors, and key leaders rallied around me in prayer and fasting, and I was able to come out of that.

What Bryan just said about prayer and the Word is so true. I had to get back to the basics of

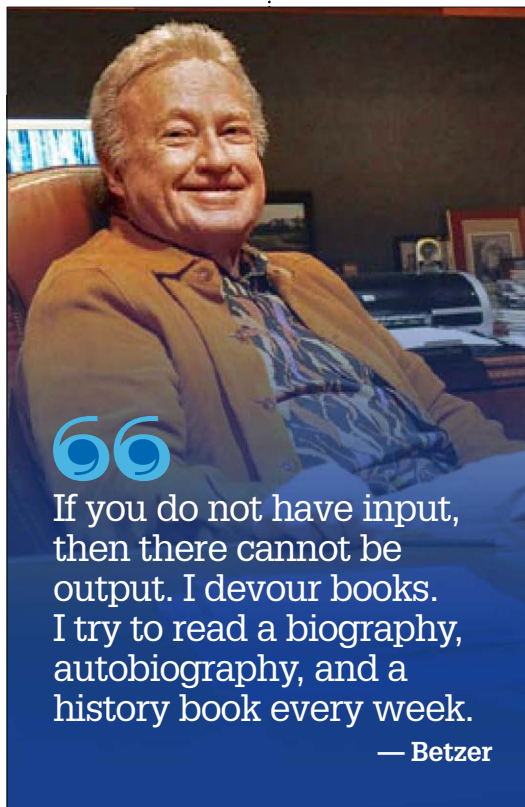
prayer and being in the Word and waiting on God. These are the things that help me stay emotionally and spiritually strong.

Our culture resists any affirmation of absolute truth. How do you engage the culture in meaningful ways with the gospel?

BETZER: A pastor can remain dogmatic in his or her Christian beliefs and not be nasty or repulsive. Our culture changes constantly, and unfortunately it changes downward. But the preacher can stay positive, relevant, and strong in the midst of cultural change.

I have many friends outside the Christian community. We have a strong Jewish community in southwest Florida, and I am very involved with them. I have spoken in all the synagogues. The rabbis are my friends. The local Muslim imam is a friend. These people know where I stand. Yet, I have seen many people, particularly in the Jewish community, who have made Christ their Messiah and Lord. They have done so not because I embraced them or took issue with them, but because of my love for Christ and the love I have for them. I have never backed down from our 16 statements of faith. I do not water down the Bible. I can believe and be persuaded of Scripture’s validity without being ornery or mean or a religious troll under a theological bridge.

GONZALEZ: The biggest challenge I face is the immigration issue. This has challenged me to read the Bible from that perspective and look at how God has used the movement of people from Genesis to Revelation to fulfill His purpose. I always try to contextualize the Scriptures into that challenge. Whether people are in this country officially or undocumented, I must preach the gospel, which always brings hope.



66

If you do not have input, then there cannot be output. I devour books. I try to read a biography, autobiography, and a history book every week.

— Betzer

JARRETT: To me, tone makes the difference. Scripture tells us to speak the truth in love. Many pastors hear “speak the truth” but have forgotten the “in love” part of it. Attitude makes the difference. Pre-Christians or non-believers walk in our building every Sunday. I speak the truth, but I do it in a tone of grace and love. It is easy if you have no relationship with those outside the church to preach dogma and doctrine and do it with an

arrogant tone. It almost comes across as hate to those who do not agree with us, if you do not know them. But, when those same people are your friends, and you care about them and have dinner with them like Jesus did, you speak truth in a different tone. So, relationship is the key to engaging the culture in a meaningful way.

Tell of a time when you were preaching and the Holy Spirit designed a text to arrive at the same moment as the need in a person's life.

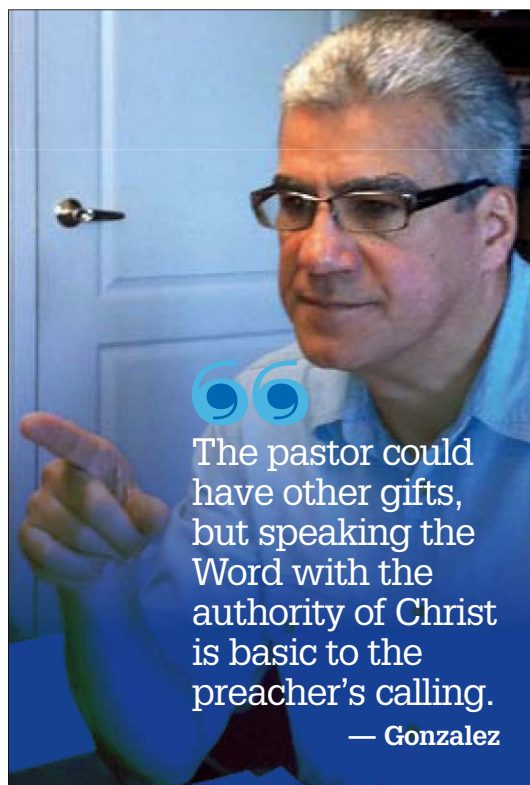
BETZER: I remember one Sunday morning I deviated from what I had prepared and preached on God's lavish grace. During the altar service, one of the altar workers summoned me. I knelt beside one of the toughest-looking men I had ever seen. He asked, "Do you *really* believe God can forgive anything I've ever done?"

I said, "Yes, of course, the Bible says so."

He reached inside his jacket, pulled out a pistol, and laid it on the altar. Then he reached into his pocket and took out the bullets. He said, "I come from a very large city in the Northeast. I'm an enforcer for the mob. I've used this gun in ways that I don't even want to talk about. Can God forgive me?"

As we began to pray, he cried out to God to forgive him. I am confident that God did. And after we prayed, I advised him what his responsibilities to society were, and he promised he would follow through. I still have those bullets on a shelf near where I prepare my messages. When I meet people, and it looks like an impossible situation, I look at those bullets and remember the gunman who came to our altar in response to God's incredible grace.

JARRETT: We are studying the writings of the apostle Paul, and what they say to us about godly relationships, specifically as it pertains to the family, marriage, and parenting. Last week I had a gentlemen come to me in tears. He and his family had come for two Sundays — the first times they had been to our church. Their marriage was about to fall apart. I had given them tools to help their marriage in those 2 weeks. We had planned this preaching series in October 2011. We were nearly 6 months past that. God orchestrated the message I delivered to intersect with them. They were not believers, but He



used the need in their life and the application of the text to bring them to cry out to Jesus as Savior.

What are some topics preachers need to address but seem afraid to?

JARRETT: I teach financial stewardship. Preachers are afraid they will get backlash when they bring up money. There is no greater quantifiable way to determine where some people's hearts are than where they place their treasure. The way they manage their credit card and their checkbook determines a lot about the depth of their spiritual maturity.

Even the unchurched know it takes money to run a business. Most of the people who have issue with you talking about finances are church people

who are walking in disobedience to God. Pastors need to be talking about biblical money management and what that looks like when we make our life the offering. Tithing, missions, other issues of giving become a nonissue when as the hymn asks, "Is your all on the altar of sacrifice laid?" Pastors can deal with a lot of spiritual maturity issues in that one topic.

GONZALEZ: We need to preach more compassion in a contextual way. Another topic I do not hear preached on is proper nutrition. We have people coming for prayer, but sometimes part of their sickness is the result of bad habits and wrong ways of eating.

BETZER: Many pastors are afraid to address missions because they think people will give money to missions instead of the general fund. Just the opposite is true. Every miracle of God's provision I have seen at First Assembly, I can attribute directly or indirectly to missions. The more we give and the more missionaries we undergird, the more God blesses our church.

What advice do you have for helping other preachers be more effective storytellers?

BETZER: Read Mark 4:34. Jesus used stories to reach people. I use a lot of stories when I speak.

Watch great storytellers. When I was at Missouri State

College (now University), I watched the actor Hal Holbrook in his role as Mark Twain. Every preacher needs to watch the way that man told stories. You have to become the person. You can't be afraid to emote.

I told stories to children for years with my puppet, Louie. It changed the lives of so many children. Preachers need to learn how to tell stories because Jesus told stories and He's our master. Outlines do not touch people's lives a whole lot. But stories, real-life stories, really impact them.

Is it ever acceptable to preach another person's sermon or get your sermons online?

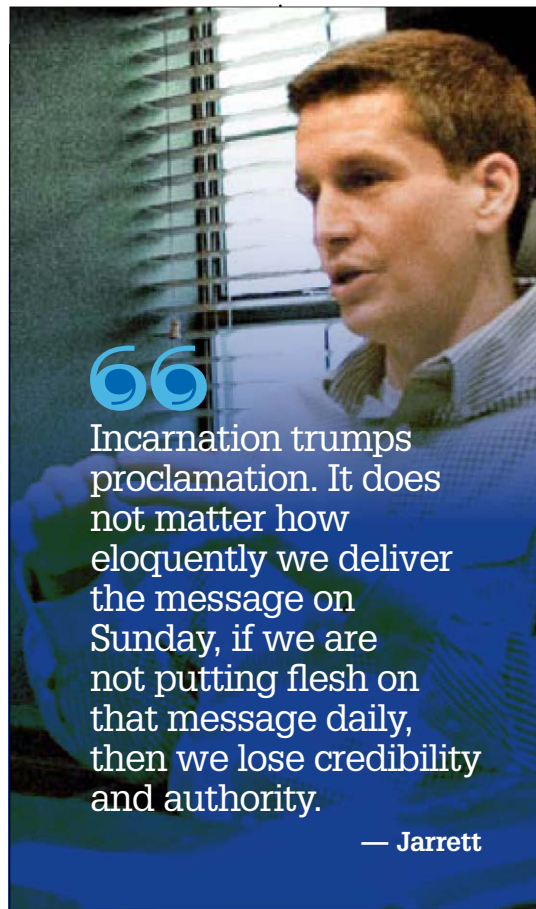
JARRETT: On three occasions in my 21 years of ministry I have gone to the pulpit with a manuscript from another person's sermon.

One sermon was from S.M. Lockridge, the great black Baptist preacher. One was from A.W. Tozer and one from Leonard Ravenhill entitled, "Between the Porch and the Altar." I told the people that I had been so bothered in my spirit and troubled in conviction from these sermons that I wanted to preach through the manuscript of another man's sermon. I announced prior to the beginning of the message whose sermon it was and what it had done in my life.

As I read through the manuscript in my own personality, I prayed that the Holy Spirit would somehow let that happen in them. In every occasion, it was effective. But, I never tried to spin it off as if it was my own.

GONZALEZ: I have checked online to see who has preached my topics. I sometimes think no one has thought about this topic or this way to interpret this verse and I'll be the first one. And then I find others have pretty much said the same thing. If I look at Christian history, I find somebody years ago preached what I was preaching today.

BETZER: It's probably better to preach somebody's great sermon than your own poor one.



I was in a service as a visitor. I knew the sermon the pastor was preaching and who wrote it. I had read it. He was reading it and obviously had not prepared ahead of time. He came to a certain point, and he stopped abruptly. He looked at the congregation, and said, "Well, I don't believe that."

C.M. Ward, my predecessor at *Revivaltime*, said he preached for 25 years on *Revivaltime* and never scratched the surface of the Bible. He preached 25 sermons on the Prodigal Son and never repeated a thought. There is so much original material in the Bible if we dig it out. I do not know why we would want to preach somebody else's sermon.

Share a closing thought or challenge.

GONZALEZ: My purpose in preaching is to bring a person closer to God, to a commitment with God, to a commitment

with Christ, to accept Jesus. If I can do that, I feel I have fulfilled my duty as a preacher. And, of course, many factors play into that — the life of the preacher and the anointing of the Spirit.

JARRETT: Incarnation trumps proclamation. It does not matter how eloquently we deliver the message on Sunday, if we are not putting flesh on that message daily, then we lose credibility and authority. More people will be transformed by our incarnational living of the gospel daily, than eloquent delivery. And my eloquent delivery on Sundays should work toward helping people live the gospel incarnate in their daily lives.

BETZER: Years ago Lou Gehrig, the great Yankees first baseman, stood at home plate and said to the massive crowd, "Today, I consider myself to be the luckiest man on the face of the earth."

For some reason, known only to God, he called me to be a preacher of the gospel. I am so grateful. I consider myself the most fortunate, blessed person in the world. What greater joy can preachers have than follow the call of God on their lives? I thank the Lord every day for it. 📖

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Spiritual Formation

for Preachers By Rick Warren



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Since the days of Adam and Eve, Satan has used three basic temptations to

trip up believers. He used these same temptations on Jesus, and he uses them to attempt to undermine your ministry.

The Bible describes these temptations as “the cravings of sinful people, the lust of their eyes and their boasting about what they have and do” (1 John 2:16, TNIV¹). The King James Version renders them, “the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life.” But no matter how you translate this verse, it comes down to pleasure, possessions, and position.

“For everything in the world — the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does — comes not from the Father but from the world” (1 John 2:16).

In ministry we can easily fall to these temptations. We are under constant pressure emotionally, intellectually, physically, and spiritually. And this increases the temptation to deal with the stress of ministry in a sinful way.

James Emery White, in his book, *What They Didn't Teach You in Seminary*, gives this summation of what we can experience: “When you are in ministry, it is easy to confuse doing things for God with spending time with God; to confuse activity with intimacy; to mistake the trappings of spirituality for being spiritual.”

If we do not take these temptations seriously, they will undermine our pastoral ministry. That includes our ability to bring the Word of God before our congregations through preaching. Falling to one of these temptations not only entangles us in sin, it is a sign that we have pulled back from intimacy with God.

Lack of intimacy with God will show up in the way you preach: perhaps because you avoid certain biblical passages that force you to face your sin; perhaps through illustrations you use that seem to constantly come back to materialism and money; perhaps through delivery that draws more attention to your ability to preach instead of pointing to God and His great love for us.

Here are some strategies for combating the temptations that come from pleasure, possessions, and position.

THE TEMPTATION OF SEXUAL PLEASURE

The Bible says we will be tempted by sex. We may not even see the initial temptation as sin. For instance, the enemy may

use discouragement to encourage us to think we are entitled to indulge in pleasure. We start thinking we have worked hard, we are under tremendous stress, and we just need to let off a little pressure.

Here are some things I do to maintain moral integrity:

Be honest when you are fatigued, and take a rest. When you are tired, you are vulnerable to a lot of things: discouragement, depression, and temptation.

The Bible says 6 days you labor, and the 7th day you rest. If you are not taking a day off every week, you are breaking the Ten Commandments. Take a day off.

It is particularly important to take time off after a spiritual or emotional high. Elijah, in 1 Kings 18, had a big God contest with the prophets on Mount Carmel. Right after that, he ends up in the desert saying, “God, I want to die. Take my life.” Fatigue is a hazard of being in the ministry, and it lowers our resistance to temptation.

Do not believe your own PR. In ministry, you are on a pedestal with lots of people admiring you. You may remember about 25 years ago Jimmy Swaggart fell into sexual sin. William Martin said in *People* magazine, “I’ve seen [Swaggart] change over the years. He seems to have been seduced by the power and the fame. ... He says, ‘If I have an idea to build a Bible college or mission, it must have come from God.’ Next, he starts to say, ‘God told me this ... God told me that. ...’ Next, the tendency is to say, ‘I think what God meant to say was. ...’ ”

Swaggart himself said, “I forgot that I was human. I thought I was more than human.” Never forget that you are human and just as vulnerable to sexual temptation as anyone else. There, but for the grace of God, go all of us.

First Corinthians 10:12 says, “So be careful. If you are thinking, ‘Oh, I would never behave like that’ — let this be a warning to you. For you too may fall into sin” (TLB²). The morning I start saying, “I have conquered that problem,” is the morning I am openly vulnerable to temptation.

Continually guard your heart and mind. When I am tempted, I remind myself of God’s omniscience and omnipresence. God sees everything in my life, and He is always with me. The devil says, “No one will ever know.” Yet, knowing that God is always with me and sees everything is my motivation to practice His presence in the midst of temptation.

The battle for sin begins in your mind. If you lose the battle in your mind, then you have already lost the battle. Consider:

- James 1:14,15: “Each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.”
- 1 Peter 1:13: “Therefore, with minds that are alert and fully sober, set your hope on the grace to be brought to

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Spiritual Formation for Preachers

(continued from page 53)

you when Jesus Christ is revealed at his coming.”

- 2 Corinthians 10:5: “We take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.”
- Romans 13:14: “Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature.”
- Matthew 5:28: “But I say, anyone who even looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart” (NLT³).

Remind yourself regularly of the damaging consequences of moral failure. When you are tempted, think like this: Minimize the pleasure and maximize the consequences. Hebrews 11:25 says there is pleasure in sin for a season. Of course, sin is fun. No one would do it if it were not. You would not be tempted if there was no pleasure in it. But you must think about what sexual sin will do to your family, your congregation, your ministry, and your livelihood. Think about how it will hinder your relationship with God.

materialism, I went to God and acknowledged this income came from Him and that it was up to Him to decide what I should do with it.

I prayed, “Okay, God, what are You doing with this? I don’t need this. I’m a pastor.” God reminded me that He does not give us money to fulfill our selfish desires. As I spent time in the Scriptures, God gave me several passages, including 1 Corinthians 9.

In 1 Corinthians 9, Paul is talking to pastors about money and their salary and says, “Those that teach the gospel should make a living by the Gospel.” In other words, it is okay to pay your pastor. “But,” Paul said, “I will not accept that right because I want the free rein to serve God for free so that I am a slave to no man.” When I read that, I decided I want to serve God for free so I am a slave to no man. So my wife Kay and I made several decisions.

First, we decided we would not change our lifestyle one bit, no matter how much money came in. So, we still live in the same house we have lived in for 25 years, and I still

The battle for sin begins in your mind. If you lose the battle in your mind, then you have already lost the battle.

Take the necessary precautions to protect yourself. In Matthew 26:41, Jesus says, “Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak.” It is interesting that He does not say, “Watch and pray so you will not fall into sin.” He says, “Watch and pray so that you will not *give in* to temptation.” He’s telling you not to even put yourself in a situation where you can be tempted.

The Living Bible renders 1 Peter 5:8, “Be careful — watch out for the attacks from Satan, your great enemy. He prowls around like a hungry, roaring lion looking for some victim to tear apart.”

Let me be clear: Most sexual temptation in the ministry will not be from some brightly painted vamp. It will come from someone you genuinely care about, someone you love.

THE TEMPTATION OF GREED

When the Bible speaks about the lust of the eyes, it is referring to materialism, the ungodly desire to increase what we have and to get all we can get. I faced a huge temptation in this area after the success of *The Purpose Driven Life*. In one quarter, the book earned \$9 million in royalties. To insulate myself from the desires of

drive a Ford truck. I have the same two suits; I do not have a guest home; I do not have a yacht; and I do not own a beach house. We said we were not going to use the money on ourselves.

Second, I stopped taking a salary from the church.

Third, I added up all the church had paid me over the past 25 years and gave it all back, because I did not want anyone thinking I was in ministry for money. I knew I was going to be under the spotlight, and I wanted to live a life beyond reproach. The next week a major news magazine interviewed me, and the first question was, “What is your salary?” I was able to say that I serve my church for free. I know a lot of pastors who would gladly do that, too, if God gave them the means.

I found that God was teaching me this: Every time I give it back to Him, it breaks the grip of materialism in my life. This is the best way to combat this temptation. I believe every time we give, it makes us more like Jesus. Every time we give, our hearts grow bigger.

Another way Kay and I insulated ourselves from this temptation was by reverse tithing from early on in our marriage.

When we got married 30 years ago, we began tithing 10 percent. Each year we raised our tithe 1 percent to stretch our faith — we gave 11 percent after the first year, 12 percent after the second year, and so on. Now, we have the means to give away 90 percent of our income and live on 10 percent. Because we had already made a habit of giving, it was easy to see what to do with the money: just give it away.

THE TEMPTATION OF POWER

When the Bible speaks about the pride of life, it is referring to a narcissistic need to impress. Because people in our congregations are constantly putting us on a spiritual pedestal, we are vulnerable to assuming we belong on that pedestal. One thing I teach my staff is that always being in the spotlight blinds you.

When *The Purpose Driven Life* made it to the bestseller list, I found dealing with this temptation a bit trickier. I started getting invitations from everywhere. I spoke at Harvard, Cambridge, Oxford, and on Capitol Hill. Producers in Hollywood

asked me to come and discuss the book.

That was not my plan. My plan was just to pastor Saddleback and train pastors. So I asked God, "What am I supposed to do with all of this new influence you are giving me?" He led me to Psalm 72, which is Solomon's prayer for more influence.

When you read Solomon's prayer, it sounds

quite selfish. Solomon is the wisest, wealthiest, and most powerful man in the world. Yet he prays, "God, I want You to make me more influential. I want You to bless me and give me more power. I want You to make me famous. I want You to spread the fame of my name to many nations" (author's paraphrase).

It sounds selfish until you also read that he says, "So that the king may support the widow and orphan, care for the poor, defend the defenseless, lift up the fallen, release the captive, help the foreigner, the immigrant" (verses 12–14, author's paraphrase).

God taught me that the purpose of influence is to speak up for those who have no influence. I had to say, "God, I'm sorry. I can't think of the last time I thought about widows or orphans. They aren't even on my agenda."

It wasn't like I was wasting my time. At Saddleback, we had baptized more than 15,000 new believers by the time *The Purpose Driven Life* was published. I had not just been goofing off. Yet I sensed God telling me that I still did not care about the people He cared about. I told God, "I'm sorry,

God, and I will use whatever affluence and influence You give me for the rest of my life to help those who have no influence." That was a significant change I made to combat the temptation to use the influence God gave me for my own purposes.

You probably have more influence than you realize. You wield it every week as you stand before your congregation and share God's Word. You wield it when you mobilize your church toward a cause. You wield it as you sit in front of a couple with a struggling marriage. You influence people all the time. It's what you do.

Yet, you can influence others in ways that dishonor God. A Christian leader gets the attention of the media with some outlandish statement, and it stains the entire church. Instead of the leader using his or her influence in a positive way, the leader turns people away from God.

CONCLUSION

Your authority to preach does not come from your skill as a communicator, your education, or the fact your job description says that is what you are supposed to do. Your authority to preach comes through your relationship with Christ, and that is why you need to be intentional in maintaining intimacy with Him and vigilant in combating temptations that will lead you into moral impurity, greed, or sinful pride.

God has called us to bring the Word of God into our congregations, and we can only do that with any lasting significance by staying focused on Jesus, the Word, and not the world around us. 📖



RICK WARREN, senior pastor, Saddleback Church, Lake Forrest, California

Notes

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PREACHING

The Man **in the Back of the Room**

— and Other Issues Facing Women Preachers

By **Jodi Detrick**

Most female preachers face issues their male colleagues encounter; some issues, however, are unique only to women who preach. Here are three of them.

My heart beat a little faster. I noticed the unfamiliar man who had just walked into the banquet room and leaned against the back wall. He did not appear to be restaurant staff. I wondered what he was doing in this setting. Suppressing my uneasiness I continued addressing the women gathered at a downtown eatery for a Christian businesswomen's luncheon. I was still young (in my mid-twenties). It was an honor to speak at an event like this — actually any event, especially in that early season of life and ministry. I did not want to get flustered and not adequately deliver what God had put on my heart.

As I continued with my message, the man stood, arms crossed, glaring at me. When he began to walk forward, I wondered what would happen next. Soon he was standing in front of me. He picked up my Bible lying on the podium beside my notes, thumbed through the pages, pointed at a passage, and said in commanding tones, "Read this." He walked out of the room and onto the busy street.

This episode seemed surreal as I glanced to where the man had just pointed — 1 Timothy 2:11,12: "A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man; she must be quiet." Though unnerved, I somehow managed to get through my talk. I never learned who the man was, where he came from, or what prompted him to walk, uninvited, into this meeting for Christian professional women and their guests. I did know one thing about him with certainty; he thought I was disobeying God by speaking publicly, even to a group of women. And he felt it was his job to put me in my place.

That was not the first or last encounter I would have with those who believe there is no biblical basis for women in public ministry (especially preaching or teaching) or in church leadership. But it was one of the most personal and jarring things I experienced in my early years related to that issue. No wonder many young women, facing similar incidents of opposition and criticism, have lost heart when it comes to fulfilling the call to a preaching ministry, especially if the doors of opportunity to do so seem few and far between.

I will be honest. Preaching to a mixed-gender audience has been intimidating for me at times. On occasion, the disapproving countenance or dismissive body language of some has caused me self-doubt. There is, I am certain, a correlation between these experiences (including that unsettling *man in the back of the room* incident) and my times of when it came to public ministry where men were present.

To be fair, I have met plenty of women with the same "no female preachers" view who can be just as intimidating as

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any man with that perspective. And I have also had nonintimidating, mutually respectful encounters with those of both genders who happen to see this issue differently. We can and should have healthy, thought-provoking exchanges with those whose beliefs on this topic contrast our own without either party feeling belittled.



Overt censure based on gender bias is only one of the potential obstacles facing women whom God has called to preach to the whole church.

Thankfully, I married a man who believes God calls women both to preach and to lead. Don also believes in me and constantly encourages me to move forward confidently in my calling and leadership. With his support and a sense of divine direction, I “found my voice” as the only female on an otherwise all-male district leadership team for almost 9 years. Serving with that great team at the Northwest Ministry Network (NWMN), who also support the call of women to ministry, was a high privilege and has reaffirmed my belief that the body of Christ functions best when God’s image is fully represented by both genders.

During that season the district invited me to do a short Communion message for the ministers gathered at our annual conference (district council). Speaking to ministry peers can be scary for any of us but, by God’s grace and with His help, it was a sweet experience. I felt my heart swell with gratitude

as I looked into the faces of my brothers and sisters who reflected back nothing but encouragement and affirmation. In some odd way, that day I felt like I had completely faced down my old fear of the disapproving *man in the back of the room*.

ISSUES WOMEN PREACHERS FACE

Most female preachers face issues their male colleagues also encounter: discerning and answering

God’s call, adequate spiritual formation, proper education and training, knowing how to faithfully exegete the Scripture, personal integrity (living the message), prioritizing time for sermon preparation, developing a good delivery, knowing one’s listeners, and above all, having the Holy Spirit’s anointing. Some issues, however, are unique to women who preach.

While the *man in the back of the room* was my hurdle to overcome, overt censure based on gender bias is only one of the potential obstacles facing women whom God has called to preach to the whole church. Since most of these problems are of less concern when women are speaking

strictly to other women (an equally important, invaluable expression of ministry), I will focus primarily on three issues having to do with mixed-gender settings. And while these are among the most prevalent challenges I have observed and heard about from female colleagues (and/or experienced personally), this is not a definitive list — especially for women who are lead pastors or teaching pastors. But these three concerns are a good place to begin when we look at issues female preachers face.

Fewer opportunities. If practice makes perfect, then a real where-the-rubber-meets-the-road issue is that female ministers often have fewer opportunities to preach than their male counterparts. This can equate to greater inexperience (especially in mixed-gender settings) and fewer occasions to fully develop their preaching skills. Obviously, we cannot manufacture by any amount of rehearsal or repetition God’s anointing and the proclamation gifts He gives. Still, humans are hardwired, by divine design, to hone their gifts through experience and practice. The more we do something the better we get at it.

In 1 Timothy 4:14–16, Paul tells us not to neglect the ministry gifts God has given us, but to cultivate them. Women whom God has called to preach must be prayerfully proactive about developing this ministry skill and watch for God-opened doors to proclaim His truths. I am not sure God sees our preaching opportunities as large and small — big gatherings versus just a few hungry hearts, mixed groups or women-only gatherings; it all counts. Every assignment to deliver His Word is precious and not to be taken lightly. But I do believe He uses all our accumulated obedience, investment in training, and various ministry experiences to prepare us for greater assignments. Thomas Kingsley’s words apply here: “Have thy tools ready; God will give thee work.”

With that said, I hope those in authority prayerfully consider

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called women when extending an invitation to preach. Those who do will not only be exposing hearers to a broader representation of the voices God uses to speak to a world of great need (and great variety), they will be giving a colleague opportunity to express, and further develop, God's call on her life.

The freight of being first. This issue follows the previous one. In recent years, I have been humbled and blessed by invitations to preach on Sunday mornings for various churches. At times people tell me (or perhaps, forewarn me), "You are the *first* woman to ever preach in this church on a Sunday morning — at least as long as anyone around here can remember."

While this is a great honor, the unspoken message I, and other women who are "firsts," may hear is, *And you could be the last if you mess up. You had better knock it out of the park for the sake of other women who follow.* No pressure.

I am sure that is not the intention behind a "you are the first" declaration by ministry hosts, usually male pastors. Most are expressing honor and are truly glad to have a female ministering in their pulpits. Still, if we knew the truth, to even extend this invitation, someone bravely bucked local culture and risked the displeasure of congregants who do not believe it is biblically valid for women to do pulpit ministry. All this leads to an unexpressed, but very real, added weight on a female preacher to do an *especially* good job because she is essentially representing *all* her sisters in ministry. This is not usually the case with male ministers.

We all have hits and misses when it comes to delivering power-packed, compelling sermons. When a man's message is not quite up to par, it does not mean no other man should be given the opportunity to preach again in that setting. And while women (and men) should continually strive to offer God and others our best when we preach, it would be nice to know we would not necessarily be killing all future ministry opportunities for females in that setting if we do not knock it out of the park every time.

Most female preachers I know are courageous women who would not be excessively intimidated by the pressure of being a first. In fact, they might enjoy the challenge and appreciate the opportunity even more. Count me in that number. However, it is healthiest when we offer to each other, and to ourselves,

the latitude to do our best every time we preach without this undue burden. When someone says, "You are the first woman to preach in this pulpit," what I would love to hear next is, "but our intention is that you will not be the last."

An insufficient theological foundation. I have encountered a number of women who have a burning sense of God's call and a passion to proclaim the Word. Yet, they still struggle with whether or not it is biblical for females to preach. Books and articles, or some loud voices declaring otherwise, have discouraged them. And most grew up with very few (or no) role models of women who preached regularly in their local church.

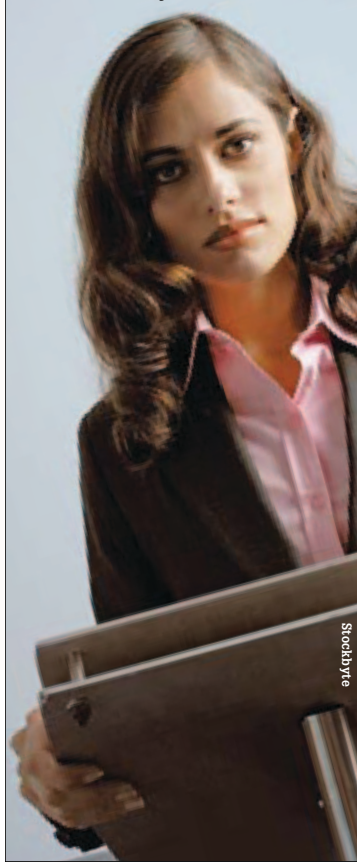
A familiar truism claims knowledge is power. Biblical knowledge and good historical perspective provide women the power and courage to pursue ministry, including the call to preach, to its fullest scope.

This is not the militant kind of power leading to ill will and endless arguments with those who see things differently, but rather, a gentle strength that springs from knowing who we are as women called of God. Having a firm biblical base provides a foundation that can withstand gender bias, even antagonism, and still be a winsome witness that God calls and uses both men and women.

Many excellent books carefully examine the Scriptures and offer solid reasons for believing God's call to preach extends to women. Among them, *God's Women: Then and Now* by Deborah Gill and Barbara Cavaness is outstanding. Anyone still ambivalent on the subject would be wise to carefully, prayerfully read this book, and others like it.

While I freely admit there are a few difficult texts on this subject (like the 1 Timothy verses *the man in the back of the room* pointed to that day), it is important to consider the concepts of context, content, and categories when reading and applying Scripture. Gill addresses these issues with insight: "Finding the meaning of a text is the reader's goal. God's Word has eternal relevance and also historical particularity. Bible texts can be divided into several categories: 1) highest norms or standards (timeless truths), 2) regulations for people where they were, and 3) records of history. All the Bible is 'God-breathed' and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training

Perhaps it is the treatment of women by Jesus that is the weightiest of arguments for their value to God as His servants in leadership and ministry.



The Man in the Back of the Room — and Other Issues Facing Women Preachers

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in righteousness' (2 Timothy 3:16,17). Yet, not all passages apply equally to every situation."¹

Careful study of the Bible with these things in mind point to the truth that, while there are verses dealing with exceptional situations that on the surface may seem to limit the roles of women (most notably 1 Corinthians 14:34,35 and 1 Timothy 2:11,12), the whole of Scripture endorses the ministry and leadership of women. If this were not the case, the Bible would most certainly be contradicting itself in multiple instances.

Many "timeless truth" verses call for women to serve God in leadership and ministry. Among the most noteworthy are those in Acts 2, especially in the light of Acts 1:4–8 and Joel 2:28. In these verses, God fulfilled His promise to pour out His Spirit on all flesh (including women), as was His proclamation that both sons and daughters would prophesy. Galatians 3:28, which says that in Christ there is neither male nor female, is another important "timeless truth" on this issue.

Then there is the matter of the historical records in Scripture. God used a woman, Deborah, as a judge (the highest position of leadership in Israel at that time) and prophet. She spoke for God, presided over the affairs of men, and even led an army of men into battle. It is apparent that God honored her leadership and used her to deliver her nation from destruction. Miriam was a prophet and one of the leaders of her people during the exodus. Huldah, too, was an Old Testament prophet whom God used to turn Israel from paganism and idolatry back to true worship.

The New Testament has many examples of women who were leaders and ministers. Phoebe was a deacon and a trusted letter carrier of the Epistle of Romans for the apostle Paul. Junias was a female apostle. Philip the evangelist had four virgin daughters who prophesied. Priscilla was a pastor of a house church along with her husband, Aquila. Of the two, it is likely she was the most prominent leader, denoted by the fact biblical writers mention her name first more often in the texts. She traveled with Paul and, along with her husband, was an instructor and mentor for the gifted orator, Apollos. Some scholars believe she even authored the Book of Hebrews.

The historical record of the Bible is clear; many women were leaders and active as ministers. And in none of these cases do the Scriptures ever suggest God disapproved of them doing so. The Bible upholds them as examples and heroes of the faith.

Perhaps it is the treatment of women by Jesus that is the weightiest of arguments for their value to God as His servants in leadership and ministry. Jesus healed and taught them. He had important conversations with them (His talk with the woman at the well was the longest private conversation with an individual recorded in Scripture.) He never spoke down to them but revealed important theological truths to women. He included them in His traveling ministry and allowed them to contribute meaningfully to it with both their means and their presence. He always treated them with respect and courtesy. He defended them. He forgave their sins and delivered them from

demonic attack. He was careful to use both genders as examples in His teachings and parables. He made His first entry to earth inside a woman and revealed His entry from death to a woman first, sending her to tell the men this good news.

Since Jesus is God, we can assume that He completely represents the heart and intentions of God toward women. That being the case, women can move forward with confidence to fulfill their calling to ministry and leadership knowing that Jesus expects no less of them and is cheering them on. He truly is the Champion of women.

For me, the old *man in the back of the room* is gone and a new one has replaced him. He is one of my many brothers in Christ who believes in me and cheers me on. Mostly though, instead of the old scowl of disapproval, I see the face of my Hero, Jesus. He smiles His encouragement and mouths, *Go for it, daughter — I am with you. I made you for this.* ☑



JODI DETRICK, M.A. is chairperson for the Network for Women and director of Women's Ministries of the Northwest Ministry Network, North Bend, Washington.

Note

1. Deborah Gill and Barbara Cavaness, *God's Women Then and Now* (Springfield, Missouri: Grace & Truth, 2004), 25,26.

HOW REV. I.M. PUTTY WAS ABLE TO REMAIN SENIOR PASTOR AT FIRST ASSEMBLY FOR 15 YEARS



"I'll close now. If you are not happy with my conclusion, feel free to draw your own."

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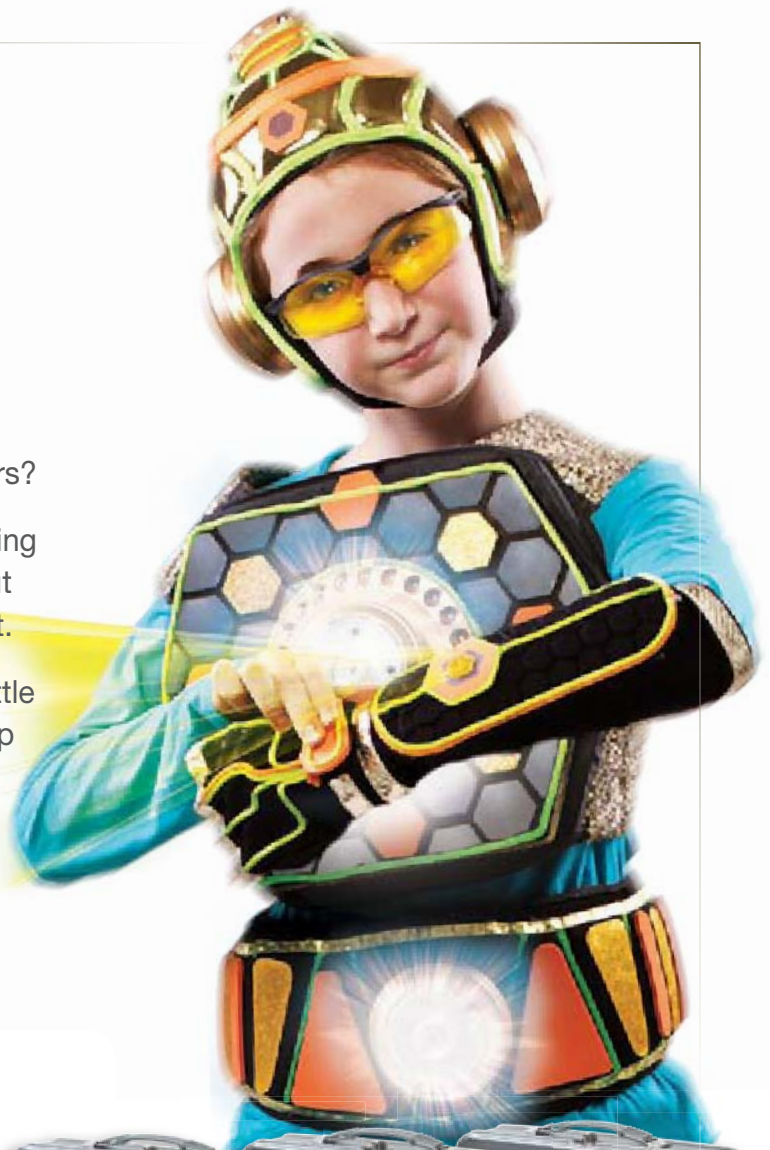
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Why Should Anyone Listen to Me?

By **Herbert Cooper** with **Scott Harrup**

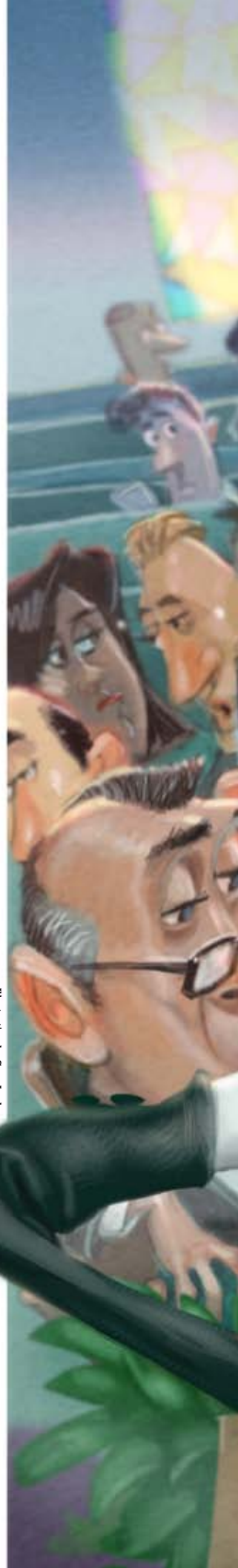
Whether you stand behind
a pulpit or on an open platform,
whether you speak in an auditorium or
a coffee shop, whether your audience is a
dozen church-planting contacts or thousands
of longtime mem-

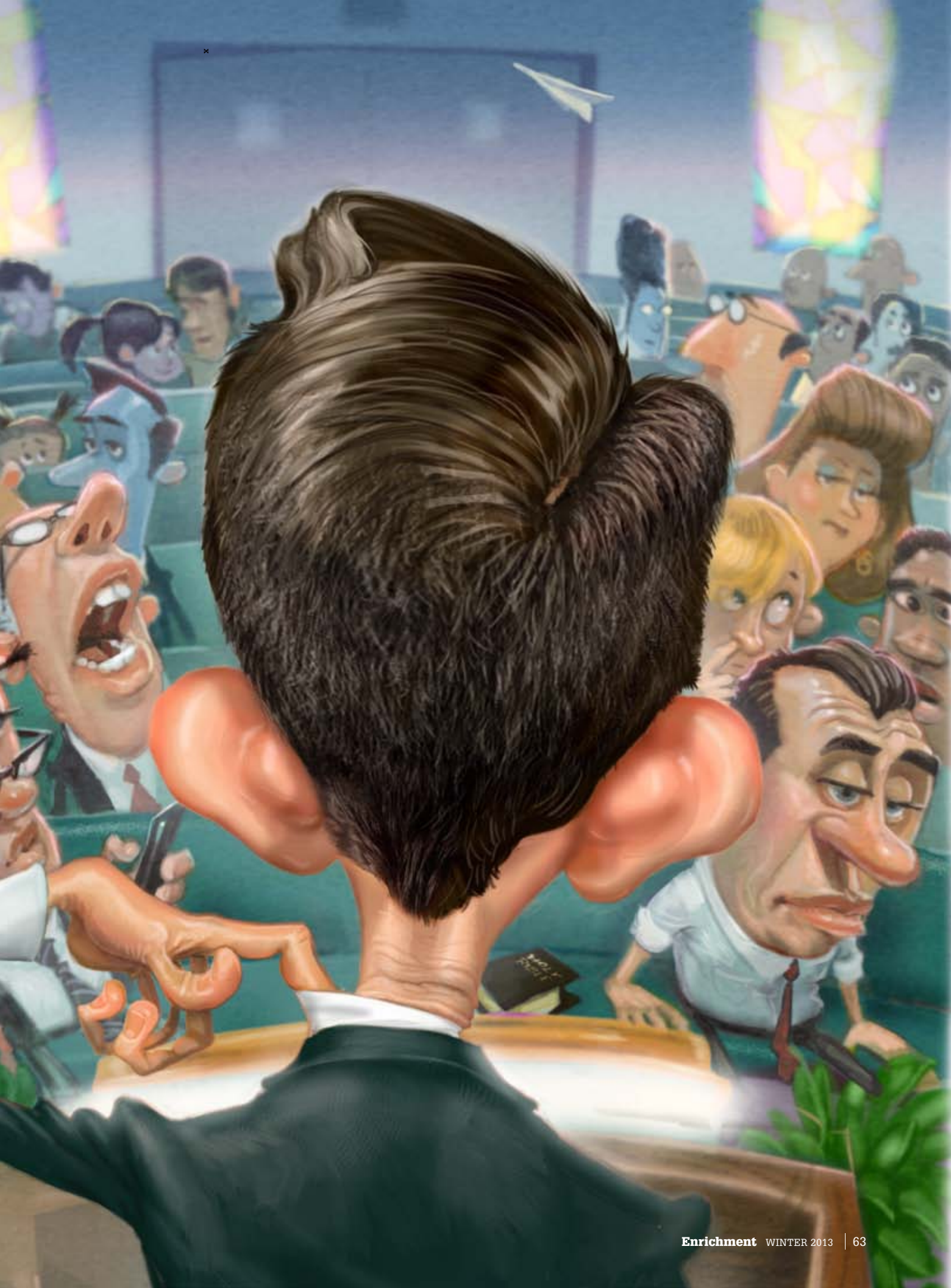
bers, you need to
ask yourself the same fundamental question with
every message you deliver: *Why should anyone
listen to me?*

This question is both humbling and reassuring.
Humbling, because when you are honest with your-
self, you readily admit your deep spiritual need
before God and your lack of merit in His sight. You
are no better than anyone in your audience.

Is your life and
preaching an
overarching
testimony of
your integrity?
Are the people
to whom you
preach week
after week
inspired to
follow your
lead? They will
if you follow two
very important
principles.

Illustration by Gary Locke





Why Should Anyone Listen to Me?

(continued from page 62)

Reassuring, because when you are honest with God, acknowledging your need, you absolutely know He has created your giftings, initiated your ministerial calling, and drawn fellow members of the body of Christ into your sphere of influence.

I am convinced people are drawn to any preacher's ministry in direct proportion to two factors in his or her life: (1) the extent to which he or she builds every message on the foundation of God's Word, and (2) the extent to which that preacher's life and character reflect that Word.

Every time I stand before our growing and diverse congregation at People's Church in Oklahoma City, I am reminded anew of their great needs and even greater potential. I am reminded anew of my dependency and God's enablement. I again recognize that the Word is the bottomless reservoir for answers to our deepest questions, and that my obedience and submission are the catalysts for the Holy Spirit to communicate answers.

PREACH FROM THE WORD

Pastor Dan Anderson of First Baptist Church in Wewoka, Oklahoma, was my pastor during high school. He preached unvarnished and undiluted truth from the Word of God. I never remember him standing behind the pulpit in an election year trying to sway the congregation to vote for this or that candidate. I never remember a sermon on the latest fad theology or sin du jour. He simply preached the Word.

"Preach the word," the apostle Paul enjoined Timothy. "Be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage — with great patience and careful instruction" (2 Timothy 4:2).

Preachers can lose sight of this most fundamental element of effective ministry. Whenever fads, politics, or personal opinion shift the focus from the Word of God, we diminish

our ability to shape lives into the growth patterns God envisions for them. People want to hear a preacher teach and preach Scripture. If they truly are in tune with the Spirit, they do not want to listen to a preacher who has any other motivation than proclaiming the gospel and seeing lives changed by the power of Jesus Christ.

This past election season has again sensitized me to the dangers of prostituting

the pulpit to politics. I am not saying politics of itself is evil. We need politicians, just like we need lawyers, doctors, and dentists. But I am not going to preach about your favorite lawyer, doctor, or dentist. I am not going to preach about your favorite movie star



or basketball player. I am going to preach the Word of God.

Preaching the Word of God is far more than an exercise in homiletic prowess or a display of exegetical finesse. Beyond proclaiming the inspired words from Scripture, we must rediscover the heart of God for the people we serve.

We must preach the Word of God with love. Every message must communicate the same love of God that motivated Him to give us His Word in the first place. We must never allow dogma to destroy our ability and responsibility to love.

There were times early in my ministry when I probably came across to my listeners as harsh, condemning, and critical. I traveled as an evangelist, and I knew I had a responsibility to stir up and move an audience to action. I have grown in my own relationship with Christ and in teaching and preaching God's Word; I have learned when I preach truth with a loving heart it creates the best possible environment for change.

With every message I preach, I want people to sense my desire for God's best in their lives — for their marriage, for their family, for their kids, for their career, for their finances. I want them to discover anew God's all-encompassing love that brings to life the truth of His Word in every corner of their identity.

We must preach the Word of God with compassion. Compassion demands our personal identification with our people's pain, with their temptations, and with their seasons of hopelessness. Many people come into our churches on Sunday following a week of renewed evidence that their lives are broken — a marriage is failing, a business is ruined, a child is living in addiction or in the grip of a lifestyle choice. What do we see when we look out on our congregations?

"When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So he began teaching them many things" (Mark 6:34). Jesus saw the crowd and was moved with compassion for them. What He taught the crowd was an outgrowth of His compassionate awareness of their need. When you look at the Scriptures and the life

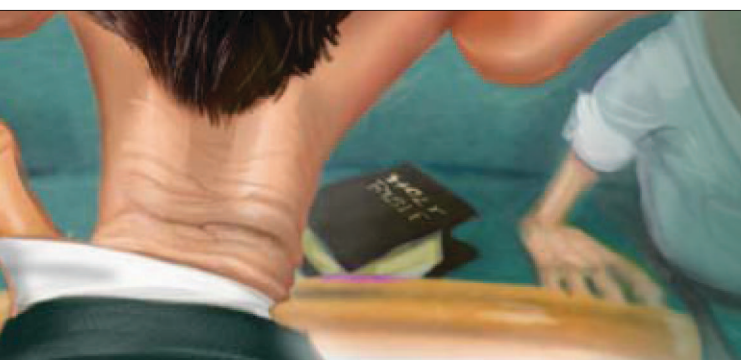
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of Jesus, you catch His vision anew. Your messages become lifelines to your people; and, the more clearly they perceive the rescuing and restorative nature of a message, the more powerfully they will be drawn to listen and to apply what they hear.

also understood we must live the Word as well as preach it. "Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young," he wrote to Timothy, "but set an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith and in purity"



My credibility rests on the credibility of God's Word, and anything attractive about my life is a fruit of the Spirit's work within me.

We must teach the Word of God with grace. It's easy for any of us, whether we are writing, teaching, or dealing with people in the workplace, to become tainted with a spirit of expectation. We allow ourselves to mentally list conditions for others' lives, where we treat people differently based on how well they meet our criteria.

Churches are places of rescue and healing. But too often we create environments where the lost feel they are on the outside looking in — even when they take the initiative to come into our building. How this grieves the heart of God. We must invite people into our church and accept them unconditionally. And this sense of acceptance must come through in our preaching.

Am I saying that we accept and endorse sin and the destruction it inflicts? Absolutely not. With the apostle Paul, I will readily affirm: "Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We are those who have died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life" (Romans 6:1–4).

I will identify from the pulpit lifestyle choices and motivations and daily practices large and small as sin when the Bible clearly identifies them as such. But may I never communicate to anyone sitting under my teaching that they must do A, B, C, or D before I will accept them. From the moment guests first enter People's Church, my passionate prayer is that I might do everything in my ability to connect them with the Heavenly Father. Every word they hear from me absolutely must be a word of invitation.

PREACH WITH YOUR LIFE

Paul called on Timothy to preach the Word, because he knew God's Word is the only sure foundation for ministry. Paul

(1 Timothy 4:12). He cautioned another preaching protégé, Titus, similarly: "In everything set them an example by doing what is good. In your teaching show integrity, seriousness and soundness of speech that cannot be condemned, so that those who oppose you may be ashamed because they have nothing bad to say about us" (Titus 2:7,8).

Paul did not claim either Timothy or Titus would set a perfect example. None of us has arrived spiritually. Each of us is on a journey. Paul himself admitted: "Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me." He immediately connected this truth with his ministry by addressing those he served in Christ: "Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 3:12–14).

One great attractor in your life to draw people to Christ will be their realization that you are on the journey with them. Just like the people I serve, I am growing in grace as I apply life principles from the Word of God. Let me outline four key opportunities where each of us has to lead by example.

1. In our relationships

I talk to my congregation about my marriage and tell them I am growing as a husband. I freely confess God is stretching me as a dad, and I need to be more patient with my children.

I admit that my relationship challenges extend beyond the home. When someone gets on my nerves, I am tempted to fly off the handle.

But there are also positive aspects of growth I pursue in my life and share with our church. I am intentional about a weekly date night with my wife, and I talk about how Tiffany and I are growing closer as a couple. Without sinking to

Why Should Anyone Listen to Me?

(continued from page 65)

prudence, I communicate to our congregation that our marriage is strong and wonderfully intimate.

My No. 1 ministry is not to the church; it's to my wife and kids. I am at my kids' ballgames. I nurture them. I read the Word to them. Tiffany and I pray with them every night. I lead that way in our home, and I let our church know that. I try to weave our family dynamics into messages because it motivates and inspires people to make God and His truth the center of their homes and their lives.

2. In our priorities

Praying, fasting, and personal Scripture study are priorities to me at home and in ministry. I read the Word of God and pray and spend time alone with the Lord before my family wakes up. I join with my staff in times of spiritual renewal.

We begin each year at church with 14 days of prayer and fasting. I lead in these disciplines. I don't ask our church or our staff to go on a 14-day fast if I am not doing it. During those 2 weeks, we offer all-church prayer meetings in the morning from 6 to 7 and from noon to 1. Our staff is required to come to at least eight of these prayer meetings. I attend even more. I come to more meetings than anyone else because I must lead by example in my own relationship with the Lord.

Physical and spiritual health contribute to each other. I work out at a gym three or four days a week. I guard my Friday and take that day off. I model for our staff a personal commitment to restful and healthy living, and I expect them to maintain the same priorities. If you cannot take a day off every week, you are not healthy.

I have heard it said, as if it were some kind of spiritual merit badge, "Bless God, we are growing so much, we are so busy, I cannot get a vacation." I do not accept that. I take my vacation. I just told the church recently, "I know some of you tell me, 'Pastor, we miss you when you are not here.' Well, I miss you too, but I

am still going to be gone." They laughed, but they understood.

3. In our finances

I work hard to be an example of godly stewardship. I tithe. I give offerings. I give until it hurts. When I ask the church to give a pledge above the tithe to a building campaign, I know I must lead the way. I must be willing to sacrifice if I am going to see God bring about a spirit of giving.

Tiffany and I worked to get out of debt when we were in our 20s, and we do not have any debt today besides our home. We live debt free. We may not drive the nicest cars, but they are paid for.

We committed to eliminating our debt because we recognize excessive debt is really evidence of greed. We struggle like everyone else to be content and to reject the materialistic siren song of our culture. With God's help, we have determined that our purchases will never create a debt load that impacts our tithes and offerings. We do not want anything to eclipse our view of God and His goals for our lives. We live that way, and I preach that truth.

4. In our pain

Our first building program about 8 years ago nearly overwhelmed me. Between raising money, buying 50 acres, and building our first building, I came to a place where I felt like quitting.

When you are in a season of pain, the temptation is to allow that pain to shape your preaching. It might be as subtle as shifting your emphasis from a theology of joy to a theology of Job. There is certainly plenty of pain in the Bible. But circumstances must never replace the Holy Spirit as the source for your inspiration.

I can now tell stories about that difficult season and the lessons I learned, because I do so now with the right perspective. My pain is not dictating the content of my message. And when I share those vignettes, it surprises people. Nobody back then



Dos and Don'ts of Honest Transparency

DO admit you have struggles just as your congregation does.

DON'T be specific about last week's sins.

DO emphasize the joys of your marriage.

DON'T give your spouse any reason to doubt your confidentiality.

DO mention names when there is an opportunity to offer thanks or give a positive example.

DON'T open yourself to libel charges by naming names in negative examples.

DO be honest when an innocent mistake calls for a new direction.

DON'T wring your hands or blame others.

DO expect your people to listen to you; the expectation will energize your preaching.

DON'T become disillusioned by those who don't.

— HERBERT COOPER

would have said, "Pastor's going to crack; he's close to quitting the church." Thanks to God's grace, I could model how to handle stressful seasons.

Stresses can manifest themselves through people as well as through situations. I have been attacked by people, I have seen people leave the church disgruntled and angry, and I have heard people say things about me and my ministry that were hurtful and untrue. But I determined that, with God's help, my pain would never come through in my preaching. Sometimes the most difficult people in your church will be staring you down from the front row, but you need to be sure you are not creating a message aimed at your adversaries. Even in the midst of interpersonal stress, your message must be built on the Word of God and expressed with compassionate, grace-filled love.

PREACH ... AND THEY WILL LISTEN

When you found your preaching on God's Word, and your life demonstrates its application, your people will be inspired to follow your lead. They will see that your life and your messages merge in an overarching testimony of integrity.

Even your mistakes can become steppingstones to greater trust and effectiveness when you have this kind of relationship with your people.

Our church started Saturday night services several years ago. We started in January, we went about 9 months, and we had decent attendance. But it was not accomplishing what we thought it would accomplish. Late in the fall, I knew I needed to pull the plug on it. I had to get up in front of the church.

"As your pastor," I said, "I told you we were starting Saturday night services. I thought it would work; it hasn't."

I preached an entire sermon on why we started the Saturday night schedule, why it wasn't working, and why we would discontinue. I had made a mistake, but I admitted it and gained credibility with the church.

You might come to a place where an announced goal does not materialize. "We're going to build this building, and we'll be in by April." June could find you still in your old building. Have the courage to get up and be honest with the people. Honesty gives you credibility. An honest admission of humanity will build your leadership.

Trust leads to multiplication. When we started our second campus in August 2011, that transition was a great success because of that trust. I was able to ask 500-600 people to support the second campus and be willing to watch me on video each week. It was not an easy decision for them to make; but they did so because they bought into this vision, and that campus is running over 1,000 people because of the trust that has been established.

Why would anyone want to listen to me in person, much less on a video each week? It sure isn't because of Herbert Cooper. My credibility rests on the credibility of God's Word, and anything attractive about my life is a fruit of the Spirit's work within me.

I feel I'm at a place now with our church — and I say this before the Lord in a spirit of brokenness and humility and

good, healthy fear and trembling — that I have earned their trust. I have the trust of this church and the trust of my board. It is such an honor to have men and women who are influencers in our community, who run their own companies, say, "Pastor, we trust you. We trust your leadership. We will follow you."

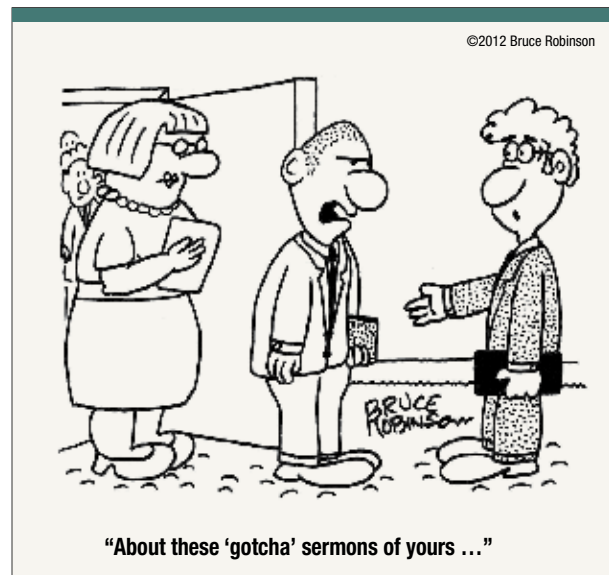
I pray I never take their trust for granted. With every new message the Holy Spirit lays upon my heart, I want to be on my face before God again asking that most critical question, "Why should anyone listen to me?" I want to hear the Spirit's assurance that I have truly heard from Him, I have discerned a truth from His Word for our people, and I am in a position before God to model that truth as well as proclaim it. ■



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PREACHING

Let's **Be Honest:** **The Need for Integrity** in Sermon Development, Delivery, and Decision

By **Thomas Lindberg**



W e have all said: “Come on, let’s be honest.”

That common expression can apply to many areas of life, but it supremely applies to preaching. When a man or woman stands before a crowd to preach, they are proclaiming God’s eternal truth (see John 17:17). Since they hold the truth-filled Word of God in their hands, it is incumbent that what comes out of their mouths is truthful.

What ethical principles should guide how preachers develop their sermons, deliver them, and call for decision from their audience?

Paul instructs Timothy that a preacher must be “above reproach” (1 Timothy 3:3). He tells Titus that God’s messengers need to be “blameless” (Titus 1:6). Let me say big, bold, and clear: There are high ethical standards that we must maintain when we prepare and present a sermon from God’s Word.

Preachers who desire to sharpen their skills and effectiveness must ask at least three questions about preaching. First, “What shall I preach?” That will determine the content of the message. Next, “Why do I preach?” That will determine the conviction of the message. Finally, “How should I preach?” That will determine the character of the messenger. Each question deserves a clear answer.

In this article I focus on the final question: “How should I preach?”

INTEGRITY IN SERMON DEVELOPMENT

The word *integrity* comes from the world of mathematics, where its root is “integer.” By definition, an integer is a whole number in contrast to a fraction. Integrity implies that an individual is a whole person marked by complete honesty and is not a fractional individual who sometimes is honest while at other times is not. That has enormous implications for those who preach.

Paul urged the younger pastor: “Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15). Greeks who refined gold used the word “approved” (*dokimos*). Once they removed all the impurities from the ore, they formed the gold into bars and stamped *dokimos*, that is impurity-free. This is how preachers must view their task as they prepare to proclaim God’s Word. They must maintain high ethical standards as they assemble the material they preach.

This means we must be accurate in handling the Scripture text from which we will preach. It is wrong at best and dishonest at worst to twist a biblical passage to make it say what we desire it to say. The Bible is not a soft lump of clay God places in our hands so we can mold it to whatever shape and form we choose. Instead, it is a proven, settled rock of revealed truth that we need to humbly and diligently explore for its truth to emerge. The Holy Spirit not only inspired the biblical passage from which we will preach, but He also illuminates the messenger so he or she can be an accurate, anointed spokesman for God.

Let's Be Honest: The Need for Integrity in Sermon Development, Delivery, and Decision

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The Bible sits above us to guide us how to live and what to preach. We do not sit above the Scripture to determine our own standards or concoct our own messages. The prophet Micaiah said, "As surely as the Lord lives, I can tell him only what the Lord tells me" (1 Kings 22:14).

and fingerprints all over it. You and I can milk many cows as we prepare to preach, but we must churn our own butter.

If all we desire to accomplish through our preaching is to inspire our people or explain a biblical text, then why not just play a DVD from some gifted, nationally known preacher

Do not get people to respond to your emotional appeal instead of to the true knowledge of God and the conviction of the Holy Spirit.



Consider the words of John Calvin a month before he died as he was saying good-bye to some preachers: "I have not corrupted one single passage of Scripture, nor twisted it as far as I know. I have always studied to be simple and clear." A good rule of thumb is: Do not develop a sermon from a text if only one Bible version translates it the way you desire. Let multiple translations confirm your conclusion.

Another mark of integrity is we will not preach another person's sermon. To do so is unethical. I received a letter from a pastor who told me he listened to my sermons on the radio and then preached them a few weeks later in his church. Real preaching occurs when preachers communicate to their congregations what the Holy Spirit has revealed to them through their personal study and interaction with the Scripture. One benefit of preparing a sermon is the Holy Spirit not only helps you develop the message, but He also develops you.

Deuteronomy 5 has an instructive verse on the dynamics

of true preaching. The people said to Moses, "Go near and listen to all that the Lord our God says. Then tell us whatever the Lord our God tells you. We will listen and obey" (verse 27). Good preaching must include a personal witness. Yes, you will read other commentators, writers, and speakers during preparation, but integrity demands and the Spirit desires the finalized message to have your thoughts, prayers,

instead of wasting our time preparing? That is insufficient because God's people want a personal witness to the power of God. If God is not speaking to you, how can He speak through you? People desire to see the Word of God become flesh in their pastor, and then in turn have their pastor guide them so they can successfully navigate life and please God. That is integrity in the development of a life-changing message.

INTEGRITY IN SERMON DELIVERY

In preaching "the Word becomes flesh" (John 1:14). To use the words of Phillips Brooks, "Preaching is God's truth communicated through human personality." Who the preacher is — his words, her emotions, his body language, his passion, her dress — cannot be hidden. Who we are as preachers will ooze out in our sermon. Therefore, it is imperative we demonstrate integrity in both our sermon development and delivery.

Some point to Philippians 1:15–18 as proof God can use any kind of sermon delivery — good or bad, ethical or unethical. While it is true that our sovereign God *can* use any preached sermon, it would be foolish to lower standards to conclude integrity in delivery does not count. Paul is not urging anyone to follow the example of the jealous preachers in Philippians 1. That passage is the exception, and you do not build principles off the exceptions, but off the norms.

Think of Paul's inspired autobiography as he reveals how he preached. In 1 Thessalonians 1:4–6 he wrote, "Our gospel came to you not simply with words but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and deep conviction. You know how we lived among you for your sake. You became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you welcomed the message in the midst of severe suffering with the joy given by the Holy Spirit." Then in 2 Corinthians chapter 2 he added, "Unlike so many, we do not peddle the word of God for profit. On the contrary, in Christ we speak before God with sincerity, as those sent from God" (2:17).

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What must we learn from Paul?

We must preach to please God. It is possible to undo in your delivery what the Holy Spirit accomplishes in you during your preparation. Excessive pointing to self is not pleasing to God during delivery. Humility must mark the preacher.

Humility is not putting yourself down, but it is lifting up the Lord Jesus Christ. Our God-given duty is to “preach Christ” and not self (see 2 Corinthians 4:5). Name-dropping will also hurt your delivery. As you drop names, you are saying, “I know important people. That makes me important as well.”

Any breach of pastoral confidence will also harm your delivery (and also the person whose confidence you broke). During the week you rub shoulders and interact with many people. You will hear of successes and failures, victories and sins. To publically share the successes and victories of others without

permission is foolish and possibly damaging. To publically reveal the sins and failures of others is wrong.

In the 2 Corinthians 2 passage quoted above, Paul tells us we are not to be like people who “peddle the word of God.” The verb “peddle” comes from the Greek noun *kapelos*. A *kapelos* was a con artist, a street hawker, or a huckster who would say and do anything to manipulate people. Too many today peddle a message that does not have a biblical foundation. These peddlers do not bring glory to God nor do they see real-life transformation in people. Their main goal is self-enrichment. We must guard our integrity as we deliver God’s message.

Preachers need both righteousness and godliness. We best understand the difference when we view righteousness as affecting our outward conduct, while godliness affects our inner attitude. For the most part, God’s people want to trust the person who stands before them to preach. But integrity for the preacher is a precious commodity. With it, people will follow you; without it, they will not. To quote Billy Graham, “If you lose your money, you’ve lost little. If you lose your health, you’ve lost something important. But if you lose your integrity, you’ve lost everything.”

Preachers must lean hard on God as they deliver the message (see 1 Corinthians 2:1–5). It is not our clever gimmicks that convert and challenge others. It is the Spirit of God using the Word of God. If we persuade someone to trust Christ merely by our clever argument or delivery skills, it is probable that someone with a more clever argument or greater speaking skills may deceive them. It is the Spirit, not human skill, who brings transformational life change into the human heart (see Zechariah 4:6). To deny this truth is to deny our present existence as people who are led and empowered by the Holy Spirit (see 2 Corinthians 5:7). That’s real integrity in the delivery of a life-changing message.



8 Rules for Building a Preaching Library

- 1. Make your preaching library a priority.** Readers are leaders. John Wesley said to his preachers, “Read or get out of the ministry.”
- 2. Buy books that fit you and your ministry.** Know yourself. If you do not have knowledge of biblical languages, do not buy technical commentaries. Buy books that profit you, not books that impress others. Books are tools, not museum pieces.
- 3. Read and use the books you buy.** Some books will just be acquaintances, while others will become best friends. I have some books I have read one time; I have other books I read and then reread frequently. The latter books are good friends. I know them well.
- 4. Lead your church to work your book purchases into the church budget.** A good preaching library will take money, but the results in your wisdom and preaching (and your members’ growth) is well worth it.
- 5. Visit Amazon.com and used bookstores for great prices.** I paid 35 cents for a sought-after book at a used book sale that retails new for \$36.
- 6. Examine your current library.** Do not just buy books that fit your favorite hobbyhorse theology. Where do you have holes in your library? Old Testament commentaries? New Testament commentaries? Prophecy? Spiritual warfare? Buy books that fill those holes.
- 7. E-mail 10 preacher friends and ask them to suggest the best five books they have read recently.** Ask them why that book lit their spiritual fire. Then buy some of those books.
- 8. Be reading a book or two constantly.** Paul, the older man, told Timothy to come to him and “bring the books.” I know a great preacher who took a briefcase of books with him on his honeymoon. (And yes, he still has a terrific marriage.)

— THOMAS LINDBERG

INTEGRITY IN SERMON DECISION

The purpose of a sermon is not primarily to inform the mind; its purpose is to transform the heart. That means a preacher should call for some kind of a decision at the end of every

Let's Be Honest: The Need for Integrity in Sermon Development, Delivery, and Decision

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sermon. Just as a good insurance salesman would not think of showing a client a new insurance product without asking if he would like to buy it, so you need to preach each sermon for decision.

The first recorded sermon in Acts is Peter's clear explanation and powerful challenge in Acts 2. Here is how the Apostle finished: "With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, 'Save yourselves from this corrupt generation'" (verse 40). Peter was clear in his call for a decision.

The integrity of the messenger matters greatly as we call people to decision. Phillips Brooks defined preaching as, "God's truth through human personality." It is possible to run clean water through a dirty pipe, but I would not want to drink it. As you compare that analogy to preaching, the implications are clear and convicting. There are many jobs in our world today where the character of the person doing the work really does not matter that much. Preaching is *not* one of those jobs.

The integrity of preaching is front and center in 1 Corinthians 2: "I came to you in weakness with great fear and trembling. My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on human wisdom, but on God's power" (1 Corinthians 2:3-5). Paul refused to use calculated theatrics or human techniques to manipulate a response. Do not get people to respond to your emotional appeal instead of to the true knowledge of God and the conviction of the Holy Spirit.

Martin Luther faced this problem. As the Protestant Reformation began to spread, some of Luther's followers resorted to manipulation, force, and less-than-honest methods of preaching to sway people. Luther would have none of it. In spring 1522, Luther marched to his pulpit and said, "I will preach, teach, and write, but I will constrain no man by force. I could play little games, but what would happen? A fool's play. I leave it to God's Word." That is integrity in asking people to follow Christ.

Charles Spurgeon, a beloved pastor, a great preacher, and a powerful evangelist, preached for a decision and saw tens of thousands come to Christ. He focused on the integrity of the preacher when calling people to decision and wrote words that are difficult to improve: "The power that is in the gospel does not lie in the eloquence of the preacher, otherwise men would be the converters of souls; nor does it lie in the preacher's learning, otherwise it would consist in the wisdom of men. We might preach until our tongues rotted, till we would exhaust our lungs and die, but never a soul would be converted unless the Holy Spirit be with the Word of God to give it the power to convert the soul."

Good preaching will always contain three essential components: what is said (*logos*), how it is said (*pathos*), and who says it (*ethos*). First Thessalonians 1 rolls all three components into

30 words: "Our gospel (*logos*) came to you not simply with words but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and deep conviction (*pathos*). You know how we lived among you for your sake (*ethos*)" (1 Thessalonians 1:5).

Some years ago I looked up the word *preach* in *Merriam-Webster's Dictionary*. The second entry said, "to exhort in a tireless manner." Nothing could be further from the truth. Your preaching must be faithful to the Bible, birthed out of a life of integrity, and dynamic to the listener so that lives will be transformed.

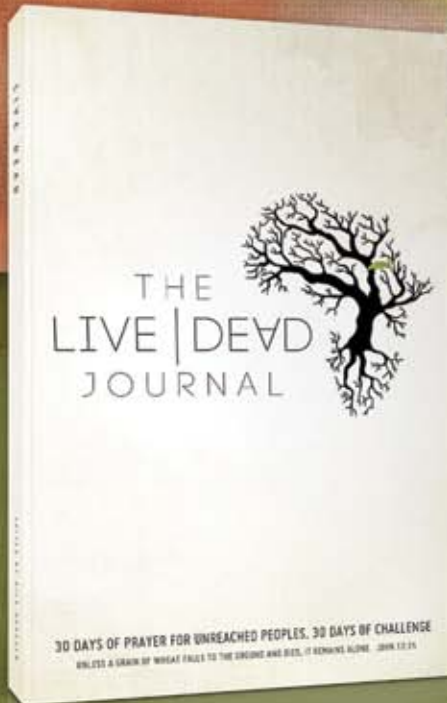
The words of Robert Murray M'Cheyne are as true today as when he wrote them in 1840: "Remember you are God's sword — His instrument. In great measure, according to the purity and perfections of the instrument, will be your success. It is not great talents God blesses so much as great likeness to Jesus. A holy minister is an awful weapon in the hand of God." Amen.

May you rise to God's calling and be the best preacher you can be. ☒



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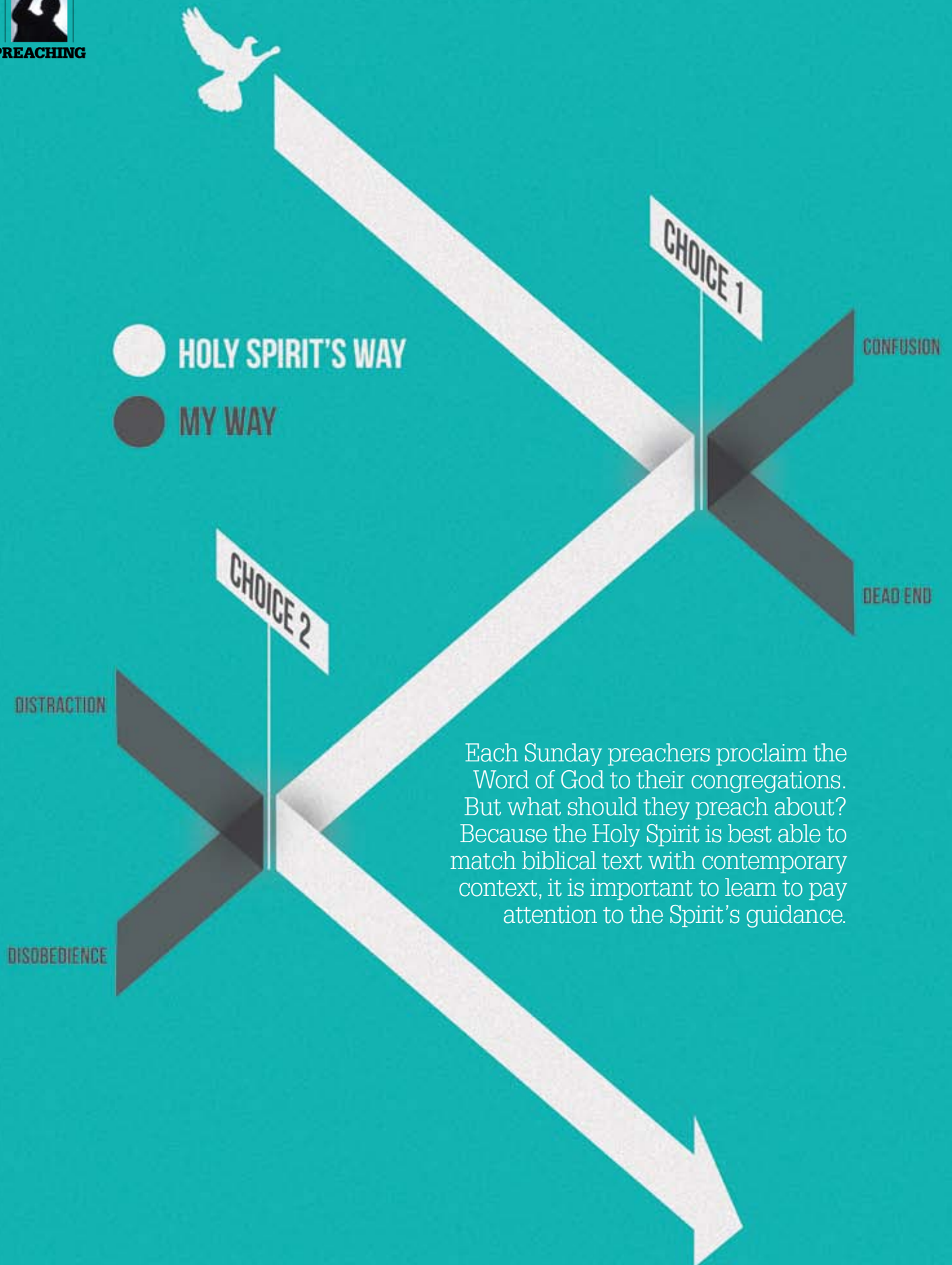
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Let **the Spirit** Guide Your Preaching

By **George O. Wood**

When I was a young campus pastor at Evangel University (then a college), I asked three great pioneer leaders of the Assemblies of God to share their testimony of salvation and baptism in the Holy Spirit with the students. I only wish we could have recorded what Ernest S. Williams, Noel Perkin, and J. Roswell Flower shared.

Those names may not be familiar to some. Flower was the first general secretary of the Assemblies of God and played a formative role in its development. Perkin guided Assemblies of God World Missions for decades of substantive formation and growth. Williams served as general superintendent (1929–49). During his leadership through the Great Depression and World War II, the Assemblies of God more than tripled.

I will never forget how then-88-year-old Williams began his testimony. He said, “In all my years of ministry I have never publicly shared how I came to Christ or was baptized in the Spirit.”

I asked myself, *How could that be?*

Then, he explained. “I was concerned since I was a leader that if I shared my experience others might feel if they experienced it differently they were incomplete.”

Known for his humility and modesty, Brother Williams felt that his experience should not be a pattern by which others assessed their spirituality.

Let the Spirit Guide Your Preaching

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I have borrowed from his example in sharing how the Spirit leads me in preaching. My testimony may not be your testimony. There are many preaching styles, and there are many ways the Spirit leads us in the journey from sermon selection and preparation to pulpit and delivery. But here is my experience.

When I was in seminary, I now realize the Spirit was leading me in a way of which I was not conscious. While we treasure the charismatic sense of the Spirit's speaking, sometimes His leading happens in a rather mundane way.

I moved frequently in my years as a missionary kid, pastor's kid, and evangelist's kid. The longest I ever lived in one place was a little over 2 years; that was the exception to the rule. Most stops were shorter — some as short as 3 weeks. That meant changing schools often and not having deep or long-lasting friendships. I longed to stay in one place for a long time.

In the seminary library, I was reading an article in *Christianity Today* by W.A. Criswell. At that time, he was completing 25 years of ministry at First Baptist Church in Dallas, Texas (he would ultimately serve over 50 years). He explained that at the start of his ministry there he began preaching expositionally through the Bible, and over those 25 years he had finished preaching through the entire Book.

I thought, *If that's the secret to staying in one place for a long time, then I want to preach expositionally.* So, as pastor at Newport-Mesa Christian Center for 17 years, that is what I did. I preached through books of the Bible. People could date their first time at the church by remembering what chapter and verse of what book I was in.

I loved expository preaching. I never fumbled around week-to-week trying to figure out what to preach next. The

text was always before me, and in every sermon I had to ask and answer two questions: "What did the text say?" (i.e., exegesis and hermeneutics) and "What does the text say?" (i.e., illustration and application).

My first 6 months as pastor I preached through the Gospel of John. My sermons were awful. I had come straight out of the classroom, and my messages were lectures without application. No

Powerless preaching will produce vapid and ineffective saints; preaching that comes with the Spirit's direction and anointing results in changed lives.

wonder one third of the congregation exited.

As I prayed about what would follow the Book of John in the fall of 1971, I felt the Spirit say, "Preach through the Book of Leviticus." I dismissed that impression — for four good reasons.

First, I told the Lord, "I don't understand the book. Second, I'm not a typologist and don't see the significance of every color of thread in the tabernacle. Third, New Year resolutions to read the Bible through in the coming year break down in the wilderness of Leviticus. And fourth, I can't even read Leviticus 15 out

loud (dealing with bodily emissions), let alone preach from it."

I felt the Lord say, "Start out and I will show you what to do when you get there."

With reluctance I obeyed the Spirit's prompting. Through Leviticus 1 to 7 and the five types of offerings, I gained a substantive understanding of the Atonement. I sailed through chapters 8 to 14. Then came chapter 15. You should have been in the congregation the day I read it aloud. If you want to silence a congregation, read Leviticus 15 to them. You could have heard a pin drop. But the Spirit showed me how to deal with the text. So, I began: "You may be here today and feel like God does not know you, or you may wonder if God exists, or if He is Aristotle's UnMoved Mover. But I am here to tell you from this chapter about 'A Very Personal God.' He is so personal that He placed a whole chapter in the Bible to let you know He designed your plumbing system and knows all about you."

Incredible things happened during the months I was in Leviticus — including the fact the church tripled in attendance.

Ten years later I felt the Spirit prompting me to preach through Leviticus a second time. Again, I protested. We were meeting in temporary quarters. Our new facilities were under construction. I was concerned that a series in Leviticus could have a negative impact on attendance. But, again the Spirit was right. I will never forget the Sunday I preached from Leviticus 13 and 14 — on skin diseases (KJV calls it leprosy).

I talked about the variety of skin diseases covered by the passage — including eczema, psoriasis, Hansen's disease, and leprosy. A husband and wife were visiting that day for the first time. They had seen the church sign outside and decided to give it a try. Unbeknown to anyone in the church or to me the husband had a serious condition of psoriasis. The doctors had considered skin transplants on his legs and rejected doing that out of fear the condition would come back under the new skin. Three nights a week he would apply cortisone cream to his legs and then wrap them in saran wrap. He suffered a lot. He listened in amazement as I preached from a passage about skin disease. I gave an invitation for people to come forward and be prayed for — whether for salvation, healing, baptism in the Spirit, or a personal need.

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He did not come forward that Sunday, but he returned the next Sunday and came forward. As the elders prayed for him, he was instantly healed and saved at the same time. He and his wife became two of the most faithful lay workers in the church.

How could I have planned that on my own? How could I have timed a passage on skin disease with the arrival of a visitor with psoriasis? That was the Spirit.

I saw the same kind of coincidence (I prefer the term *God-incidence*) in preaching through the Ten Commandments. A 15-year-runaway girl showed up on the Sunday I was on the Fifth Commandment: "Honor your father and mother." Consequently, she reunited with her parents.

We have a tradition in Pentecostal churches that the Spirit cannot plan in advance. Some in our past even refused to prepare or study for a sermon. They were of the mindset that all a preacher had to do was open his mouth and the Lord would fill it.

But we know now the Spirit can plan in advance as well as *ad hoc*. In expository preaching, the Holy Spirit can design the text to arrive at the exact moment as the need in people's lives.

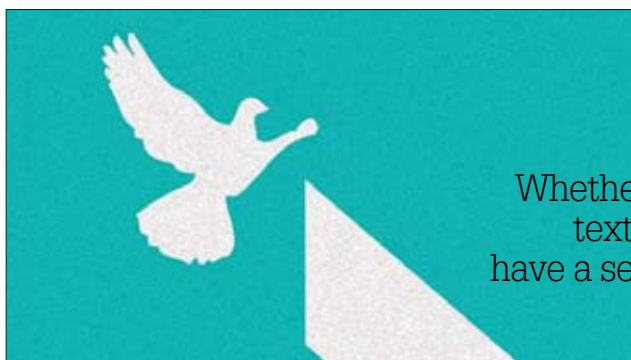
Whether you preach expositionally, topically, or textually — every form of preaching should have a sense that the preacher must be listening to the Spirit. The Spirit may speak through an impression in prayer, a commentary, a life experience, or an illustration. But the Spirit's main delivery system for the preacher is the Word of God. You will never run out of things

You may remember that I preached from the life of Leah in 2009. My experience in preaching from her life is akin to my 1971 experience of preaching from Leviticus. I felt an impression that I should preach about Leah. My instant reaction was, "No. I do not think her life has anything to say to me — and certainly not for a sermon at General Council."

But I could not shake the impression — which I now know was from the Holy Spirit. After months of her name continually coming to my mind, I decided to at least read the little bit there is about her life in Genesis. I saw nothing relevant that I could use in a General Council sermon, so I laid the impression on the shelf.

But her name kept coming back. So I trolled through every commentary looking to see if anything would jump out at me. A few thoughts began to form, but they were not overwhelming. I laid it on the shelf again.

Still, the impression to preach about Leah would not go away. I kept praying about it, thinking about it, and studying her story in the Bible. Then slowly things began to unfold. I took copious notes. I jotted down thoughts, I prayed, and the Scripture opened to me. I began to see that her story really is played out all the way to the Book of Revelation. Her life became to me an amazing illustration of how God uses the tough times in our lives. During our lifetime we may not see all that God is doing, but if we persevere, there will be a legacy of faith left to others.



Whether you preach expositionally, topically, or textually — every form of preaching should have a sense that the preacher must be listening to the Spirit.

to preach if your focus is on listening to God in His Word and applying what you are learning to your life and those you lead.

When I stepped out of pastoring, I became somewhat adrift in my preaching because I could no longer do expositional series. For the past 23 years, I am pretty much in a different church every week. Each week I must get a sense of, "What does the Spirit want me to focus on for this congregation?"

I faced that question in the General Councils of 2009 and 2011. Tuesday night is the traditional time for the message from the general superintendent. As much as I like to preach in series, I knew it was important that I not try to preach four sermons in one outline. Never having had the responsibility before to preach the opening nights of General Council, I struggled.

The same thing happened as I readied my 2011 General Council sermon. About a year beforehand, I began to sense a prompting from the Holy Spirit to preach from the Book of Haggai.

To be totally transparent, the only time I had every delved into Haggai was on the fly as part of a Wednesday night series on the Minor Prophets. As far as I was concerned, Haggai truly was minor. At the time the prompting first came, I could not even tell you what the Book of Haggai was about or the issues addressed in his prophecy.

But the Spirit kept nudging. "Spend some time in Haggai. Preach from Haggai at General Council."

So I began to read Haggai, and like the Leviticus series and the Leah sermon, I resisted. The more I read Haggai, the more

Let the Spirit Guide Your Preaching

(continued from page 77)

I balked. For one thing, I felt it was too long a text to preach at a General Council. By the time I finished reading the text to the audience, half my time would be shot. Then, there were parts of Haggai that were the Mount Everest of biblical interpretation. How can the issues of consecrated meat and dead bodies talked about in Haggai's third message (2:10–14) even relate to a contemporary audience? I would shoot another 10 to 15 minutes just trying to explain that passage. And worse, I did not at the time understand the text myself. What would I do with Haggai's four sermons that talk about Zerubbabel being a signet ring (2:20–23)? Who was Zerubbabel and what was a signet ring? How would that apply?

So I shelved the idea of preaching from Haggai. However, the Spirit would not let me drop it. The notion kept coming to me, "Preach from Haggai. Keep looking. You have not yet seen what you need to see."

I have learned over the years that sermon preparation involves as much, if not more, perspiration than inspiration. It requires hard work to dig the message out the text. I got my hands on every commentary and sermon I could find on Haggai. I knew there were some good parts, like 1:4, "Is it a time for you yourselves to be living in your paneled houses, while this house remains a ruin?" That will preach to anyone prompted to put self-interests above God's interests. And then there was 2:9, "The glory of this present house will be greater than the glory of the former house," says the Lord Almighty." I like that. I do believe these latter days of the Assemblies of God will be even greater than the beginning days.

Slowly the book began to open up to me. I discovered why the Spirit wanted me to preach from Haggai. He wanted four issues dealt with from Haggai's four prophecies: delay, discouragement, defilement, and destiny.¹

I wish I could give you a three-step, or a five-step, or a multi-step teaching on how to listen to the Spirit. I do not expect that my way of listening to the Spirit will necessarily be the way the Spirit speaks to your heart. It is important that you find the cadence by which you march to the Spirit's drumbeat.

Study in His Word is essential. The Spirit speaks through His Word. Prayer is vital. You cannot do without it. Study is absolutely necessary. You also need to take time to stew — to let the process of Bible reading, prayer, and study gestate in your mind and heart. Listen to the still small voice; pay attention to impressions. Instincts can be Spirit-generated and not just whimsical notions.

Finally, the sermon exists as a delivery mechanism to impact the hearer. I encourage you to have the kind of message that responds to the statement made to Peter by Cornelius, "Now we are all here in the presence of God to listen to everything the Lord has commanded you to tell us" (Acts 10:33).

If we, in our preaching, can respond as did Peter, then we will also see the same kind of impact. Powerless preaching will produce vapid and ineffective saints; preaching

that comes with the Spirit's direction and anointing results in changed lives. You preach to people who are gathered together in God's presence to hear what He has commanded you to say. ■



GEORGE O. WOOD, D.Th.P., general superintendent of The General Council of the Assemblies of God, Springfield, Missouri

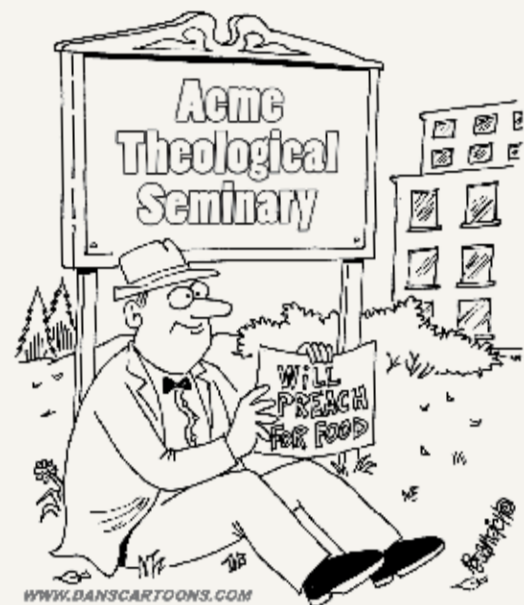


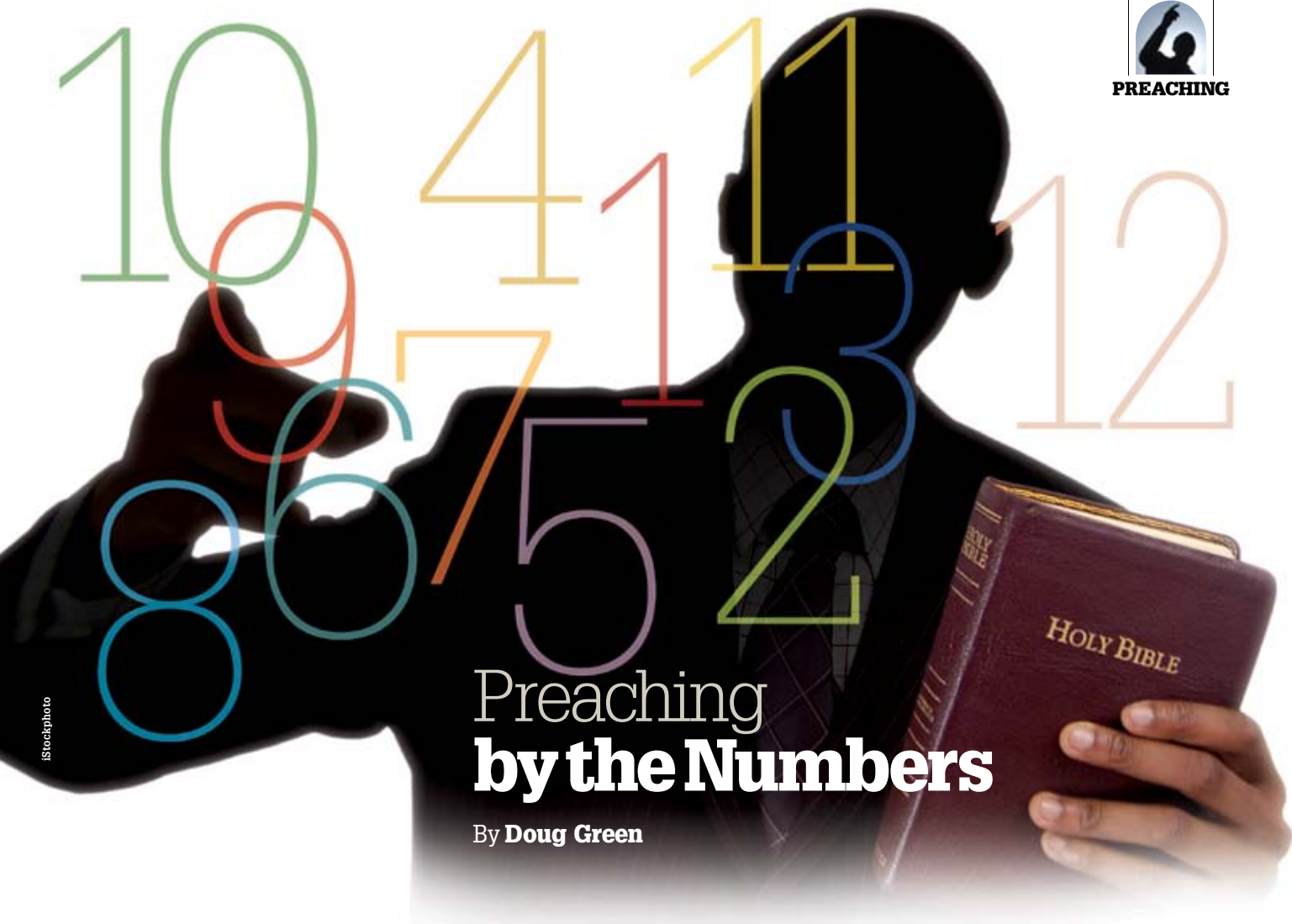
To access the Haggai sermon, visit ej.ag.org/haggai or scan the QR code.

To access the Leah sermon, visit ej.ag.org/leah or scan the QR code.



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Preaching by the Numbers

By Doug Green

This 12-step process will help you be thoroughly prepared for your next sermon.

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I love both cooking and home improvement shows. I am keen on spatulas and hammers. The experts on these shows teach me how to make it happen. I can make a six-layer chocolate cake moments after installing a skylight in the living room. It's fun to see the process unfold, step by step.

Is it possible to have the same enthusiasm about preparing a sermon?

I believe so, because preaching also has a unique sequence. There are practical steps to follow in sermon preparation. From the time you open your Bible on Tuesday to the time you deliver your sermon on Sunday, preparation has a path you will want to utilize each week.

Let us walk through the process — a practical process that will help you be thoroughly prepared for your next sermon. This process might seem overwhelming, but it is doable.

First, let me address the supernatural side of sermon preparation: prayer, self-examination, confession, the need to be empowered by the Holy Spirit, and such. These actions undergird the science of sermon craft. God speaks to humanity, and pastors tell about it from the pulpit. To be entrusted with such an honor is enough to keep you on your knees. Through Him, we can do it. Without Him, we cannot.

1

TEXT: SELECT THE PASSAGE

What biblical text am I using?

Start with the Bible. In proper literary context, you select a text (X number of verses) consistent with the logic and structure of the writer's intention. Seek to find a reasonably coherent unit of thought. It can be one verse, one paragraph, one chapter, or one book. Size is not the issue; unity and coherence of the passage are.

Because each genre in the Bible is unique, each one requires special consideration. For example, an epistle is usually organized in paragraphs based on units of thought. Note how the author moves from one topic to another. Handle each unit as a separate sermon.

A narrative passage follows a plot. You would not preach just a paragraph of the story; you would tell the full story. In longer stories (e.g., the Abraham narrative), pay attention to how the story shifts location and time to find where one part of the story ends and the other starts. Handle each new scene (unit) as a separate sermon.

Poetic passages, like the Psalms, are grouped by stanzas. You might want to preach a single stanza, but you are generally safe to preach the entire Psalm. (Psalm 119, however, might take more than one sermon.) Preach each poetic unit as a separate sermon.

As a general rule, applying to all genres, choose a unit of biblical thought (with a clear start and finish) as the text.

2

RESEARCH: STUDY THE PASSAGE AND GATHER YOUR NOTES

What can I learn about this text?

The primary goal of research is to find context. Every unit of thought fits into a larger context. In a paperback novel, for example, we would treat chapter 8 as part of the whole story. Each preaching unit is part of a larger context within a wider framework of Scripture. For example, you cannot pull a single *word* out of

its rooted connection to its sentence, its paragraph, its chapter, and so on.

Before you turn to research tools, read the passage and interact with what you hear. Read it out loud. Words leap off the page in a different way when you hear them and see them. Make notes, ask questions, try to discern what you do and do not understand.

After you have spent time reading the text, consider using tools: lexicons, concordances, Bible dictionaries, and commentaries. Gather notes about your text. (I print out multiple copies of my passage on a white piece of paper with wide margins. I use these to take all my notes as I interact with the words of the text — circling key thoughts, drawing connections, underlining key words, and making notes in the margins. I try to be high tech, but at this stage there is nothing better than paper and ink.)

After gathering pages of notes, you should have a good handle on the context of the passage.

3

BIG IDEA: DISCOVER THE EXEGETICAL IDEA

What is the big idea?

The Bible is a collection of ideas. Each unit of thought (preaching passage) has a distinctive idea. Biblical sermons share the Bible's unique big ideas, inspired by the Holy Spirit and written by an ancient author.

To determine the main idea of the biblical text you selected, ask four questions. (I will use Psalm 1 as an example.)

A. What is the topic? The topic of the passage is not the big idea but the one- or two-word concept of the passage. (*Topic of Psalm 1: God's paths.*)

B. What is the subject? Every biblical writer writes with a question in mind. This is how we write. We answer questions when we form ideas, obvious or not. The Holy Spirit guided the questions of the author, and He will help you find them in the text. As you study your preaching portion, understanding the original author's intent, you will find the question propelling the text. (*Subject of Psalm 1: Where do God's paths lead?*)

C. What is the complement? After identifying the subject (the overall question of the author), complete it with the complement (the answer the author provides). Just as a question demands an answer, a subject demands a complement. (*Complement of Psalm 1: They lead to wisdom and life.*)

D. What is the big idea? If you join the biblical author's subject/question with his complement/answer, you will have

the big idea of the passage. This is what you preach. It becomes the unifying idea of your sermon. Every part of your sermon from beginning to end is about *this* idea, for *this* idea is the point of the passage. The preacher does not create a biblical sermon's big idea; he *extracts* it from the text. (*Big idea of Psalm 1: God's paths lead to wisdom and life.*)

4

ANALYSIS:

ANALYZE THE EXEGETICAL IDEA

How can I analyze my big idea?

Now that you have a big idea, there are only four things you can do: restate, explain, prove, or apply it. Analyzing your big idea will propel the rest of your preparation. Ask four analyzing questions. (*Psalm 1 big idea: God's paths lead to wisdom and life.*)

- **Restatement:** Do I need to restate it? (*Not really.*)
- **Explanation:** What does it mean? Does this concept, or parts of it, need explanation? (*Explain key concepts: God's paths, wisdom, and life.*)
- **Proof:** Is it true? Can I prove this is true? (*Can you show examples or testimonies where this has proven true? Is it always true? Immediately? Eventually?*)
- **Application:** What difference does it make? (*If somebody is ready to walk God's path, how does he do it? How will that look at work? At home? In tough times? In easy times?*)

Because we want our hearers to obey the Word, we want them to *apply* it. (So what?) But they will not apply it if they do not *believe* it. (Is it true?) Furthermore, they will not believe it if they do not *understand* it. (What does it mean?)

If they understand it, they *can* believe it; and, if they believe it, they *can* apply it. Our goal is to remove roadblocks keeping them from doing the Word, allowing them to know and experience Scripture in word and deed.

5

IDEA:

FORMULATE THE HOMILETICAL IDEA

What is the simplest way to state my big idea?

You are now ready to say it in a lean and concise way. This tight reshaping will be your homiletical idea in about 15 words or less. It will be simple, forceful, and memorable. You will want to use concrete language — language that is



Before You Crack Open the Commentaries

Spend time meditating on God's Word, reading the text over and over again.

■ **Learn how to talk to your Bible.** When you read a text, ask, "What is the point?" Then ask, "Where are the pictures and how do both fit together?" Ask questions of the principal characters. Ask questions of the bystanders who saw it happening. Ask about the setting. Ponder the weather, the time of day, the proximity of the setting, the tone of the voice and anything else helping you to see the written text as a thriving, living account of life.

■ **Look at the Bible as a big picture book.** The Bible is an illustrated book, using imagery to reveal God's truth. Bible words are often picture words. After reading a passage and clearly understanding its original intent, ask yourself, *What does that look like?* Hold on to those images. They can become the foundation of an engaging and descriptive sermon.

■ **Look at the world around you.** Seeing the world around you helps you see God's truth. Read the Bible and the newspaper with your eyes wide open. Ask yourself how the events and the sights of the day expound or express the text. If you ask God to reveal himself, He will use the Word to come alongside your daily experiences and speak into your life. If you pay attention to those opportunities, discernment and perception will facilitate your explanation of the text, even the most difficult passages.

— DOUG GREEN



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Making the Most of Your Study Time

Consider the following ideas, making the most of your study time, upgrading your current resources.

■ **Form a sermon study group.** Find a group of perceptive parishioners who love to explore God's Word and meet with them weekly. Let them help you. Expect them to come prepared to do so. Farm out assignments. Although they need to allow you the space to hear how God wants you to preach the sermon, come with an open mind and listen to how God is speaking through them. Pray over your time together.

■ **Feed a local Bible scholar or retired pastor.** I spent a whole year of Wednesdays eating breakfast with a local New Testament scholar discussing the week's text from Ephesians. I bought his bacon and eggs; he told me everything he knew about the passage. It was a great use of church funds, for it upgraded my preaching and I made a lifelong friend.

■ **Consider studying with ministerial friends.** Rather than going alone each week, consider studying the text with some of your ministerial friends from other Bible-based churches. What if several churches in the same community preached from the same text each weekend? What if those pastors shared their insights and research with each other on a designated day each week, swapping notes, forming outlines, and sharing personal insights? As you walk together through sermon preparation and evaluation, this could be a huge leap forward in local Christian unity, tearing down walls of divisive competition.

— DOUG GREEN

Preaching by the Numbers

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familiar to your listeners.

You will not compromise your commitment to the truths of the text, but the language you use to describe it needs to be accessible by all. Consider these questions:

- How can I state it for the ear?
- Can it be easily grasped when heard only once?
- Is it stated in positive, not negative language?
- Is it relevant to contemporary culture?
- Do I need to remove any religious verbiage?

You will want a sentence that summarizes the big idea of the text, stated so your listeners can sense you are talking to them *about them*.

Is your idea clear in your head? If you were abruptly awakened on a Saturday night, shaken by both shoulders, and asked what you are preaching about, would you be able to sit straight up and state your big idea with limited hesitation? If you know what you are saying before you *get to* the pulpit, there is a greater probability your congregation will know what you are saying when you are in the pulpit.

(Psalm 1: "God's paths lead to wisdom and life" is concise, but can become "Walk this way and it'll pay.")



PURPOSE:

DETERMINE THE SERMON'S PURPOSE

What is the purpose?

Purpose is a hot word in church leadership. Understanding the function and purpose of a sermon will make the sermon more meaningful — to deliver and hear.

Consider these questions:

- Why am I preaching this?
- When I finish preaching, what will the people be able to do?
- What beliefs, attitudes, actions, or values should change as a result of hearing this sermon?

Also ask:

- Why did the author write this?
- What effect did he want it to have on his original audience?
- Why was it included in the Bible?

Prayerfully submit this quest to the Holy Spirit, discerning what God desires to accomplish through your sermon. This purpose becomes the goal. This goal can be new knowledge, fresh insight, changed attitude, or acquired skill.¹ Write your goal in a way that ensures evaluation, giving you the ability to determine success.

(Goal for Psalm 1: Listeners should be convinced that following God's ways is not only the right thing to do, but the smartest thing to do.)

7

SHAPE:

CHOOSE THE SERMON SHAPE

What is the appropriate shape?

There are deductive and inductive sermons. A deductive sermon places the big idea at the beginning; an inductive sermon places it at the end. The deductive sermon tells up front where

the sermon is going; the inductive sermon keeps listeners guessing. A deductive/inductive sermon places the big idea in the middle.

Consider the shape of your *purpose statement*:

- A. If the purpose is *to inform*, your form should favor explanation (deductive).
- B. If the purpose is *to persuade*, your form will lead hearers to come to your conclusion on their terms (inductive).
- C. If the purpose is *to inform and persuade*, your form will draw the listener in (through induction) and then explain (through deduction).

8

OUTLINE:

OUTLINE THE SERMON

What is the appropriate structure?

Now you are ready to write an outline. The text will shape your outline. The goal of expository preaching is to expose the text. The big idea is the main idea; the outline is what the author of the text is saying about the big idea (the points).

A good outline helps the listener *follow* the preacher's thoughts. It helps the preacher have a flow. A sermon based on a good outline has unity, order, and progress. The work of writing an outline has these benefits:

- It heightens a sense of unity because it forces the preacher to view the sermon as a whole, not as parts.
- It crystallizes the order of ideas, making sure you will give them to the listener in the appropriate sequence.
- It exposes the places in the outline requiring additional illustrations to aptly develop each point.

9

ILLUSTRATIONS:

FILL IN THE SERMON OUTLINE

How can I illustrate?

Good illustrations (stories, examples, explanations, analogies, restatements, quotations, statistics, and so on) help reinforce the big idea, allow listeners tangible, concrete ways to obey Scripture.

Effective illustrations connect the scriptural idea to the audience's personal experience. They arouse attention and stir emotions. They establish rapport, show care, and create sympathy.

They must be realistic, understandable, and believable. They must be authentic, allowing the preacher to identify with the needs of the audience, coming alongside, not down on.

Listeners love transparency, for the best stories are personal stories, especially stories that do not make the preacher the hero in every way possible. Stories from your week are always your best source of fresh inspiration. The more personal, the more powerful.

Use illustrations to show your listeners what the truth of the text looks like. Tell stories that turn their ears into eyes. Model the healthy biblical action into the plot. Show; don't just tell.

10

BOOKENDS:

PREPARE THE INTRODUCTION AND CONCLUSION

How do I introduce and conclude?

Now that you know where you are going and what you are attempting to do, write the introduction and

conclusion. The temptation will be to write them first, but wait till you know what you are introducing and concluding. The introduction and conclusion are tools that serve the body of the sermon, which serves the text. They open and close the curtain for the main act — the exposition of the biblical text.

In the introduction, listeners decide whether or not they will continue to listen. If the introduction is fuzzy, the listener will be confused the rest of the way. A good introduction will appeal to three important features of the listener:

Preaching by the Numbers

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- ears — arresting attention and arousing curiosity.
- heart — exposing need and linking it to the listeners.
- head — introducing the topic.

The conclusion bookends the sermon, giving the congregation another view of the main idea, entire and complete, driving it home, giving a final reminder of the truth proclaimed in the biblical text. There are many shapes for a good conclusion, but the safest shape is a summary reinforcement, helping land the plane without circling the airport. Attempt to stop talking before your congregation stops listening.

11

MANUSCRIPT:

WRITE THE MANUSCRIPT

How can I write it all down in full completion?

Much of your content is either in outline form or bulleted segments within the outline. Bring everything you have together and write out the entire sermon in full sentences and full paragraphs. The process of doing so will not only complete the sermon on paper, but help you think about each concept all the way through.

On my computer I type in 14-point font, on a single-spaced Word document. When it is time for a new paragraph, I start one. I indent my illustrations. I put scriptural passages in red and direct quotations (letters, e-mails, quotes, etc.) in blue.

Each page equals about 5 minutes. If I am trying to speak 30-35 minutes, I need to keep my manuscript to 7 or 8 pages. If I have 10 or more pages, I will go too long.

The manuscript forces you to think through all of these issues. The discipline of putting it on paper makes you better prepared for the delivery. It exposes sermon strengths and weaknesses. It becomes visible evidence you are or are not ready to preach.

12

REHEARSAL:

PRACTICE THE SERMON

How can I practice?

Although I write the sermon word for word, I do not take my manuscript to the pulpit. I rehearse by reading it over and over again, making sure I have said everything the way God wanted me to say it. I look for fuzzy and weak transitions.

Sometimes when I am prepared ahead of time, I put my manuscript down for a season and come back to it when my head is clear. The time away and the return to what I have written brings new insight — both what I need to delete and what I need to add. I make the edits and I read it over again.

I try to walk through the contents from memory. Each movement of the sermon's logic should naturally flow into the next movement. Usually, when I cannot remember what comes next, it's because there's a flaw in the logic and I need to adjust my connection. If I can reduce my sermon to a series of key words or visuals, I can go to the pulpit with limited or no notes.

What I may lose in *content* by not preaching from my notes, I will gain in *contact*. Since the vast majority of human communication (as much as 90 percent) is nonverbal (nonmanuscript), it is best to minimize the amount of time you spend in the pulpit looking at your notes or reading your manuscript. The more eye contact you have, the more effective you will be. Your body language and how you speak are vital to your effectiveness. Practice your sermon in front of a mirror or a video camera. See what your congregation sees. Practice your vocal skills.



Resources

For a thorough guide through sermon preparation, consider the following textbooks and authors. They have influenced much of what I know about preaching:

- Robinson, Haddon W. 2001. *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages*. Grand Rapids: Baker.
- Sunukjian, Donald R. 2007. *Invitation to Biblical Preaching: Proclaiming Truth With Clarity and Relevance*. Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications.
- Chapell, Bryan. 2005. *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon*. Grand Rapids: Baker.

This is why I leave my manuscript behind. I cannot be effective without preparing it because it forces me to think through every thought. Subsequently, I cannot be effective by taking it to the pulpit because I need to connect with the congregation as one who is right alongside them, walking through the life-changing words of a living God.

CONCLUSION

I heard Chuck Swindoll speak to a group of pastors. He told us the last sound he wants to hear when he leaves this earth to meet his Savior is the sound of his head hitting the pulpit. He wants to go out preaching the Word. I love this fervor.

Although sermon preparation and delivery are not easy tasks, and it does seem more fun at times to cook or do a home improvement project, the assignment to preach and the grace and power to pull it off week after week is the highest honor God can possibly give the pastor. I know the sacrifice to do so with excellence and authority. I get it. I do it every week just like you. It's hard work.

With that said, it is also a tremendous blessing to spend time each week with words that are eternal, provided by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. It is fulfilling to spend days

helping people meet a God who speaks directly to their hearts through His Word. He uses the humble, contrite pastor like you and me. This trust is more than enough for me. I can do it, through His strength, a bit better than last week, and so can you.

Until we hear the sound of our heads hitting the pulpit. 🙏



DOUG GREEN, D.Min., founding pastor, North Hills Church, Brea, California

Note

1. For a complete chart on how to write a sermon purpose, see Haddon W. Robinson, *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 110.

*Are you the answer
to a child's prayer?*

Somewhere in Thailand, a malnourished child prays she won't have to go to bed hungry.

A child in Cambodia pleads with God for a warm bed and a roof over his head.

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PREACHING

Biblical Clarity and Cultural Relevance Through **Topical Preaching**

By **Doug Clay**



Do you want to bring God's Word dynamically into your congregation's here-and-now experience? Then consider these four tools for effective topical preaching.

When I pastored Calvary Assembly of God in Toledo, Ohio, in the late 1990s, nearby Lake Erie and the Maumee River proved to be irresistible attractions to one family-unfriendly crowd — the riverboat gambling industry.

I did not want to be known as a soapbox preacher. But I knew our church needed to take this opportunity to educate people on a biblical understanding of gambling, and, bigger than that, stewardship.

I did a topical series on culturally relevant subjects that summer, including a sermon I entitled "You Bet Your Life." While the local papers touted the economic boom a nearby casino supposedly would provide, I helped families sharpen their understanding of God's economics. Trusting in God's provision and obeying His principles for living are always a better choice than trying to manipulate blind chance.

The apostle Paul said the preacher is "to equip [God's] people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ" (Ephesians 4:12,13). A fundamental and biblical outcome of preaching should be to have each listener mature into the likeness of Christ.

If preaching is one of the methods God uses to change the character and conduct of the listener, then the preacher needs to build a bridge that connects the ancient text (God's Word) to people who live in the 21st century and who deal with 21st-century cultural realities. This bridge building is a combination of art, science, and the anointing of the Holy Spirit. Topical preaching can effectively combine these elements to bring God's Word dynamically into a congregation's here-and-now experience.

Lane Simmons

Biblical Clarity and Cultural Relevance Through Topical Preaching

(continued from page 87)

When offered with excellence and after sufficient preparation, topical preaching helps listeners interpret the realities of cultural issues through the lens of Scripture to develop a Christian worldview. The preacher who clearly presents the truth of Scripture and applies it to the issues and felt needs of his or her audience creates a valuable starting point for this process.

Ecclesiastes is a profound book recording an intense search by the Preacher, or Teacher, (very likely, Solomon) for relevance, meaning, and satisfaction in life. You might say it's the Old Testament's most extended topical sermon. Tucked in this book is a set of blueprints that all preachers should consider using when attempting to build a biblically accurate and culturally relevant sermon.

"Keep this in mind: The Teacher was considered wise, and he taught the people everything he knew. He listened carefully to many proverbs, studying and classifying them. The Teacher sought to find just the right words to express truths clearly" (Ecclesiastes 12:9,10, NLT).

I suggest four tools for effective topical preaching, modeled on four tasks the Teacher undertook: gathering, reflecting, constructing, and delivering.

FOUR TOOLS FOR EFFECTIVE TOPICAL PREACHING

1. The gathering process: "He listened carefully to many proverbs, studying and classifying them" (emphasis added).

One of the first exercises when preaching on a topical subject is the topic itself. Sometimes a community issue, such as riverboat gambling, hands you your sermon on a platter. Other topics will present themselves at key events on your church calendar. A concerned parent may ask you to address a controversial subject a child faces at school or among friends. I pastored Calvary Assembly just as J.K. Rowling began sharing the adventures of Harry Potter with the world.

When you identify your subject, find out what God says about the issue in His Word. I invest time to find biblical references to the issue and study these references in the context of their historical setting. In my research, I ensure the context of the verses accurately connects with the subject.

You might identify one key text or discover a wealth of material concerning an issue. My treatment of Harry Potter connected with many parenting guidelines in

Proverbs. A series on marriage could include marital counsel and marital examples from throughout the Bible.

I pepper a message with various texts to reinforce the value I am communicating. My goal is to substantiate each topical point with a biblical text people can wrap their memories around.

In topical preaching, personal and contemporary stories can powerfully augment the scriptural text. As you gather resources, identify someone whose life story energizes your theme. This story will be far more effective if you contact the person, record the details accurately, and gain his permission to share the information. If he can share the story himself, so much the better.

In the aftermath of 9/11, we invited someone to speak about losing a loved one in the World Trade Center. The speaker spoke about grief, about dealing with anger toward Muslims, and how to process why God allowed that tragedy to happen.

While the Bible should always be your primary source, topical preaching can open your horizons to other reservoirs of material. I would periodically preach from the front page of *USA Today*. The goal was not to present some news commentary but to ask how followers of Christ biblically interpret these issues.

I use the same approach when researching people in the news. At times I preached on the theme, "What Would God Say to ...?" and then included the name of a celebrity like Bill Gates, Steve Jobs, or LeBron James. Out of that cultural connection I reinforced a biblical value. Again, take care not to go beyond reliable facts about that person's life; in the same way your treatment of the biblical text should not include conjecture.

2. The reflecting process: "He listened carefully to many proverbs, studying and classifying them" (emphasis added).

Reflecting on Scripture is biblical. The Psalmist said, "I will study your commandments and reflect on your ways" (Psalm 119:15). Sometimes the process brings a flash of inspiration. Sometimes your reflection calls for time and patience.

When you experience a Holy Spirit-inspired eureka moment, record your ideas quickly. There were times on a Sunday night after a service that I identified a follow-up theme to the message I had just shared, and I went to the office to work on the next message.

But I have also discovered when you are plodding through a subject, there is no sin in stepping away from it. Do some broader research. Google the topic. I am a big fan of Google



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(when protective filters are in place). Sometimes I will see a quote from a current article or news flash that resonates with the Scripture passage I have been studying. Sometimes I can break up my outline into smaller thought processes that generate productive hits during an online search.

Feedback is invaluable at this stage. You can generate feed-

with the Bible in your hand, will automatically equip you to communicate well, you are deeply mistaken. You must work at being interesting. Boredom is a gross violation. Being dull is a grave offense. Irrelevant is a disgrace to the gospel. Too often these three crimes go unpunished and we preachers are the criminals."²



When offered with excellence and after sufficient preparation, topical preaching helps listeners interpret the realities of cultural issues through the lens of Scripture to develop a Christian worldview.

Lane Simmons

back formally with a creative team on your staff or a focus group from your congregation. But feedback can originate informally. "I'm thinking about doing a sermon on this topic. What do you think? What's your take? What questions would you have?"

I tend to divide the reflection process into two components: biblical exegesis and personal/cultural reflection.

The more technical process of reflection centers on the exegetical part of sermon preparation. This is taking time to consider the historical setting, literary style, grammatical structure, theological framework, etc. A variety of Scripture translations, commentaries, and other Bible helps will contribute to this step.

Probably the longest sermons series I ever preached was on the end times. Sermons on biblical prophecy and the end times all too easily shift from solid biblical exegesis to personal conjecture. I was determined to keep our people focused on what the Bible really communicates.

The series went 8 weeks. I started with "What to Do if You Miss the Rapture." The Bible never allows us to set a date for the Rapture, but Scripture is clear we must be ready for the return of Jesus Christ. I encouraged people to prepare a DVD and put it in a safe deposit box and let unsaved loved ones know about it. "In the event of the Rapture, we would like you to watch this."

But particularly in regard to topical preaching, your personal and cultural reflection process can play a much larger role. This is the devotional part of sermon preparation. This is meditating on the verse and asking, "What is this verse saying to me?" "What is this verse saying to the lives of our church family within our culture?"

Do not rush this process. New thoughts often emerge as you reflect on the material. Chuck Swindoll said, "If you think that the gathering of biblical facts, and standing up

3. The construction process: "The Teacher *sought to find just the right words* to express truths clearly" (emphasis added).

You have identified a topic; you have built a scriptural framework; you have identified additional resources; you have reflected on how you can put these components to the best use. In the construction process, you want to arrange and organize your material in such a way that you achieve understanding and application.

We do not measure the strength of a sermon by alliteration or other verbal tricks, but rather by how readily people grasp the message and act on what we have taught. Here are some observations.

- **Keep your points/thoughts simple and clear.** Each key concept should be able to stand alone. With numbers of families in our church dealing with the deployment of loved ones in the armed forces, I preached a message and gave a handout on, "Is War Really Hell?" I let each point in the message and each point in the handout deal with one challenging question.
- **Keep a logical progression from point to point.** In the aftermath of 9/11, I preached a message, "Are Jesus and Muhammad Related?" I wanted to clearly guide our people through a biblical and progressive understanding of who is Jesus Christ. They needed a structured framework, a biblical grid, for Jesus' identity. They also needed a basic, point-by-point presentation of Muhammad.
- **Offer clear action steps or takeaways.** When I preached about Harry Potter, some parents wanted me to demonize the books. Others wanted a pastoral endorsement to let their children read the popular volumes. Instead, I directed moms and dads to biblical principles of parenting.

Biblical Clarity and Cultural Relevance Through Topical Preaching

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- **Flavor the teaching with appropriate illustrations.**

The events of 9/11 flooded our nation with turbulent emotions and patriotic fervor. My sermon, "Moving the Christian Flag Closer to the American Flag," used two of the most iconic symbols in our culture to illustrate an array of life choices we could make journeying through that experience.

- **Personalize your teaching with a generous dose of "I."** When your life connects with topics you share, let your congregation mentally walk in your shoes and face your challenges.

- **Tie in to what's going on in culture.** If the economy is tough during the Christmas season, and all the news is about a lack of retail sales, craft a message that weaves stewardship and giving beyond monetary means into the larger narrative of Christmas.

4. The delivery process: "The Teacher sought to find just the right words to *express truths clearly*" (emphasis added).

A lot of preachers have good content, but they do not know how to turn a phrase. J.B. Phillips says, "If words are to enter people's hearts and bear fruit, they must be the right words, shaped to pass defenses and explode silently and effectively

within their minds." Solomon said, "The tongue of the wise adorns knowledge, but the mouth of the fool gushes folly" (Proverbs 15:2).

Solomon said the Teacher both found the right words and could express them clearly. When you are looking for the right words, ask yourself:

1. **What is the most practical way to say it?**

2. **What is the most interesting way to say it?**

3. **What is the simplest way to say it?**

The topical message lends itself not only to the weekly sermon but also to the significant moments in our lives. It creates a scriptural framework for life-shaping events and gives an eternal context to a memorable day.

When the reigning atmosphere is one of joy, a topical message directs that joy toward God and His wonderful plan for our lives. I have helped many couples celebrate their wedding, and I always connected the key components of the ceremony — vow exchange, ring exchange, pronouncement — with topics that resonate with life stories of the bride and groom.

As well, in most Christian weddings, you can think in a second context beyond the central focus on the couple. Yes, it is all about this couple, and you want to speak into this very day when the two become one. But also, you want to speak

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to guests who may not have a Christian context but they are watching their Christian friends get married.

Life's crisis moments find your listeners coming to the Word from a position of abject need, even as shock, pain, and anger can cloud their awareness of that need and foster resistance to the truth. At such times, your dependence on the Holy Spirit to convey eternal truth into a painful moment can make all the difference.

I have conducted five suicide funerals. I cannot remember a more difficult environment in which to offer a message. But my approach was both prayerful and quietly reassuring. "I am not here to place this individual in one of two eternal destinations," I would say. "Let's leave that in the hands of a God who loves this person better than we do." I then clearly communicated that suicide is not God's will for us to leave earth, and I urged everyone present to consider His best plan for their lives both now and in eternity.

You will do a disservice to your people and you will only partially fulfill your calling if you fail to take advantage of the opportunity to pastor your people through crisis. They will hear plenty of false messages about God from a culture that seeks to discredit the Almighty and throw every tragedy in His face — "This is the judgment of God." "This is the end of the world." You can reinforce that God is in control; His grace is sufficient to sustain.

People are hungry to know, "How do I handle this; how do I process this with some scriptural truth?" The caring pastor will seize the moment to bring the truth of Scripture into a calamity.

One of the most common dangers of topical preaching is when culture and Christianity are merged without any distinction. When pastors saturate a sermon with talk-show sound bites so people cannot tell Scripture from opinion, then they have compromised biblical preaching. When preachers lift the political banners of conservative or liberal agendas so high that the cross of Jesus becomes just a shadow, then they have made their quest for relevance become irrelevant.

Being relevant has nothing to do with watering down the gospel or compromising truth. Neither does it mean you need to eliminate all references to sin, the Cross, or commitment. Relevant is about using language that will connect the truth of Scripture to the people to whom you are speaking. Topical relevance is not being trendy or faddish; it is about using the language, vocabulary, analogies, and illustrations that will relate Scripture in such a way that it convicts the heart and motivates and structures a congregational response so they become living testimonies in the community.

CONCLUSION

The Christian preacher has the distinct privilege and awesome responsibility to present a biblical worldview filled

with redemption and hope. Much of our culture's collective message is that our world is beyond hope. Economic uncertainty, political distrust, and the threat of terror and violence have become the norm of nightly news. But the Christian preacher, with biblical clarity and cultural relevance, can offer the good and unexpected news that redemption is possible, hope is obtainable, and life is — contrary to popular belief — meaningful and eternal. No wonder the apostle Paul said, "The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God" (1 Corinthians 1:18). ■



DOUG CLAY, general treasurer, The General Council of the Assemblies of God, Springfield, Missouri

Notes

1. Scripture quotations marked (NLT) are taken from the Holy Bible, New Living Translation, copyright © 1996. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Wheaton, Illinois 60189. All rights reserved.
2. Evangelical Church of Fullerton Newsletter, date unknown.





Preaching That Actually Changes Lives: Six Keys in Forming Disciples

By **Stephen Lim**

Here are six key factors that enable preaching to change lives and transform believers into growing disciples.

The single biggest problem in communication,” wrote playwright George Bernard Shaw, “is the illusion that it has taken place.” Unfortunately, this includes preaching. Barna found that the typical church member cannot remember the theme of a sermon 2 hours after the church service.¹

If so, the self-deception to which Shaw referred runs rampant among Christian communicators. Another survey of church members regarding their perspectives on preaching found that sermons rarely produced change in their lives.² The results of the two surveys correlate: If individuals do not remember a message, they cannot apply it.

Partly as a result of weakness in preaching, small groups and spiritual disciplines have gained popularity as preferred options for growing in discipleship. Yet in no uncertain terms, the apostle Paul states the crucial role of preaching in the disciple-making process. He charges Timothy, his son in the faith: “Preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage — with great patience and careful instruction” (2 Timothy 4:2). While appreciating additional means that help us form disciples, to obey God’s calling we must find ways to effectively proclaim the Word.

Historically, preaching has played a powerful role in forming disciples. It can still do so today. Effective preaching helps in the “making new” of our minds (Romans 12:2), enabling changes in our perspectives, priorities, and practices. In short, preaching produces life change. But what has happened to preaching? Church members often cannot remember the message, much less apply it.

Here are six key factors that enable preaching to change lives and transform believers into growing disciples. Preachers can more easily apply the first four, while the last two normally require more time to acquire the needed insights and abilities.

COORDINATE THEMES FOR LEARNING

Believers who attend several Christian meetings a week receive numerous exhortations. They may hear three or four good points in the Sunday morning sermon. Then, in Bible class they receive several more points on a topic different from the sermon. In attending Sunday evening service, a midweek service, small group, or fellowship they will hear or study more points on additional subjects. How many points will the typical church member hear in a month? Easily dozens, likely scores.

How many of these points does the average believer apply? For most, the reality is — *none*. Inundated with numerous topics and points, members cannot even remember most of the topics they hear, much less apply the points to their lives. If pastors will survey members on the major points they *remember* from the previous month’s preaching and those they have begun to *implement* in their lives, they will discover they have retained little and even applied less.

Some churches have learned to coordinate the theme of other learning opportunities during the week with the Sunday morning message. During these smaller meetings, leaders develop the topic further, and members discuss it, make



personal application, and practice mutual accountability. This allows members to focus on one primary message each week. In addition, if a church takes several weeks to develop one topic, members will have more time to reinforce and apply the truth to their lives. Not all topics require extended treatment. For variety, some can and should be preached in a single sermon.

A few churches have taken the additional step of coordinating themes, whenever appropriate, throughout their age groupings. Taking the common theme, they provide discussion questions and activities for family times, which are appropriate for children and youth as well as adults. This has

the added advantage of encouraging the transition of spiritual learning and growth from a primarily church-based process to a more family-centered one.

MOTIVATE LOVE FOR GOD AND HIS WORD

Responsibilities, busyness, and stress conspire to drain our spiritual vitality and keep us from growing. We require ongoing motivation to persevere in following Jesus and becoming more like Him. Preachers can validly appeal to Christian duty as a motivation for obeying God. Alone, however, this will only lead to our doing the minimum required — often with little joy. Recall the elder brother in the Parable of the Prodigal Son.

Preaching That Actually Changes Lives: Six Keys in Forming Disciples

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Beyond duty, our vision of God determines our capacity to love Him and our desire to serve Him and grow in relationship with Him. Through preaching, believers need to see God's holiness, greatness, beauty, and love, and appreciate His goodness, faithfulness, and forgiveness. Foundational to discipleship is the vision of a good and loving God — a God who is for us, not against us. Author Richard Foster wisely observes, "The Christian life comes not by gritting our teeth but by falling in love."³

As preachers, our lives must match our words. If a growing love for God and a delight in Him characterize our lives, we will radiate authenticity that inspires others. Otherwise, communicating facts about God simply becomes an exercise in transferring information without spiritual life. Our members quickly sense whether we speak from fresh spiritual experience or human emotion. As preachers, we must regularly ask ourselves, "Are we cultivating a personal love for God so it is alive and new in our hearts?"

Preachers also need to instill an appreciation for God's Word, for discipleship requires obedience to it. Sustained motivation to follow it results when we see its value for human flourishing — in contrast to the way sin diminishes, damages, and destroys our lives.

Attached on my hair dryer is a tag that tells me what I should and should not do with it:

1. Always unplug it after use.
2. Do not place or store where the dryer can fall or be pulled into tub, toilet, or sink.
3. Do not use while bathing.
4. Do not use near or place in water.
5. If the dryer falls into water, unplug immediately; do not reach into the water.

What if I think, *Why should I allow the manufacturer to tell me how I can or cannot use my hair dryer? After all, I paid good money for it and it belongs to me. I'll use it as I please.* You would shake your head at my stupidity. The manufacturer places the tag on the hair dryer, not simply because the government requires it,

but the manufacturer recognizes the danger of serious injury or death if I use it improperly.

Believers may chafe under God's laws, because: 1) Many are difficult to obey. 2) Others appear to limit our lives. 3) Some run so counter to society's perceptions and practices that we question their validity. 4) Still others require courage, risk, and sacrifice. For sustained motivation to obedience, believers need to recognize

Partly as a result of weakness in preaching, small groups and spiritual disciplines have gained popularity as preferred options for growing in discipleship.

the *desirability* of God's standards. We need a vision of God who gives us His laws because He knows they are best for us.

For years I regularly reminded my congregation that God's laws are *descriptions of reality*. God told Israel, "Observe the Lord's commands and decrees that I am giving you today *for your own good*" (Deuteronomy 10:13; emphasis mine. See also 4:40; 5:29,33; 6:3,24). Obeying God's laws protects and enables us to flourish. To ignore God's laws means to ignore reality. Sooner or later living in unreality will result in distorted living, harm to ourselves and others, and eventually destruction.

CHALLENGE COUNTERFEIT GODS AND MISBELIEFS

The world seeks to seduce us with attractive and urgent goals to divert our attention and energy from spiritual goals. These often become counterfeit gods in our lives. The nature of these seductions has not changed since biblical times. Jesus identified three major categories, "They are choked by the *cares* and *riches* and *pleasures* of life, and their fruit does not mature" (Luke 8:14, ESV⁴, emphasis mine). Riches and pleasures are obvious. Cares not only refer to concerns about daily needs, but include goals — such as security, approval, success, power, influence, and fulfillment. If God blesses us with these things, we should gratefully receive them and use them for His purposes. Giving priority to their pursuit, however, will deplete the time and energy we need for spiritual cultivation.

Preachers need to discern which seductions most tempt their members and challenge the ability of these counterfeit gods to provide more than partial, temporary fulfillment. We need to provide believers with a vision of God who provides what we truly need and a vision of ourselves as beings created in God's image for relationship with Him. We can never find full and lasting satisfaction apart from Him.

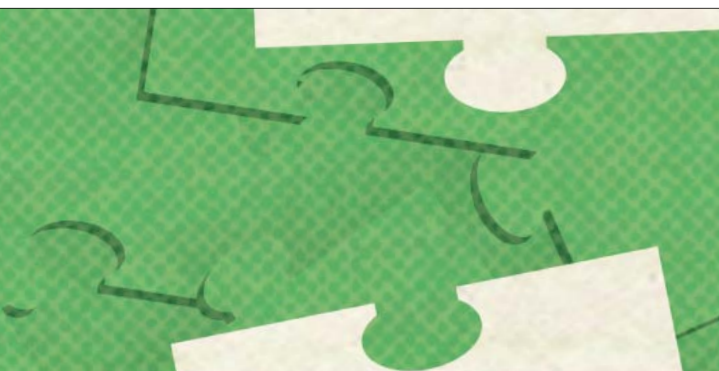
Along with seductions, in any culture *misbeliefs* abound. Often imperceptible, like low-flying cruise missiles, misbeliefs slip under our defenses and weaken our faith by gradually altering our worldview, passion, and values. Consider a sampling of misbeliefs proliferating in our society:

- In life our primary concern is to take care of ourselves and our families.

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- God exists to take care of our needs when our resources prove inadequate.
 - Personal fulfilment is the ultimate purpose of life.
 - Achievement, assets, and appearance determine our worth.
 - Many biblical teachings are out-dated and irrelevant today.
 - Sex is a normal drive that single people, as well as married people, should satisfy.
- Like weeds, misbeliefs keep sprouting and multiplying.

Preachers need to expose the fallacies behind current cultural misbeliefs, lest they weaken the spiritual commitment, life, and growth of believers. By challenging them, we can reduce or minimize their impact. Weeding clears space for growing spiritual fruit.

TAP THE POWER OF PERSONAL STORY

Jesus frequently told parables, a form of story. Both the Old and New Testaments abound with narratives. Preachers need to use stories in communicating truth. They offer multiple benefits, including the following:

- People more easily remember stories than abstract statements of truth. As people replay stories in their minds, they are reminded of the truths we have communicated to them, and these truths are reinforced in their minds.
- Stories speak to the heart and imagination as well as the mind. In this way, stories leave a deeper and more lasting impression.

Our personal stories can impact others even more powerfully than stories about others. When appropriate, we need to share our struggles. This produces several effects. First, people



3 Ways to Support Discipleship Preaching

Three pathways can powerfully contribute to the process of discipleship and spiritual formation. As presently practiced, the first is often ineffectual. The second and third need far more frequent use.

SMALL GROUPS

The New Testament illustrates the need for authentic spiritual community for growth in discipleship. Because churches increasingly realize that the quality of relationship required occurs primarily in small groups, these have proliferated. Barna, however, concluded that most are *not* effective in discipleship.¹ One reason is that they focus primarily on cognitive learning, which can be better done through qualified teachers. This misplaced emphasis reduces the time available for the four key values of small groups in promoting growth: active participation, personal sharing, personal application, and mutual accountability.

SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES

Spiritual disciplines fit Paul's instruction to Timothy, "Train yourself to be godly" (1 Timothy 4:7). Disciplines such as worship, prayer, ministry, and witness are spiritual ends in themselves, as well as means to growth. Others — such as silence, solitude, study, fasting, simplicity, and confession — help remove the distractions of life. This frees our minds and spirits to focus on experiencing God's presence and to receive His instruction and guidance. As a result, He can empower us to fulfill our mission and to become more like Jesus.

RESPONDING TO THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF LIFE

While valuing and practicing the traditional means of growth, I realize I have grown as much through the unplanned — and often unwanted — circumstances of life. When we respond appropriately to situations that arise in our lives, they produce spiritual growth. On the contrary, inappropriate responses hinder it. While God does not usually initiate these circumstances, He regularly uses them for our maturing, as we cooperate with Him. They include: daily decisions to obey, difficult life choices, trials, guilt, and negative feelings. Along with specific responses, we can trust in these circumstances that God "is working for good" (Romans 8:28).

— **STEPHEN LIM**

Note

1. L. George Barna, *Growing True Disciples* (Colorado Springs: Waterbrook Press, 2001), 92, 94.

Preaching That Actually Changes Lives: Six Keys in Forming Disciples

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appreciate the fact we speak from experience, not simply theory. Second, they identify with us, for they too have weaknesses. Third, our vulnerability encourages them to honestly look at their own lives. Fourth, in relating to our failures, they can also identify with our successes. They gain hope for their struggles: "He is human. He has wrestled with what I now experience. With God's help he overcame his problem. This gives me faith that I too can make it."

ADDRESS ALL OF LIFE

In October 2010 at the Lausanne Conference in Cape Town, South Africa, 4,000 evangelical delegates from around the world publically confessed the Church's lack of holistic discipleship: "We have failed to bring the whole of life under the Lordship of Christ."⁵ Preaching commonly focuses on the spiritual life, which lies at the heart of the Christian life. We hear the call to love and worship God, to trust Him, and to obey and serve Him. Receiving the Spirit's empowering enables us to participate in His mission in the world and to become transformed into the image of Christ. This is all good. Yet, while the spiritual life takes priority, we cannot ignore the other areas of life, which must also fall under Jesus' lordship.

Discipleship preaching must include the areas of daily life — including our understanding, attitudes, and behaviors related to work, career, success, money, possessions, leisure, and media. We also need to preach on relationships, especially the neglected areas of romantic love and sexuality, which our culture so badly distorts, creating much pain and grief.

Preachers must also deal with the believer's responsibilities in the world. This involves not just evangelism and missions, though these have critical importance. According to God's Word, Christians must also engage the practical needs of people for physical sustenance and justice.

DEAL WITH PERSONAL MATURING AND ISSUES

Personal maturing closely intertwines with spiritual growth. We cannot become spiritually mature without becoming personally mature. I have known believers who possess great zeal for God, yet appear to make little spiritual difference in the lives of others. Why? Their weaknesses in relationships or their emotional immaturities neutralize or limit the effectiveness of their influence, ministry, and witness. Personal maturing includes: emotional awareness and growth, understanding the past and present influences in our lives, healing for inner brokenness, mental and moral development, and healthy relationships and functioning. Spiritual resources can aid the process of personal maturing, which in turn encourages spiritual growth.

Most preachers lack familiarity in this area, since the discipleship literature rarely mentions it and their training for ministry usually does not cover it. We need to intentionally seek to grow in this area. In our preaching, we need to share how we have struggled and learned to overcome negative

personal issues with the help of God's Spirit.

For example, while passion for ministry is good, it took me years to realize that part of my workaholicism in ministry came from an unhealthy drivenness. Though I needed more sleep, I reasoned that I could get by on 6 hours, enabling me to spend more time in ministry. *It's up to me*, I believed, *to meet the church's needs, while doing everything possible to communicate the gospel to a lost world.*

As a result, I often felt sluggish and drowsy during the day. In retrospect, I could have accomplished more with adequate rest. One day I dozed at the wheel and crashed into a tree, wrecking my car. Even that did not change my compulsive lifestyle. While my conscious motives seemed noble, my drivenness resulted from low self-esteem. I strove for success in ministry to prove to myself that I had value as a person. Fortunately, I eventually experienced (not just understood intellectually) the reality that my worth comes not from what I achieve, but from God's love for me.

Other personal issues that can thwart spiritual growth, include: unresolved emotional pain, evading the truth about our weaknesses, lack of awareness of our emotions and their causes, perfectionism, codependency, and a sense of entitlement. If any of these issues influence our lives, they prevent Jesus from being fully Lord. Discipleship preaching can sensitively reveal these issues, so believers can seek spiritual counsel, the support of others, and the power of the Spirit to deal with these obstacles to discipleship.

As you apply these six keys to discipleship preaching, seek the enabling of God's Spirit for you and your congregation. Then, not only will the congregation remember your sermons, your preaching can actually change lives by forming disciples for Jesus. ■



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Notes

1. *The Barna Update*, August 9, 2005. Available at: www.barna.org/barna-update/article/5-barna-update/174-most-adults-feel-accepted-by-god-but-lack-a-biblical-worldview. Accessed 02 April 2012.
2. Lori Carrell, "Sermons Most Likely to Succeed," in *Rev!* magazine, May/June 2007, 71.
3. Richard Foster, *Streams of Living Water* (Harper San Francisco, 1998), 51.
4. The Holy Bible: English Standard Version. Scripture quotations marked ESV are taken from The Holy Bible: English Standard Version, copyright 2001, Wheaton: Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.
5. The Cape Town Commitment: Lausanne 2010. Available at: www.lausanne.org/en/documents/cape-town-2010.html. Accessed 02 April 2012.



Exegeting Your **Audience**

By **DeLonn L. Rance**

Preachers are tasked with the hard work of exegeting the biblical text and exegeting the audience to speak the gospel in the language of their hearers. Here are tools the preacher can utilize to facilitate the task of audience exegesis.

“¡Si alguno tiene sed, que venga a mí y beba! ¡Vengan a las aguas todos los que tengan sed!” (Juan 7:37; Isaías 55:11).

What a wonderful invitation from God's Word. Yet many reading this article zoned out or skipped the previous two sentences. A similar phenomenon occurs when audiences attempt to listen to preachers who do not speak their language because the preacher did not make the effort to exegete his or her audience. To be an effective preacher requires that the preacher exegete not only the biblical text, but the audience as well.



Exegeting Your Audience

(continued from page 97)

I listened to a radio preacher argue passionately that all one needed to do was preach the Word. But what does this mean? As a missionary I appreciate his desire to stay grounded and focused on revealed Truth, but should a preacher just repeat Scripture? If so, in which language? Preaching in English to an audience that only speaks Mandarin is not really preaching the Word. If language is important, then would we not need to interpret (exegete) other communication elements as well?

The core of the gospel does not change (preachers are to be stewards of that gospel — 2 Corinthians 4:1,2; 1 Timothy 6:20; 2 Timothy 1:12–14) — but often hearers reject the message, not because they do not need it, but because they do not hear it. The English translation of the Spanish text above: “Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink” (John 7:37), and “Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters” (Isaiah 55:1) resonates with those who have tasted that Water. Because someone spoke our language, we received the good news of life in Jesus Christ; we drank of the free gift of the Water of Life.

Communicators in the biblical text demonstrate the importance of exegeting their audience. The tools of the social sciences can facilitate the spiritual-discernment process that matches the appropriate communication to the corresponding audience and context.

EXEGETING YOUR AUDIENCE: DISCOVERING THE APPROPRIATE CUP

Noted missionary evangelist Sadhu Sundar Singh presents a compelling illustration of the need to exegete one’s audience. In a period of ineffective communication of the gospel in colonial India, Sundar Singh supernaturally encountered Christ

and began to travel throughout India preaching as a Christian *sadhu* or holy man. In addressing missionaries, Singh told of a high-caste Hindu traveling by train in the heat of the summer. Someone recognized that the heat was about to overcome this man and brought him a cup of water to revive him. Despite his condition, the man rejected the water because the cup belonged to a person of another caste. Then, discovering that the man had his own cup in the seat beside him, they rushed back to the faucet, filled his cup, and offered it to him. This time he received it with gratitude. Then Sundar Singh said, “This is what I have been trying to tell you missionaries from abroad. You have been offering the Water of Life to the people of India in a foreign cup, and we have been unwilling to receive it. If you offer it in our own cup, we are much more likely to accept it.”²

Biblical truth never changes: “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever” (Hebrews 13:8) whether in India, Afghanistan, El Salvador, New York, Chicago, or Muskogee. The good news that Jesus became flesh and dwelt among us to show us “that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures” (1 Corinthians 15:3,4). This is grounded in history. But the means of communication must change according to one’s audience. Each person, each community, and each culture is unique, requiring a particular cup of communication. As followers of Christ, we recognize we live in a world filled with people thirsty for what only the Water of Life can satisfy. However, many in our world today reject the Water, not because they are not dying of thirst, but because of the offense of the cup. God in His sovereignty has chosen to communicate His good news through us His followers. We are the cup.

For missionaries, this means following Christ’s example of



taking up the towel of service, setting aside the robes of our own culture, learning a new language, assuming new ways of thinking and acting to effectively communicate the good news without losing our identity in Christ. Likewise, though the cultural distance may not be as great, the preacher must exegete her or his audience to discover the appropriate cup to communicate.

The cup never saves. Only the Living Water transforms and gives eternal life to those who drink it. In the quest for the appropriate cup, the preacher can be seduced into thinking that the cup (i.e. style, skill, relevancy, or the form used to communicate) is the main thing, the critical factor. Cup issues, however, only become significant if they prevent the audience from hearing the truth of the gospel. Cup issues are critical if they prevent access to the gospel or divide the body of Christ. In themselves they are not salvific or divine.

The church of Jesus Christ needs all kinds of cups for all kinds of people and communities and cultures. The only superior cup is the one wrapped in the towel, unnoticed by those enthralled in the joy of drinking the water. The same is true of preaching.

EXEGETING YOUR AUDIENCE: DEMONSTRATED IN SCRIPTURE

Jesus (and the entire biblical text) demonstrates the need to exegete one's audience by using multiple cups to communicate the gospel in unique contexts to specific audiences. Communication cups Jesus utilized include physical touch, dramatic actions, miraculous signs and wonders, dialog, poetry, prophetic rebuke, stories and parables. When Nicodemus, a leader in the Jewish community, approached Jesus in John 3, Jesus communicated in terms of being born again. Jesus recognized

(exegeted) that Nicodemus presumed to know the answers (i.e. that the Messiah would overthrow the power of the Roman oppressors and establish the fullness of the kingdom of God on earth). Nicodemus needed deconstruction to experience the truth of salvation by total dependence on the grace offered by Jesus through His death and resurrection. He needed to be born again, born of the Spirit. Jesus called Nicodemus — who based his hope on race, position, knowledge, power, and works — to total dependence on the righteousness of Christ.

In John 4, Jesus communicated with a woman who did not need someone to tell her that her situation was hopeless. Culturally, society marginalized her and she had no access to the means of salvation. Jesus violates the cultural norms of appropriate behavior in opening the lines of communication and access to truth by requesting a favor of the woman. The woman heard for the first time that in spite of the physical, social, and religious realities that surrounded her, she could access salvation. Jesus offered this salvation as a free gift accepted by faith, as simple as drinking the water that Jesus offered her. The impact of Jesus' use of this communication cup is that not only this woman, but the entire Samaritan village declared that Jesus is the Savior of the world (John 4:42).

EXEGETING YOUR AUDIENCE: DISCERNMENT TOOLS IN ANTHROPOLOGY AND THE SOCIAL SCIENCES

While there are no easy steps to exegeting community and discerning the appropriate communication cup, the Spirit can use the tools and principles of cross-cultural communication theory to improve preaching effectiveness. The following observations on worldview, cognitive processes, and elements



Lane Simmons

Exegeting Your Audience

(continued from page 99)

of acculturation illustrate how an understanding and use of the social sciences can facilitate effective communication.

Worldview refers to how people perceive or see their world. Cross-cultural communication theory identifies specific communication styles that are more effective among particular worldviews. The preacher's delivery should attempt to authentically communicate according to the worldview of the audience. Non-Christians in the West explain the world and their experiences in terms of natural causes. Conversational preaching, articulate, educated logic expressed with sincerity and controlled passion, makes sense to this worldview. However, if the audience is primarily of an animistic background where spiritual beings and experiences fill the world of nature, a different style is appropriate. (A majority of the population of the world perceives reality from this perspective.) For those who come from this worldview, if the message is important, the delivery style must be dramatic, passionate, varied in tone, pitch and rhythm, and filled with movement and other nonverbal forms of communication (i.e. an old-time Pentecostal preacher). Signs, wonders, and manifestations of the Spirit demonstrate the authenticity of the message for this audience.

Language shapes our thinking. While humans utilize various cognitive processes, anthropologists assert that certain processes predominate in specific cultures. One form is not superior to the other, but different means of communication are more effective among specific types of thinkers. In the West the conceptual way of thinking is dominant. If the hearer can identify and categorize the message, they know it. Concise, articulate arguments and theories impact audiences. The ABCs of the gospel effectively transmit the core message to this way of thinking, as does the three-point sermon that moves from theory to practical application supported by handouts and PowerPoints.

The bulleted sermon, however, makes no sense to other types of thinking. Intuitive thinkers, also described as quantum thinkers, seek mystical knowledge that emerges from inner experience and vision (spiritual knowledge). The

preacher must avoid drawing explicit conclusions from the text, allowing the hearers to explore the mystery of divine truth and experience the *aha* moment as revealed by the Spirit. Biblical doctrines of illumination and baptism in the Holy Spirit are vital to spiritual growth among intuitive thinkers.

People with origins in the cultures of Latin America, Africa, and areas of Asia think in terms of

concrete situations and how it impacts their relationships. They do not seek to interpret the Bible as much as live the Bible. Like the thinking in many cultures in the Bible, effective communication utilizes stories, parables, dramatic speech enhanced with nonverbal communication accompanied by physical demonstrations, power encounters, and signs and wonders.

Critical to the process of exegeting one's audience to preach in such a way as to be heard, understood, touched, and changed by the Word of God (i.e. discerning the appropriate cup) is shared experience (i.e. the preacher must investigate, question, and humbly identify with the audience to live out the Word).

As a missionary, every time I visit a congregation my desire is to inspire, to educate, and to move my hearers to a deeper understanding, commitment and engagement with God's global mission. Most churches I visit in the United States are predominately conceptual thinkers. My message must clearly communicate the task and the motive and means to fulfill the task. God in His Word mandated that the people of God, His church — motivated by His love and empowered by His Spirit — take the gospel to every people group and to every person. Based on these concepts, all within the hearing of the preacher should pray, give, and go.

When speaking to an audience of Salvadorans, the majority of whom are concrete/relational thinkers, I would not begin the message with the task but with a story of how Juan encountered God's love on the basketball court, how love drew him into the Kingdom, and how he now shares that love among another people groups. Rather than three logical points that lead to a conclusion with action steps, I weave together a series of stories, both biblical and contemporary, that allow the hearer to experience the truth of the story. Because someone communicated God's story to me, I now participate in that story along with my fellow believers by sharing our life together with those who have never heard the story by praying, giving, and going.

In speaking about missions to university students, who tend to think intuitively, the missionary task reveals itself as the mystery, diversity, and passion of God as explored in the Word and the world as community. Frederick Buechner describes preaching for this way of thinking: "Basically, it is to proclaim a Mystery before which, before whom, even our most exalted ideas turn to straw. It is also to proclaim this Mystery with a passion that ideas alone have little to do with. It is to try to put the gospel into words not the way you would compose an essay but the way you would write a poem or a love letter — putting your heart into it, your own excitement, most of all your own life. It is to speak words that you hope may, by grace, be bearers not simply of new understanding but for new life both for the ones you are speaking to and also for you."³ The hearer enters into God's mystery and mission by creating space for Him to work and reveal himself in prayer, by economically living by faith, and stepping out into unknown environments so others from all nations may begin the journey of discovery of the infinite God revealed in the good news.

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Audiences think in all three ways, but the preacher must utilize communication forms that connect in ways that make sense to them. The Bible communicates effectively to all ways of thinking. Storytelling is not only biblical but communicates effectively in each of the cognitive processes identified above: among conceptual thinkers, the story illustrates the point; for the intuitive, the story creates a mental environment where each hearer can discover the truth of the story; among concrete relational thinkers, the story is the point.



In the quest for the appropriate cup, the preacher can be seduced into thinking that the cup (i.e. style, skill, relevancy, or the form used to communicate) is the main thing, the critical factor.

Anthropology offers preachers cultural inventories that they can use to identify cultural characteristics of the audience and how they differ from that of the preacher¹ so the preacher can bridge the cultural communication gap. Each congregation has its own unique subculture. Moving from one church or audience to another requires cultural exegesis for the preacher to increase communication effectiveness.

Acculturation is the identification process by which an adult effectively lives and communicates in a culture other than the one in which he or she was born. When a preacher and audience share the same culture, background, and experience, communication flows with little thought of cultural identification. With increased cultural distance between preacher and audience, however, the need for audience exegesis and acculturation also increases. While a preacher cannot participate in every experience of the audience, the more experience that speaker and audience have in common, the more effective their communication.

This indicates a need for the preacher to get out and live what the people in the pew, chair, or theater seat experience. A rural audience requires that a preacher participate in farming and small-town activities. An urban audience tends to be more individualistic with community by association often valuing a multicultural environment. A wise preacher joins volunteer organizations and seeks experiences common to the audience like public transportation, cultural events, and educational opportunities. Following Jesus' example, who took up the towel of humanity to make His Father known, the preacher takes up the towel of audience identification because "no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him" (John 13:16).

CONCLUSION

The Holy Spirit through the missionary people of God continues to invite the thirsty to drink. "The Spirit and the bride say, 'Come!' And let the one who hears say, 'Come!' Let the one who is thirsty come; and let the one who wishes take the free gift of the water of life" (Revelation 22:17).

The Bible illustrates that each audience requires a unique cup to provide access to this life-giving water. The Water of Life, the gospel, never changes, but the communication cup must change. All kinds are needed for all kinds of people; all kinds of ecclesial cups for all kinds of communities; all kinds of preaching for all kinds of hearers. In preaching the gospel there should be no offense but the offense of the Cross. All preaching must point to the Cross, what God has done to make possible the redemption of people from every nation.

Preachers are tasked with the hard work of exegeting the biblical text and exegeting the audience to speak the gospel in the language of their hearers. Like the tools of biblical exegesis there are cross-cultural communication tools available that facilitate the task of audience exegesis. Preachers utilize these tools as a means of spiritual discernment. Ultimately, the preacher's effectiveness will depend on his or her total reliance on the Spirit for only the Spirit leads into all truth (John 16:13). 📖



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Notes

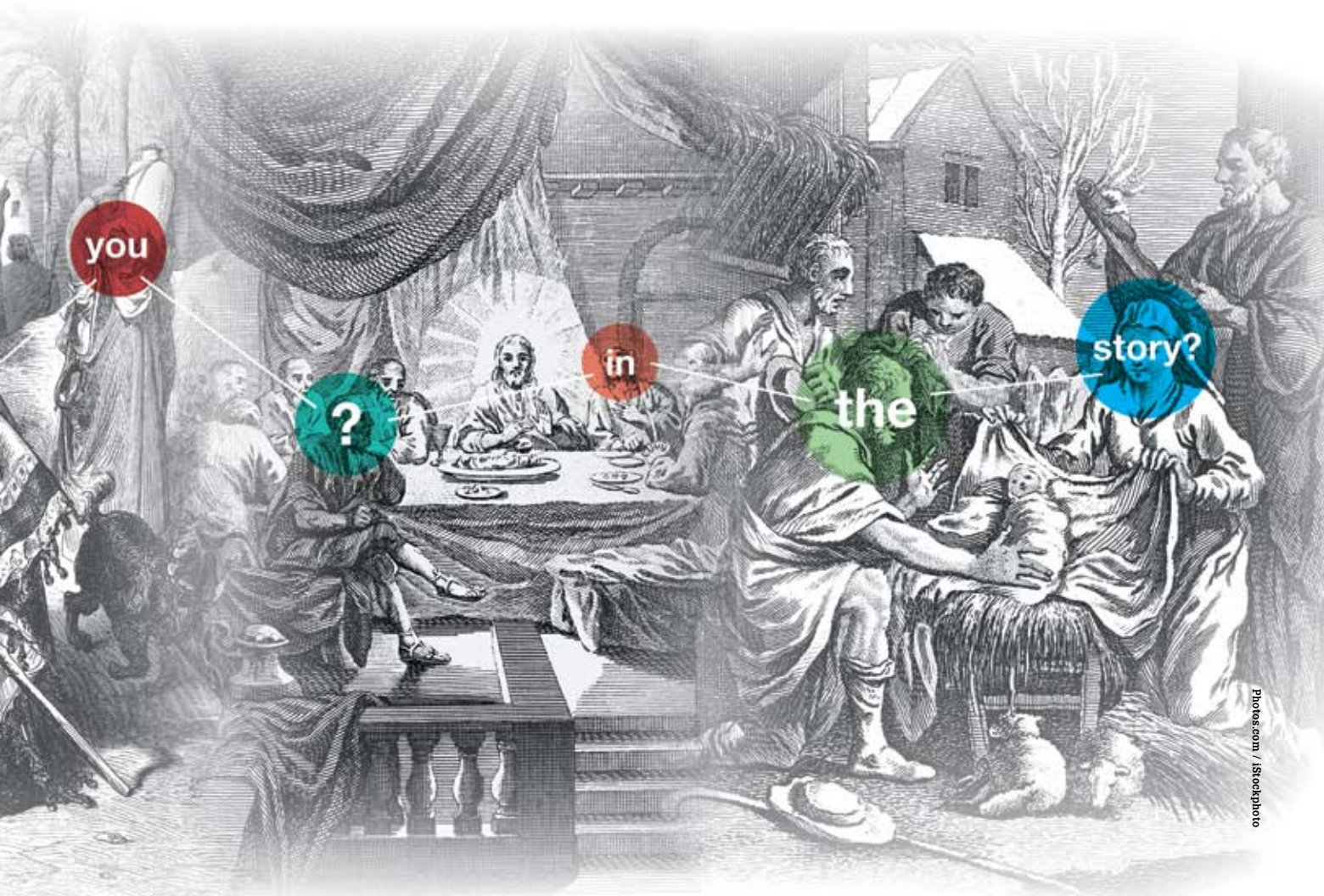
1. La Santa Biblia, Nueva Versión Internacional® NVI® Copyright © 1999 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.
2. John T. Seamonds, *Tell It Well: Communicating the Gospel Across Cultures* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1981), 12.
3. Frederick Buechner, *Listening to Your Life: Daily Meditations With Frederick Buechner* (New York: HarperOne, 1992), 327.
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Telling Stories and Asking Questions: **What Jesus Teaches Us About Preaching** By **Richard Foth**

God designed us to communicate in certain ways. Questions and stories are those ways.

A blend of Betty Crocker, Mother Teresa, and the CIA, the dean of women at Bethany Bible College 50 years ago was not part of an institution. She was an institution. Seventy-something May Swanson taught homiletics and the Book of Colossians, played matchmaker without apology, and — of most interest to me — had a unique collection of 33 1/3 long-play records of Dr. Peter Marshall, pastor of New York Avenue Presbyterian Church in Washington, D.C., preaching on Sunday mornings in the mid-1940s.



If I close my eyes, I can still hear that ringing Scottish burr, as Marshall began one of what he called his biblical newsreels: "It was a fine spring morning in Jerusalem during Passover week. The sky was powder blue and the birds sang a chorus to the sun, as Simon the Cyrene made his way down into the city crowded with Jews from every nation of the Mediterranean Basin. ..."

I would sit in her apartment by the hour listening to those imaginative stories. Only years later would I recognize that, on the backstroke, I was learning to preach by story.

One simple way to preach by story is to do what Marshall did: Take the core stories of the Scriptures and retell them, either as a character or an observer. To preach by story is to ask, "I wonder what he or she was thinking when such-and-such was happening? How had they happened into this scene? What produced the feelings expressed in the narrative?"

In a day of short attention spans and 140-character communiqués, when e-mailing and texting are happening as you speak on Sunday morning, what engages the listener? How about a question that your listeners cannot answer with a yes or no, or a phrase such as, "Once upon a time"?

A question or a story turns a monologue into a conversation and captures the imagination. Imagination is the key. Why? Because of what Einstein said: "Imagination is more important than knowledge because imagination has no limits."

When I read Jesus in the Gospels, His stories and questions raise the issues and make the points. We should not be

surprised. He was The Teacher and those were the practices of the culture and the day.

Yet, underneath it all is our *design*. God designed us, hard-wired us if you will, to communicate in certain ways. Questions and stories are those ways. Jesus knew that.

OUR DESIGN

In His culture, people often answered a question with a question. So, questions were the Petri dish from which many of His stories grew. And, both question and story have a common core: *information*. A question *gathers* information; a story *shares* information.

Questions are the most natural place we go in conversation. It is reflex. Whether it's the 2-year-old that forever asks "Why?" or the 32-year-old with a catch-in-the-throat waiting for a reply to "Will you marry me?" questions are the stuff of life.

Every culture uses stories to share history, to entertain, to educate, and to instill moral values. In the past, the one who told the stories often evolved into the group historian. We call the one who put stories to song in the Middle Ages a troubadour. With the advent of the printing press, things changed. But, storytelling never did.

That being said, how does the function of question and story inform our preaching? How might we think differently about the construction of a message?

Telling Stories and Asking Questions: What Jesus Teaches Us About Preaching

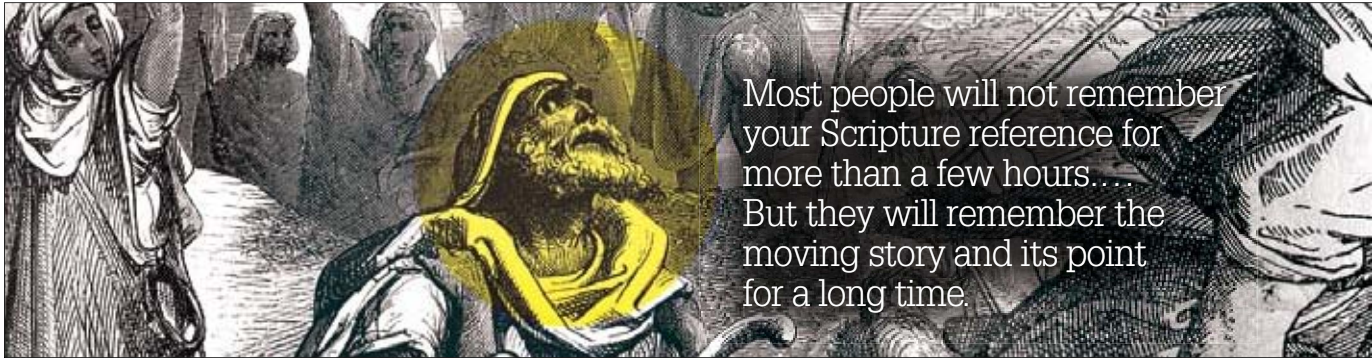
(continued from page 103)

If the point of a message is driven by, what my Wheaton Grad School professor Dr. Lois LeBar called, “The Big Arrow” (i.e. What do you want the listener to walk away knowing, thinking, and feeling?), how do we frame that message through question and story?

Ask a question to begin a message. Instantly, you engage me. To say, “Driving through town the other day, I had this thought: *Why does. ...? or What do you think was in God’s mind when He. ...?*”

different locales walk up and say, “I have never forgotten the story about so-and-so that you told in such-and-such a place, and I refer to it often.” Usually they are referencing a time more than 20 years ago.

Why do stories affect us so? Because we are all storytellers. It is our native tongue. Something we instinctively learn. Studies show we are able to tell stories at the age of 2. Jerome Bruner has documented how little children at this age, as soon as they can start to talk, show that they understand



Begin your thoughts with narrative. I am there. “The year was 1940. The Nazi blitzkrieg turned London into *Dante’s Inferno* every night. The ‘crump’ of bombs and the wail of air raid sirens drowned out the melodies of The Andrews Sisters. There was no way the British people could survive. Except for a group of young aviators who said no.”

Age makes no difference when a story starts. We are present. We are involved. We are connected. Why? Because storytelling is profoundly personal.

When you tell me a story, I catch your look, inflection, and tone. I hear pace and timbre and enunciation. When your voice softens, I listen more closely. You do not need to complete the sentence for me to get the meaning. You, in fact,

are an author. You are an audio book.

When I listen to preaching, the stories stick. Trust me, most people will not remember your Scripture reference for more than a few hours. For sure, they will not remember the points you have labored over for more than 48 hours. But they will remember the moving story and its point for a long time.

Within the past year I have had several people in

the stories that their families tell them, and they start to tell their own stories.

JESUS, THE STORYTELLER

That being said, we should not be surprised to find that the Author and Finisher of our faith employed questions and stories. He was born into an agrarian age. Peasant farmers were the order of the day. The country was quilted with hundreds of plots of land, where people on the lower rungs of society eked out their meager fare year in and year out. Most were illiterate. Their libraries were compilations of word pictures.

Their rabbis consistently used questions and stories as the heart of their pedagogy. It was a teaching style that synched with the listener’s world. Rabbis used common images — a field, a lamp stand, a sower, a loaf of bread. Markets and houses and fields and fishing boats were pictures in the book.

The most common form of story, of course, was the parable. A parable is a metaphor, which literally means to “carry across.” By definition it compares two things that are unlike each other, but implicitly have something important in common.

Madeline Boucher writes: “The importance of the parables can hardly be overestimated ... all of the great themes of Jesus’ preaching are struck in the parables. Perhaps no part of the Gospels, then, can better put us into touch with the mind of Jesus Christ than the parables.”

When I was a young pastor, I believed what professors told me both in college and seminary: “You do not get your theology from the narrative.” I no longer believe that. I have

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discovered the Kingdom through story.

Jesus is the master of story, and He chooses to present the appeal of His kingdom that way. His approach changes the landscape because He speaks of the kingdom of God, an invisible Kingdom that touches the native longing of the human heart. More than that, His kingdom challenges (and trumps) all my other kingdoms.

John Dominic Crossan notes: "Jesus was not proclaiming that God was about to end *this* world; but, seeing this as one



view of world, He was announcing God as the One who shatters *world*, this one and any other before or after it."¹

So, when Jesus spoke of the Kingdom in Matthew 13, it is very different from the Roman and Jewish kingdoms the listeners knew. Here comes the parable-picture: The Sower, Wheat and Tares, Hidden Treasures, Good Fish and Bad Fish. When He said, "The kingdom of heaven is *like*. ..." we are all ears.

The most compelling part of your preaching is the Jesus and His kingdom story in you.

When you think about it, the earliest disciples did not have John 3:16 to reference. All they really had beyond their Jewish roots was what they had experienced with Jesus. That is what they told those who would listen.

The story of your own journey is at its core biblical. So, a 2,000-year-old Zaccheus' story and your own 13-years-ago story are made of the same stuff. Randall Wallace, screenwriter of *Secretariat* and *Brave Heart*, recounts that as a small boy he had asthma. He says, "My grandmother would sit up and hold me at night when I had trouble breathing. She would tell me Bible stories and stories from her childhood.

Often, I couldn't tell the difference."

When we tell Kingdom stories, we tell the truth. Whether those stories are from the Scriptures or from our own or others' lives, we are truth-tellers. There is nothing the younger generations want more than the authentic, the real. Reality — the truth — sets everyone free.

When you use metaphor and story and questions, you create connections. So, when Jesus spoke, He created a photo album with His stories. I see pictures of people and settings with which I am familiar, and it attaches to another existing piece in my memory.

It isn't just that Jesus used stories to make a point, is it? He understands us so well that He used stories to jog prior memories and frame new memories. The iconic preacher/storyteller, Fred Craddock, Bandy Professor of Preaching at Candler School of Theology at Emory University, says that a story is a reminder of something else in one's experience. It causes someone to want to say something themselves, like, "I know someone just like that" or "I saw that yesterday."

Jesus used stories that expose both the heart of the Father and the heart of every man. In Luke 15, when He challenged the blindness of the Pharisees, He told three stories: The Lost Sheep, the Lost Coin, and the Lost Son.

He used common things — my work, my money, and my family — to make the point that whatever it takes to retrieve the "lost thing" is what we need to be about. In the future, the listener will have difficulty seeing a flock of sheep, paying for an item, or observing a young man without reflecting on the point that Jesus had made.



The beauty of Jesus' stories is that they allow for blank spaces. By simply asking the question in a message: "Who are you in this Bible story?" it pulls a listener toward the Kingdom. Years ago Karl Olsson wrote a book entitled *Find Yourself in the Bible*. It encouraged the reader to read the stories and find the character with whom he or she identified. Like, in the story of The Prodigal Son (or perhaps more aptly, The Gracious Father), who are you? The prodigal? The elder brother? The father?

Telling Stories and Asking Questions: What Jesus Teaches Us About Preaching

(continued from page 105)

You don't need to use a published book of stories to preach well. You need to observe life each day and form a takeaway. Your everyday encounters at the bank, gas station, or ballgame are all the wellspring for good preaching. Listeners identify with things they know.

That is certainly true of Jesus' questions. Some questions are, of course, garden variety: "What are you talking about?" "What do you want?"

Other questions push me much harder to my reason for being: "What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul?" (Mark 8:36,37). Jesus riveted the listener with His questions. We do not see many characters in the Gospel record just walking away.

A good question imbedded in a message should be like an apple pie baking in the oven. Once the scent catches me, I cannot shake it.

When you put that kind of question at the end of a message, it carries the impact into the next week. One of my favorite messages called "Who Cares?" is also by Fred Craddock. He describes counseling a woman who was disillusioned with the church and life. Her comment was that "clearly no one cares." He responded that he knew numbers of caring people. She asked, "Who?"

He closed his sermon with this question, "In the future, if I meet other people with your frustrations, may I give them your name?"

Finally, sometimes we have experiences in our lives that so illustrate the Kingdom story that it's easy to make an entire message out of it. Charlie White was one of those. He was chief of staff to a powerful United States congressman, leading the staff and managing the time and focus of the congressman. As a retired Navy submarine captain, he did it with an authoritative, but humble style.

His boss traveled the world to spearhead human rights endeavors; Charlie was his sidekick. His boss followed Jesus with his whole heart; Charlie followed his boss, but he wasn't buying the Jesus part. Not opposed, just not convinced.

When Charlie got terminal cancer and turned to Jesus, he did so without reservation. His life illustrated Jesus' response to people bringing little children to Him in Mark 10:13 (and Matthew and Luke, as well). The point of "except you become like a little child" is, I believe, absolute dependence on Jesus.

I saw that for all his experience, intelligence, and power, Charlie was a child. When I caught that fact, it became an entire message. Charlie's trust-curve over the last 6 months of his life was the main point.

On his deathbed Charlie's body was skeletal, but his child-like trust was fully fleshed out. We agreed to meet later at The Father's House. When I said, "You'll turn around a couple of times, Charlie, and the congressman and I will show up."

He grinned, and said, "I'll like that."

Days later we walked through a full-honors ceremony with flag-draped casket and horse-drawn caisson at Arlington National Cemetery.

Charlie, the child, was home.

More than once, when I have told that story in a church, a man walks up to me at the end of the service. He takes my hand, looks me in the eye, with tears in his, and says simply, "I am Charlie."

I ask, "What would you like?"

He says, "I want to do what Charlie did."

We pray. The lost sheep is found. The lost coin is recovered. And the lost son comes home.

The stories of Jesus challenge my view of life itself. The questions of Jesus inexorably call for me to give up my life and choose His.

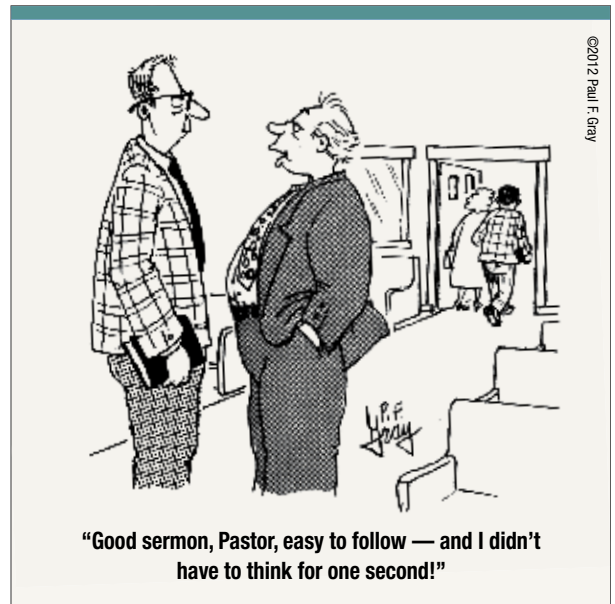
So, here's the deal: How do you want to tell the Kingdom story to your congregation this weekend? ☒



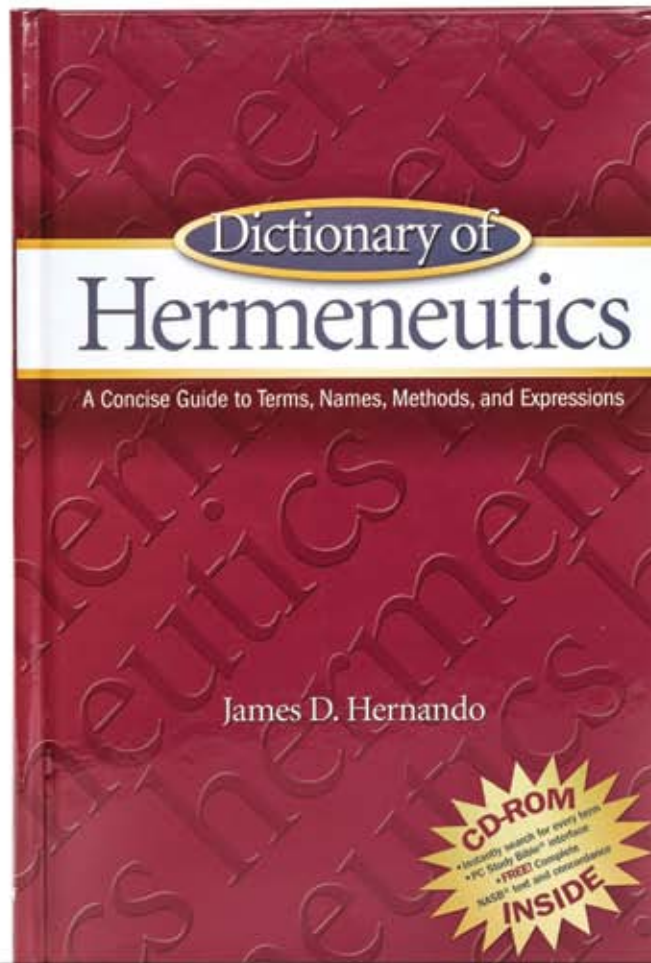
RICHARD FOTH, Fort Collins, Colorado, serves on the pastoral teaching team at Timberline Church. He also continues to work with political and business leaders in Washington, D.C.

Note

1. John Dominic Crossan, *In Parables: The Challenge of the Historical Jesus* (New York: Harper and Row, 1973), 27.



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What does responsible rhetoric in the service of Christ look like?

We Preach Christ Crucified: **Rhetoric** in the Service of Jesus Christ

By **Deborah M. Gill**

As contemporary preachers, we use the tools of rhetoric to communicate the Word of God clearly and effectively to our hearers. In doing so, however, we risk relying on our own wisdom and power rather than God's. How can Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 1:18–2:16 help us avoid this risk and keep hearers' attention focused on Jesus Christ? After all, people today often use rhetoric in popular speech as a description of communication intended only to impress, or speech that is lacking in sincerity or meaningful content. Empty rhetoric refers to pomposity, extravagant, bombastic language; i.e., hot air.

Are we arguing for unscrupulous, coercive communication in the service of Christ? Absolutely not! Such disingenuous use of language to manipulate people is not the original sense of the term.

WHAT IS RHETORIC?


Although the term holds a negative connotation to many, *rhetoric* refers to the art of persuasion studied as an ancient discipline as early as the 5th century B.C. Many consider Plato and Aristotle the fathers of modern rhetoric. Aristotle defined rhetoric as “the art of discovering all the available means of persuasion in a given situation.”

Broadly speaking, rhetoric is communication; and, more specifically, it is “the use of symbols in communication” to “understand, engage, and relate to another.” These three activities are prerequisites to persuasion in preaching: understanding, engaging, and relating to another.

Dr. Joy Qualls, assistant professor of Rhetoric and Communication at Evangel University, reminds us, “Humans are the only members of creation with the power to create a substantial part of their reality through the use of symbols. ... When we change the symbols we use to frame an event, our experience is altered.” Qualls continues, “God did not use thought or actions to create the world. Scripture states that God spoke creation into existence, and He remarked on each portion of creation. As beings created in the image of God, I would argue that the symbolic use of language to engage in rhetoric is God-given. *God is the ultimate Rhetorician*, and we are engaging Him when we engage in the process of symbol creation and understanding.”¹

RHETORIC IN SCRIPTURE AND CHURCH HISTORY

Rhetoric, then, involves all that goes into convincing an audience. Unlike our contemporary culture, which is text-based — texts and texting are ever present in this Internet age — the cultures of the biblical world were oral cultures. Both the original Hebrew and Greek texts of the Bible contain many rhetorical devices designed for hearing, such as rhythm, rhyme, alliteration, etc. With a literacy rate of between 5 and 20 percent in the Roman era, and with written texts extremely expensive to produce, all ancient peoples (whether literate or illiterate)



As contemporary preachers, we use the tools of rhetoric to communicate the Word of God clearly and effectively to our hearers.

preferred the spoken word to the written word. It is not surprising then that Jesus said so many times in the Gospels and in the Book of Revelation, not “Whoever has eyes, let them see” but, “Whoever has ears, let them hear.”

The New Testament shows how seriously the founders of the Church took the Great Commission as a commitment to convince. Not only do Jesus’ sermons and the speeches in Acts reveal evidence of rhetoric; but also, because the writers of the New Testament’s documents intended for church leaders to read them aloud — usually to a group — they too contain the same elements of oral persuasion. Ben Witherington explains in his new book, *New Testament Rhetoric*, “oral conventions more shape the so-called epistolary literature of the NT than epistolary ones.”² For example, Paul composed his New Testament letters as discourses for designated representatives of the apostle such as Timothy, Titus, or Phoebe to deliver orally in a rhetorically effective manner to particular audiences. Paul’s education, both as a Pharisee and a Roman, qualified him to present rhetorical speeches and letters comprised of rhetorical addresses. From their use of the rules of rhetoric, Witherington explains it is clear that all the NT writers were well educated: they were among the top 5-10 percent of first-

century society in terms of education.

Averil Cameron’s landmark study on Christianity and rhetoric,³ demonstrates how the small, marginalized group of Christ-followers, whose religion demanded exclusive devotion to Christ, not only survived, but also prevailed over the pluralistic culture of Rome. While ancient Christian writers attribute all the glory for this growth to God, it is also clear how effective their rhetoric was. They powerfully preached the truth, and God used this to set the captives free.

Patristic preachers considered the New Testament authors to be their mentors in the rhetorical arts. From Early Church history through the Middle Ages, while contextualization also contributed to communication, Christian discourse continued on the course of its original trajectory based on Greco-Roman rhetoric. Numerous Reformers (e.g., Melancthon) were rhetoricians. Witherington argues there is a place for rhetoric today. “The modern rhetoric of preaching would do well to learn much from the ancient preaching of rhetoric.”⁴

PAUL'S CASE AGAINST RHETORIC?

By comparing Luke's narrative of Acts 17–18 with Paul's confession in 1 Corinthians 1–2, some attempt to argue that Paul made a paradigm shift in his preaching — rejecting rhetoric — and cite 1 Corinthians 1:18–2:16 as Paul's defense of his new position. They claim that when Paul was in Athens on Mars Hill, he preached with the eloquence and wisdom of the Greeks. Having had such small success using the classical methods of communication, however, Paul changed his approach in Corinth (they claim); and that from then on the apostle abandoned oratorical approaches for a demonstration of the Spirit and power (cf. 1 Corinthians 2:1–5).⁵ The intended implication of the argument is that we should do the same: reject rhetoric and embrace the anointing instead.

This either-or argument, however, is not grounded in truth. On the contrary, the scriptural record contains evidence proving that while in Athens and in Corinth (and thereafter) the apostle Paul was a both-and preacher: making his best case with rhetoric while making much space for the Spirit.

- From Luke's historical record note first Paul's use of rhetoric in Athens was not as a replacement for powerful preaching and the Spirit's work. Instead of quoting pagan poets, Paul quoted Scripture and declared the gospel with power. Furthermore, experiencing any success among the Areopagus audience was a miracle — proof that the power of the Spirit was active in that communication event as a most-essential element in those aristocratic Athenian converts coming to faith.
- Second, Paul's use of rhetoric in Athens was not as a substitute for or denial of the supernatural. Paul's Mars Hill message did not involve any compromise, theologically speaking. Though he knew it would be an offense to his sophisticated listeners, Paul boldly declared — even in that intellectual context of philosophers — the greatest demonstration of God's power: the resurrection of Christ.
- Third, even in Corinth (and after), the apostle continued using rhetoric. The

apostle's testimony of his initial preaching in Corinth (1 Corinthians 2:1–15, the passage cited as proof of Paul's rejection of rhetoric) is full of rhetoric. "Paul here disapproves of mere rhetoric, but his own writing, including 1 Corinthians, displays extensive knowledge and use of rhetorical forms."⁶ "Paul knew the right place of persuasive argument in proclaiming Christ: at Corinth he had 'dialogued'

in the synagogue week by week, 'persuading both Jews and Greeks' [Acts 18:4]. But he personally discounted the effectiveness of persuasive speech *by itself* in bringing about faith in Jesus and life-transforming knowledge of God" [emphasis added].⁷ Placing the Pauline Epistles in chronological order proves Paul's continued use of rhetoric and rhetorical devices long after his ministry in Athens.

- Paul never rejected rhetoric as evil; but, he knew it was not enough. He was a both-and communicator, proving in practice that *preaching deserves our best efforts, but demands God's supernatural involvement*.

What, then, is the point of 1 Corinthians 1:18–2:16? The whole passage is an argument for the superiority of true wisdom over false, i.e., the wisdom of God over the wisdom of this world. Paul identifies some of the characteristics and limitations of the world's wisdom (i.e., the human way of trying to reach God): it sounds eloquent; it seems plausible (Jews



seek for a sign; and Greeks for wisdom); but, it is empty and ineffective; and it endangers the message of the Cross. The wisdom of God, however, is seen in the message of the Cross (1:16–25); the method of God (1:26–31); and the ministry of the Spirit (2:1–16). Crucifixion and humility contradict cultural wisdom, yet the Holy Spirit "explains spiritual realities with Spirit-taught words."

PAUL'S CASE FOR RHETORIC

First Corinthians 1:18–2:16, therefore, is not Paul's case against the use of rhetoric. But we can see in 1 Corinthians 9:19–23 the apostle's strong case for rhetoric in the service of Christ. If rhetoric includes all that goes into convincing an audience, then we see how committed Paul was to rhetoric. The goal of preaching is infinitely and eternally important, for "what is at stake is not simply the failure or success of human persuasion, but [one's] eternal destiny."⁸ Paul's fundamental philosophy in ministry was to discover the methods, which combined the greatest integrity with the greatest impact.⁹ First Corinthians 9:19–23 shows the great lengths to which Paul was willing to go to persuade his hearers to accept Christ. His rhetoric was not limited to words and logic; he used *all*

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means. The apostle's use of the adverb, πάντως, in his statement of purpose: "that by all possible means I might win/gain/save some," is reminiscent of Aristotle's definition of rhetoric: "discovering all [the available] means to persuade." Paul's rhetoric transcended mere words; just like the Savior's, the apostle's whole life was an incarnational witness.

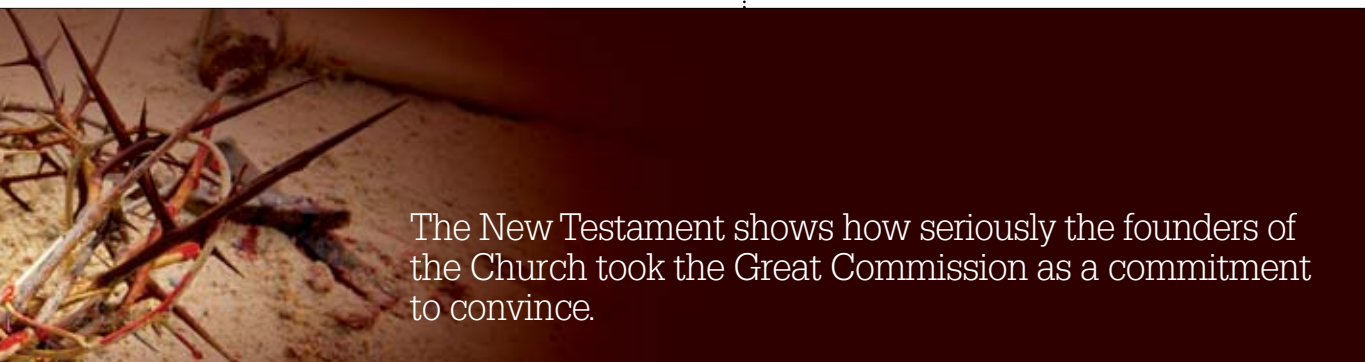
In the Classical Period, people understood rhetoric as the art of effective and persuasive speaking; and, as those speeches become recorded, rhetoric encompassed persuasive writing. People understand rhetoric more broadly today — not limited to written and spoken discourse. Rhetoric includes non-discursive or nonverbal symbols. Rhetoric can be: speeches, essays, conversations, poetry, novels, stories, comic books, and websites; but rhetoric can also be television programs, films, art, architecture, plays, music, dance, ads, etc. The list is endless. We can consider a variety of media as rhetoric, and we can employ this media rhetorically in the service of Christ.

what is stirred within them. These three proofs are excellent means of persuasion. What, of all the possible means of rhetoric, are you incorporating in the service of Christ?

RESPONSIBLE USE OF RHETORIC

Rhetoric is powerful. Although we traditionally consider effective rhetoric as admirable and desirable, empty rhetoric has become a terrible turn-off in our time. William Penn noted slippage toward this pejorative sense early in 1693 as some of his contemporaries were "using the truth and beauty of rhetoric for iniquitous purposes."

Persuasive communication has great power; thus, people use it for a multitude of purposes. The Nazi propaganda machine, much of American advertising, and many politicians and spin doctors are guilty of targeting God with their communication purposes that do not bring Him glory, but does that make persuasion evil? No.



The New Testament shows how seriously the founders of the Church took the Great Commission as a commitment to convince.

At one time, the "Transmission Model" explained the process of rhetoric as: a "Sender" transmitting messages to a "Receiver" [S > R]. This incomplete model viewed communication as a one-way process in which the speaker is active and the audience passive. Someone later enhanced this model by adding the Receiver's feedback to the Sender and by acknowledging the presence of "Noise" affecting the transmission and reception of communication both ways. Today's "Rhetorical Model" is much more complex: recognizing also the differing contexts of the sender and of various receivers in an audience, and that the interaction among them is a continuous loop. What can we learn from this new understanding of rhetoric? Communicating the gospel is not just about the preacher's "transmission"; that's a great place to start, but there's much more involved.

The editors designed this *Enrichment* journal on preaching around what Aristotle called "the three proofs of rhetoric": *logos*, *ethos*, and *pathos*. We could restate these ancient Greek concepts for today's preacher as three Cs: (1) **content** — organization of the argument to demonstrate its truth; (2) **credibility** — effectiveness of the message based on the believability of the speaker; and (3) **connection** — emotional/relational relevance of the communication, since listeners become convinced by

What does responsible rhetoric in the service of Christ look like? It recognizes that communication is God-given — part of the image of God in us; and, it seeks to understand, engage, and influence others in loving ways that please our Creator. It recognizes that the good news is all about Jesus; and it seeks to spotlight the Cross, without compromising its costliness to Christ or to us, as His disciples.

Responsible rhetoric in preaching recognizes the ultimate importance of its goal — the eternal salvation and entire transformation of souls for the glory of God; it is willing to discover and employ all available means to persuade; yet it humbly acknowledges the absolute necessity of a demonstration of the Spirit and power to convince. Thus, the preacher is careful with content — leading God's truth out of Scripture; the preacher connects with the audience — walking the truth into their hearts; and the preacher is conscientious in life — to be a credible witness of God's Word.

Saint Augustine, Bishop of Hippo, born in A.D. 354 in Roman Africa (present-day Algeria), was a leading professor of rhetoric prior to his conversion to Christ. When asked whether Christians could use secular rhetorical theory in proclaiming the gospel, he replied: "Yes. Secular theory could be used and

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We Preach Christ Crucified: Rhetoric in the Service of Jesus Christ

(continued from page 111)

should be used to proclaim the gospel." He said, "A good Christian speaker should emulate the speakers of the Bible as they have the most effective preaching style." In 386, he wrote *On Christian Doctrine*, which applied Cicero's rhetoric to preaching. In it Augustine spells out his ideals for a Christian rhetorician.

What is responsible use of rhetoric in the pulpit? Augustine challenges each of us, be:

a Defender of the Faith
an Enemy of Error, and
an Expositor of Scripture. ☐



DEBORAH M. GILL, Ph.D., professor of biblical studies and exposition, Assemblies of God Theological Seminary, Springfield, Missouri. For resources and biographical information, go to www.agts.edu/faculty/Gill.html.

Notes

1. Interview with Dr. Joy Qualls, assistant professor of Rhetoric and Communication, Evangel University, Thursday, May 10, 2012, Springfield, Missouri.
2. Ben Witherington, III, *New Testament Rhetoric: An Introduction Guide to the Art of Persuasion in and of the New Testament* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2011), 4. See also chapters. 1, 2, 5.
3. Averil Cameron, *Christianity and the Rhetoric of Empire* (Los Angeles: University of California, 1991).
4. Witherington, 239.
5. More than 50 years ago Barclay presented this view with missionizing zeal: William Barclay, *The Letters to the Corinthians*, rev. ed. The Daily Study Bible Series (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1954), 23–25; and more recently Joseph Pathrapankal uses the same perspective on this passage to argue in favor of religious pluralism: Joseph Pathrapankal, "From Areopagus to Corinth (Acts 17:22–31; 1 Corinthians 2:1–5) A Study on the Transition From the Power of Knowledge to the Power of the Spirit," *Mission Studies* (2006) 23.1: 61–80.
6. Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*, Accordance electronic ed. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1993), loc cit.
7. David Prior, *The Message of 1 Corinthians: Life in the Church*. The Bible Speaks Today Series, NT Series ed. John R.W. Stott, Accordance electronic ed. (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1985), 41.
8. *Ibid.*, 159.
9. *Ibid.*, 160.

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TO ILLUSTRATE

CLOSER TO GOD

To encourage your listeners in serving the Lord, use a true illustration of how humans can develop a strong desire to find God. Vincent van Gogh, the great Dutch painter, developed an intense desire to see God.

He first looked for God in the Bible and through his preparation for the ministry.

Still searching, van Gogh worked in the midst of poor Flemish miners and weavers. He learned and found that he could see the God he sought everywhere — in nature and in every living thing. God, for van Gogh, was the miracle of life itself. Despite the suffering his own life brought him, van Gogh became absorbed in the sheer wonder of life. This is what leaps out from the genius of his paintings and drawings.

Christ offers the power for living in today's uncertain world. He is changeless. He is the same Christ today as He was when He walked the dusty roads of Galilee. His love for us is the same, and He can bring good out of change. He is the Christ of eternity.

Marcus Bach, in *The Will to Believe*, tells of the great need today for the will to live what we profess: "To love and not hate; to build and not destroy; to be true to one's highest ideals at a time when ideals may not seem to matter much; to have the faith that in all, and around all, and above all, is God who is just and true. That is exercising the will to believe in our time."

DON'T GIVE UP

Close your eyes, plug your ears, and you will have a small idea of what it is like to live in a sightless and soundless world. It is difficult to grasp the full meaning of this because you know you can see and hear.

There was no such assurance for Helen Keller. In her dark and silent world, her soul cried out: "Light — give me light." She found this light, and with it, the will to become one of the great women of the 20th century.

Keller faced obstacles almost from the start of life. She lost her sight and hearing when she was 19 months old. Doctors called it a "congestion of the brain and stomach." People in Keller's era labeled the blind and deaf as idiots. Yet, Keller became a legend.

There was something within Keller; she was unwilling to give up, but this desire needed to be aroused. The person who changed Keller's life was Anne Sullivan Macy, who came to the Keller home to work with young Keller. Presenting Keller with a doll, Sullivan took Keller's hand and manually spelled the word *doll* on to it. This was the first word Keller had ever felt. She had forgotten the few words she had known before her illness. Keller was fascinated, but only because she thought it was a game. She was confused by what *doll* meant.

Some time later, Sullivan and Keller were at a water pump. As the water rushed over Keller's fingers, Sullivan kept spelling *water*. In a few moments, Keller understood and started spelling the word back. Wild with excitement, she then wanted the name for pump, flowers, and especially Sullivan, her teacher.

Keller inspired the world not to give up. Her lifetime example inspires us to not stay down for the count. Like the hit song *Pick Yourself Up* says, "I pick myself up, Dust myself off, Start all over again."

— PERRY WILBUR, Ponte Vedra, Florida



GENEROUS GIVING

Standard of Giving

Giving is the antidote to greed and consumerism. Those who share with others demonstrate they are successfully resisting greed and a consumer mentality. They are more interested in raising their standard of giving rather than raising their standard of living. In his book, *Jesus and Money*, Ben Witherington tells of his grandparents who were "profoundly committed Christians, dedicated to serving others even when they had little." During the height of the Depression, his grandfather gave \$6 a week to the poor and indigent at a time when his firefighter salary was only \$20 per week. Of his grandfather, Witherington, proudly says: "He did not allow his culture to determine his approach to money, wealth, work, remuneration, and the like. He sat lightly with possessions, and never felt compelled to shop until he dropped. He gave sacrificially not only to his church but to many others as well."

— VICTOR PARACHIN, Tulsa, Oklahoma



Helen Keller

LESSONS FROM THE WORD

SECOND MILE PEOPLE

How do you feel when someone does something for you above and beyond what you expected? Do you feel special, loved, treasured?

In Matthew 5:41, Jesus taught the principle of the second mile — doing more than what is required



or expected of us. This saying is hard because we, like the Jews of the first century, live in a 1-mile world. It is a world of rights and responsibilities; a world of basic criteria, minimum standards, and “looking out for No. 1.” Even the

media, movies, and video games are weighted with “reciprocity” for an injustice.

What does it mean to “go the second mile”? It means to rise above the instinctive desire to “strike back,” or “get even.” It means to swallow pride and abandon self-interest. It means to be slow to anger and quick to forgive. It means going beyond what is expected.

Going the second mile has the power to change us and those around us. We need to practice being second milers in our jobs, family duties, church, community service, and relationships. We do this because God acts like this toward us (Ephesians 3:20; Romans 5:8).

Strangely enough, I find that most of God’s blessings come in the second mile. Though the first mile is crowded, the second mile is not. Jesus went the second mile for us. So let’s go the second mile for someone today, and let the love of Christ change the hearts of both of us.

— **PATTI ANN THOMPSON**,
Kansas City, Missouri

THE CHURCH THAT WORKS

WHAT DOES A HEALTHY BOARD MEETING LOOK LIKE?

A healthy board meeting is a reflection of a healthy pastor-board relationship. This means regular times of praying for and with one another. A healthy pastor-board relationship involves fellowship inside and outside the boardroom.

The bond between the pastor and board members calls for mutual respect, candor, and confidence. Cultivating these elements will result in healthy, productive sessions.

A healthy board meeting gives first priority to fervent prayer. It is God’s work, and we can only do His work in the flow of His Holy Spirit. Second, the meeting itself needs to foster fellowship with time to care for one another.

Third, the pastor casts vision, then he or she and the board work toward a Spirit-guided development and implementation of this vision. As the pastor shares in an atmosphere of intercession and fellowship, the deacons can add their insights. Pastors and board members are not adversaries. The various points of view inherent in their gifts help flesh out and finalize the vision.

Next, the pastor and board explore how best to move forward in God’s leading. Board members should begin to take responsibility for parts of the vision according to their gifts, abilities, schedules, and skills. The discussion becomes a distribution of authority.

It is necessary to manage church finances but not to talk about money all the time. Adopt an annual church budget, and then stay on track with monthly summaries and detailed quarterly reports. Taking care of church business is just one of the things you do. Your purpose is mission, vision, direction, and health for the church.

— **MEL SURFACE**, Alvarado, Texas, and **RICK DUBOSE**, Hurst, Texas
Adapted from *The Church That Works* by Rick DuBose and Mel Surface



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UPWORDS

Sufficiency Syndrome

I taught myself to play the guitar. I began with a guitar I received as a prize for selling vegetable and flower seeds to my neighbors. My prize guitar was constructed of painted cardboard. I did, however, eventually manage to pick out Tom Dooley on one string. Seeing my desire to learn, my parents gave me a real guitar, which cost \$12.95. Over the years, as my skill level improved, I obtained better and better guitars.

There came a day, however, when I became satisfied with the skill level I had achieved. I was playing rhythm guitar in a local band. I could sing and accompany myself pretty well. I even had moments of teenaged glory as girls in the audience screamed and clapped wildly. Sadly, in my immaturity, this satisfied me and I became infected with *sufficiency syndrome*. Consequently, I never came close to achieving my potential as a musician.

In my Christian walk I have also faced the temptation to be satisfied. After all, I am saved and going to heaven, why should I exert myself further? The Bible is clear: the Christian walk consists primarily of working, building, and seeking “first his kingdom and righteousness” (Matthew 6:33). To spur us to action and avoid the onset of *sufficiency syndrome*, the Spirit continually urges us to “press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called [us] heavenward in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:14). As long as we press on, our spiritual skills will

improve because, in Christ, we have unlimited spiritual potential.

— JACK AIKEN,
Eagle River, Alaska



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EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

WHY DO I NEED TO BE RIGHT?

The need to be right is the source of conflict between men and women, friends, families, communities, churches, and workplaces. Discussions become a competition, a verbal tug-of-war. I perceive it, but I can't let it go. Just one last comment, one more tweet. My desire for the last word becomes an endless series of “one more” responses. These running battles become significant, but the real problem arises when I alienate and offend. Sometimes it is the person with whom I am debating, but observers get caught in the waves as well.

Clearly it is important to figure out the right answer. But, in the end, it is more important to communicate, be connected, and honor the relationships God has brought into my life. Here are six suggestions I have found helpful:

1. **Understand the other person's perspective first.** Stephen Covey says, “Seek first to understand, then to be understood.”
2. **Value relationships** more than information, data, or opinions.
3. **Bear with one another in love.** Treat others as you would want to be treated
4. **Choose your battles carefully.** Some hills are worth fighting for — some are not.
5. **Let go of your need to feel superior.**
6. **Beware of “either right or wrong” perceptions.** Sometimes there really are only two sides of a matter — black-and-white literal principles of God's Word. But frequently it is helpful to allow for God's creative differences that reside in the personalities and callings of others.

— PATTI ANN THOMPSON, Kansas City, Missouri

APP-LY

LIFE APPLICATION STUDY BIBLE



"Apps" for smart phones and tablets have become available for almost anything — from silly games to sophisticated news sources. Bible resources have entered the market, with Bibles, reference products, devotionals, and more. Recently, the top-selling study Bible became available in an app. The *Life Application Study Bible* (Tyndale House) has sold approximately 22 million copies in its various versions (currently available with NLT, NIV, NKJV, KJV, and NAS) and has been translated into 44 languages. To put this into perspective, the next study Bible on the best-selling list has sold 10 million copies.

The *LASB App* is currently available for iPhones and iPads, with more platforms to follow. Half of the screen contains the Scripture, with the study notes filling the other half. At a bottom corner of the screen is an unobtrusive button. When touched, it reveals a thumbwheel to use for accessing specific passages. This can be a challenge for large fingers (especially on the phone), but it's much better than using a drop-down menu and typing in the desired reference. Alongside the Bible text are small buttons for cross-references. When touched, those verses pop onto the screen. You also can access extras, such as book introductions, maps, outlines, and more. The concordance lets you find a word in the text.

Other features include a journal for writing personal notes about passages, selectable fonts with adjustable sizes to make it easier to read, and a text-comparison tool.

When opening this for the first time, a tutorial explains the app and walks users through it. While a bit pricey for an app (\$30), it's well worth the cost.

— DAVE VEERMAN, Naperville, Illinois

GROWING LEADERS

PROVERBIAL INTAKE

The Book of Proverbs contains over 1,000 passages providing tips and instructions for attaining the abundant life God designed for us. If you have spent any time reading these pearls of wisdom, you have realized they can be motivating and entertaining. They can also be difficult to apply in our everyday walk with God.

Even though Proverbs 1:2-7 teaches us the basic premise on what to expect from this book, we still need a system to maximize the effectiveness of each verse.

When I wake up each morning I open my Bible to the chapter of Proverbs corresponding to that day of the month. After reading this chapter, I select the verses God has led me to. I highlight them in my Bible and write them on an index card. I carry the card with me throughout the day so I am prepared to apply the teaching as needed.

Before bed, I review the card and recall my day. Did I apply any of the verses? If so, I note them on the card. If not, I try again tomorrow using verses from the next day's chapter.

As with any new endeavor, it will take 45 to 60 days of continuous effort to develop the routine. It is the small daily steps that accomplish the greatest achievements in life. Get started today and you will be amazed with the results.

— JAMES L. CASTELLANO, Emmaus, Pennsylvania

SERMON SEED

THE CHRISTIAN WAY

TEXT

"Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry" (James 1:19).

INTRODUCTION

Christ has set an example by His gracious manner toward His fellowmen. His ear was always open to the voice of His Father and also to the words of needy people who came to Him with their troubles. He was very patient, reserving His wrath for that which was evil.

MESSAGE

1. **Be swift to hear.**
 - a. "Listen to my instruction and be wise; do not disregard it" (Proverbs 8:33).
 - b. "The Sovereign Lord has opened my ears; I have not been rebellious, I have not turned away" (Isaiah 50:5).
2. **Be slow to speak.**
 - a. "But I tell you that everyone will have to give account on the day of judgment for every empty word they have spoken" (Matthew 12:36).
 - b. "Set a guard over my mouth, Lord; keep watch over the door of my lips" (Psalm 141:3).
3. **Be slow to wrath.**
 - a. "Human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires" (James 1:20).
 - b. "Encourage the disheartened, help the weak, be patient with everyone" (1 Thessalonians 5:14).

CONCLUSION

There is a way of life that seems right because it is popular, but Jesus said the crowd can be wrong (Matthew 7:14). The man or woman who lives the Christian way, walking in the footsteps of Jesus, will find it is the way that leads to eternal life.

— ESTELLA JACOBS HARE, Elkins, West Virginia

For more Sermon Seeds, go to enrichment journal.ag.org/Sermon_of_the_Week.cfm.



It's Not Just Sunday Morning at 11



Hemera

As Americans fill their schedules with all sorts of activities, many houses of faith are trying to accommodate service times beyond the typical Sunday morning. One out of 10 people attending services now goes on a day other than Sunday, according to the *Faith Communities Today* report FACTs on Worship: 2010. Two percent of Americans (primarily Jews and Muslims) attend religious services on Friday while 8 percent go on Saturdays as a growing number of Protestants join the Catholics, Seventh-day Adventists, and Jews who traditionally meet then.

Still, Sunday morning remains the most popular time for a service. In all, 54 percent of U.S. congregations hold one Sunday morning worship gathering. In addition, 16 percent of churches conduct two Sunday morning services while 4 percent have three or more services. The survey indicates that 16 percent of congregations meet on Sunday evenings.

Most congregations, 59 percent, hold only one weekend service. But 27 percent have two, 9 percent conduct three, 3 percent hold four, and 2 percent are running five or more services every weekend.

Nearly half of the nation's congregations are small — 27 percent have 50 average attendees or less while another 22 percent have between 51 and 100 members show up weekly. There are between 101 and 250 in the pews in 28 percent of churches and from 251 to 500 in 13 percent. Churches with 501 to 1,000 gathered each week comprise 6 percent of the total while 4 percent have 1,000 or more in attendance, FACT reports.

Attendees have no trouble finding a place to sit in most meetings. The median average attendance at U.S. church services is 105, although the median seating capacity is 225. Only 12 percent of leaders said their facility did not have as many seats as necessary. Finding a place to park poses a bigger problem for congregations, with one-third reporting a shortage of spaces for vehicles.

Among 27 faith traditions surveyed by FACT, the Assemblies of God ranked 16th in median average attendance with 89 at a typical service. Catholics had the highest average, 567. The AG ranked first in the category of innovative and contemporary worship reported by 51 percent of congregations. That outpaced second-ranked historically black denominations and third-place nondenominational churches.

REPORT DETAILS WHO WORKS AT AG CHURCHES

The FACT report shows that 76.8 percent of AG churches have a full-time paid leader and 14.1 percent have a part-time paid leader. The rest are serving without remuneration, 6.4 percent on a full-time basis and 2 percent part-time. The leaders are overwhelmingly male (93.7 percent) and credentialed (93.4 percent).

The wide-ranging decennial *Faith Communities Today 2010* (FACT) survey published recently provides interesting insights into the workforce in place at Assemblies of God churches in the country.

Regarding education level attained by AG lead pastors, 5.5 percent have a doctorate, 16.6 percent a master's degree, and 40.8 percent a college bachelor's degree. Also, 26.3 percent have an associate's degree or have attended a technical school or some college. Among pastors, 9.3 percent have just a high school diploma or a General Educational Development certification.

The majority of AG churches, 59 percent, have one full-time paid credentialed professional staff (including the pastor), although 14.4 percent have none. A total of 13.1 percent of AG congregations support two full-time credentialed staff members, 6.1 percent three, 1.7 percent four, and 4.4 percent five.

BILLIONS AT RISK IF CHARITABLE DEDUCTIONS ELIMINATED

As a financially strapped nation looks for new ways to raise revenue, one increasingly tempting target on the radar screens of some lawmakers is eliminating the tax-deductible charitable contributions made by millions of Americans.

The tax break for donating to charities — including offerings to churches — has long been an untouchable benefit for those who itemize their deductions. Legislatures have realized the overall benefit to society that results when people make generous contributions to such ministries as homeless shelters, pregnancy care centers, and soup kitchens. But as the national debt and budget deficits continue to escalate — and as the nation becomes less religiously observant — discussions of either reducing or eliminating deductions for charitable contributions happen more frequently.



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Most Americans surveyed by Grey Matter Research believe such a government move would decrease giving to nonprofit organizations, although they themselves say their donations would remain the same. Nearly two-thirds of Americans polled by the Phoenix-based company predicted that charitable giving would decline if the deductibility is abolished. Results varied little among Democratic, Republican, and independent voters.

However, the older the respondent, the more likely the belief that cutting charitable deductions would result in a lot less giving. Among those 65 and older, 77 percent foresee a precipitous drop in donations without tax benefits, compared to half of those under age 35. Of those who gave more than \$500 annually, 42 percent see a drop-off compared to one-third of those who gave less than \$500.

Only 11 percent of those who itemize think their own household giving will decrease a great deal if charitable deductions are eliminated, while 24 percent say their donations would go down a little. A sizable majority, 61 percent, say such a proposed change would not alter how they would help charity.

Grey Matter Research President Ron Sellers says there are around 12.5 million U.S. households in which people typically itemize charitable deductions that would decrease giving if such a law passes. He says \$29 billion is at risk annually in charitable contributions from these households that donate more than \$2,300 each to nonprofits yearly.



AG EXPERIENCES CONTINUED GAINS AROUND NATION

ties in seven states where the AG is larger than any other reporting denomination: Christian County, Mo.; Stephenson County, Ill.; Loup County, Neb.; Wheeler County, Ore.; Sierra County, Calif.; Kitsap County, Wash.; and Eaton County, Mich. There are an additional 70 counties where the AG is the largest reporting Protestant group: four in Alaska, three in Arizona, 12 in California, four in Colorado, two in Hawaii, four in Idaho, one in Missouri, three in Montana, two in Nevada, one in New Jersey, one in New Mexico, two in New York, one in Ohio, 10 in Oregon, one in Pennsylvania, three in Texas, three in Utah, 12 in Washington, and one in Wisconsin.

Unsurprisingly, there are the most AG adherents in the most populous state, California: 348,747. Texas is second with 275,565, and Florida third with 246,270. Washington, by some measures the least Christian state in the nation, has the fourth largest number of AG followers with 125,005. Arizona is fifth with 123,713. Other states with more than 100,000 in the Fellowship are: Illinois (119,747), Missouri (117,904) and Pennsylvania (106,689).

The fewest number of AG adherents are primarily in New England states. Vermont has just 2,330 people who consider the Assemblies of God to be their church home, followed by the sparsely populated Wyoming at 4,419. Rhode Island has 4,666, New Hampshire 4,740 and Delaware 5,720.

Texas ended the decade with the most AG churches, 1,322, followed by California at 1,260, Florida with 688, New York at 522, and Oklahoma with 497. On the other end of the scale, there are only 16 AG congregations in Delaware, 23 in Vermont, 31 in Rhode Island, 39 in New Hampshire, and 42 in Utah.

Note: The statistics listed in this article represent the data as processed by ASARB. For official Fellowship data, visit www.ag.org.

The recently released 2010 U.S. Religious Census: Religious Congregations & Membership Study shows that the Assemblies of God continued steady growth around the country in the first decade of the century.

The once-a-decade county-by-county report, sponsored by the Association of Statisticians of American Religious Bodies (ASARB), indicated that the Assemblies of God had the largest numerical gains among adherents for any reporting Christian group in eight U.S. states between 2000 and 2010: Minnesota, Illinois, Missouri, Pennsylvania, Florida, Massachusetts, Connecticut, and Rhode Island.

In addition, there now are seven coun-

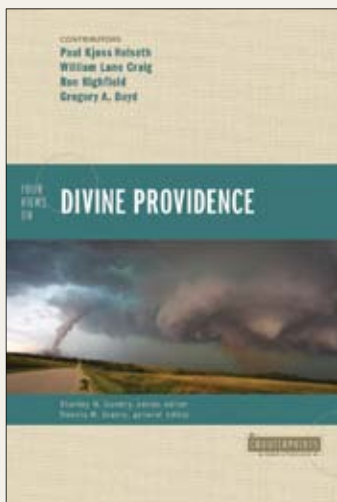
Nearly half, 49.1 percent, of AG churches have no part-time credentialed professional staff, but 36.7 percent have one, 10.1 percent have two, and 4.1 percent have three. In addition, 14.3 percent of churches have a full-time paid administrative professional staff person and 5 percent have two such employees. Nearly one in 10 churches, 9.6 percent have a full-time paid lay program staff person and 2.4 percent have two such hired people. One in four churches has a part-time lay staff member, 7.4 percent have two, and 3.7 percent have three part-time lay staff.

Most congregations, 54.6 percent, have no full-time paid clerical staff. But 29.2 percent have one full-time paid clerical staff member, 9.2 percent have two, and 4.6 percent have three. More

than one-third of AG churches do not pay part-time clerical staff, but 42.2 percent have one part-time paid clerical staff person, 16.3 percent have two, and 2.2 percent have three.

Almost two-thirds of congregations, 64.8 percent, go without full-time paid custodial help, but 26.7 percent employ one janitor full-time, and 6.7 percent have two full-time custodians. More than one in five AG churches, 21.4 percent, has no part-time janitor making wages, but 60.7 percent have a part-time paid custodian, 14.5 percent have two, and 2.6 percent have a trio of part-time paid custodial staff.

Note: The statistics represented in this article represent survey data. For official Fellowship data, visit www.ag.org.



FOUR VIEWS ON DIVINE PROVIDENCE

DENNIS JOWERS, WILLIAM LANE CRAIG,
RON HIGHFIELD, GREGORY BOYD,
and PAUL K. HELSETH

(Zondervan, 272 pp., paperback)

lenging, but he offers traditional theology without determinism. Craig is an Arminian, and his views are compatible with most Pentecostals.

Boyd is the most radical of the writers. Using the human life of Jesus as his starting point, he suggests that God does not absolutely know the free actions of human beings. True free will means that human beings are totally responsible for their choices. God is not caught by surprise, for His knowledge and wisdom enable Him to fulfill His purpose with or without the cooperation of people. This is an “open theist” position.

These issues are important for spiritual leaders. Defending the faith to the skeptical means affirming the providence of God and holding each person responsible for his or her actions. Pastoral care involves helping believers trust God in the midst of great trials. Part of spiritual maturity is learning to hold two or more biblical truths in dynamic tension with each other.

This is a good book for serious students of the Bible and theology who want to get beyond the clichés and see how intelligent leaders wrestle with serious issues. Craig’s arguments will resonate the most with non-Calvinists. Boyd’s apologetic passions and focus on Christ’s human experience keep him from considering scores of Scriptures that point to God’s total knowledge of all things. Helseth and Highfield will appeal to readers that value worship over apologetics.

— Reviewed by Charles E. Self, Ph.D. associate professor of Church History, Assemblies of God Theological Seminary, Springfield, Missouri.

The providence of God is one of the most comforting and challenging doctrines for Christians. Belief in God’s sovereignty and ultimate control over all creation and all events is an axiom of the faith. Uniting this conviction with the circumstances of life is difficult, especially when a natural disaster or traumatic event strikes that is not the direct cause of one’s personal actions.

Throughout history, apologists, theologians and ordinary people have sought to reconcile a high view of divine providence — the belief that all things occur within the ultimate plan of God — with the conviction that God is never the direct cause of human sin (James 1).

There are many ideas connected with the idea of providence: God is all-knowing, all-powerful, and moving history toward the fullness of the Kingdom. God is the creator of space and time. God is infinite and personal, transcendent, and engaged with humankind.

In this work, four Bible-believing, devout followers of Jesus Christ offer their understanding of how God’s providential activity works. All four writers agree that God is transcendent. They reject any notions of equating God with the world (pantheism) or the world as some kind of subset within God (panentheism). All authors agree that the Bible is inerrant and the final authority for faith, that God intervenes in history, and that humans can (sometimes) see God’s work in both natural and miraculous events. Each author responds to the arguments of the others with humility and respect.

The authors disagree, however, on the nature or extent of God’s omniscience (being all-knowing of past, present, and future events), human freedom, and the origin of evil.

Helseth presents classical Calvinist (Reformed) theology with clarity and unabashedly declares that God is the ultimate cause of all things. The problems of evil and reconciling human freedom and divine providence are secondary to the high view of God that Scripture affirms.

Highfield offers a view close to Helseth but with greater focus on the biblical emphasis on future restoration. God is not the direct cause of specific sins, but He has ordained all events to work together to bring about His ultimate plan.

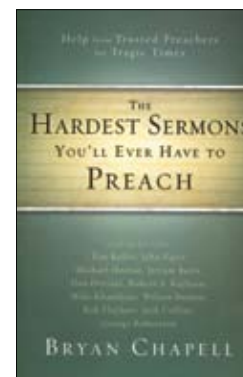
Craig’s complex philosophical argument affirms that God knows all things actual and possible and that humans have real free will at the same time. For the average reader, Craig is challenging, but he offers traditional theology without determinism.

The Hardest Sermons You’ll Ever Have to Preach: Help From Trusted Preachers for Tragic Times

BRYAN CHAPPELL (Zondervan, 296 pp., paperback)

How does a minister learn to preach a meaningful sermon in the midst of tragedy? In many cases, we learn these lessons more easily from examples than from explanations. Bryan Chappell shares several model sermons from his experience as a pastor and teacher of preachers, as well as from several other highly regarded ministers, including: Tim Keller, John Piper, and Michael Horton. Chappell rightly maintains preachers can trust God despite the tragedies of life because Jesus proved His love for people by dying on a cross for their sins.

Five parts make up the book: the first on tragedies, the other four on various types of difficult funerals to preach. Each chapter begins with a brief overview of the situation, concerns, and approach.



In Chapell's sermon on abortion, he insightfully reminds his hearers God cares about all children of creation, including mothers who abort and doctors and nurses who assist them. Christians must treat both babies and adults as precious in God's sight. Another of Chapell's sermons is for a murder victim who once lived with Chapell's family.

Chapell possesses a gracious demeanor that matches his gospel declaration. He has the knack for speaking the right words in the right way.

The main objection of this book is the Calvinism that flavors the entire volume. At least one sermon references the rite of infant baptism. The doctrine of eternal security underpins several critical assumptions made by the various preachers. With its overemphasis on God's sovereignty, some preachers attribute individual deaths more to the will of God than to human free will and its consequences. The book does mention several valid reasons for not believing everyone who commits suicide goes to hell.

The book includes two appendixes — one on suggested sermon texts for various tragedies and the other a bibliography of recommended resources — and a Scripture index. This book is of immense help to pastors provided they are aware of its Calvinistic undertones. Chapell models the right pastoral tone and homiletical approach for the inevitable difficult sermons every preacher will preach sooner or later.

— Reviewed by **Steve D. Eutsler, D.Min.**, adjunct professor of Bible and practical theology, Global University, Springfield, Missouri.

Preach: Theology Meets Practice

MARK DEVER and GREG GILBERT

(Broadman & Holman, 224 pp., paperback)



Some recent questions on a few ministers' Facebook forums have centered on "What type of sermons do you preach: expository, topical, or textual?" or "Do you use a preaching calendar to outline your sermon topics?"

These are good questions, but the wide variety of answers caught me by surprise. Answers ranged from those who preach expositionally and use a long-range planning calendar to map out their sermon texts to those who pick up a Bible on Saturday night and pray they get a message from the Holy Spirit to share with their people on Sunday morning.

For both of these groups and all in between, *Preach: Theology Meets Practice* is a great read. Mark Dever and Greg Gilbert take the complex topic of expository preaching and make it easily digestible. The book's conversational tone makes it an easy read as Dever and Gilbert dialog about how they manage their preaching calendars and the methods they use in expository preaching.

The authors divide the book into three parts. The first part

presents a theological case for preaching God's Word. Dever and Gilbert explain why preaching is important. They then lay out the case for expository preaching through the Bible.

The second part of the book discusses the mechanics of an expository sermon. The authors cover what is necessary to build a sermon from what to preach to how to review what they preached.

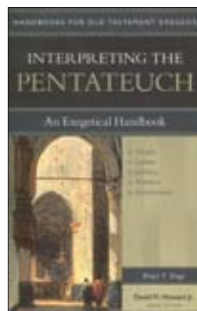
The third part of the book discusses one of the least-used methods by preachers — reviewing the sermon after they preach. Dever and Gilbert take sermons they have preached and review the sermon with each other. The comments they make cause the reader to think about the value of sermon review.

Preach: Theology Meets Practice is a great addition to every preacher's library.

— Reviewed by **George LeFevre**, former executive pastor, Cibola, Texas.

Interpreting the Pentateuch: An Exegetical Handbook

PETER T. VOGT (Kregel, 214 pp., paperback)



***Interpreting the Pentateuch* is not just another exegetical handbook** but rather an excellent summary of the principles and characteristics of the Pentateuch. The chapters are: 1. Genres (law and narrative); 2. Major Themes (sovereignty of Yahweh, seriousness of sin, grace, and the integrative concept of restoration as metanarrative); 3. Getting Started (textual criticism, ancient Near Eastern parallels, and tools); 4.

Interpreting (unity and diversity, law and narrative); 5. Communicating the Genres (law and narrative); 6. Putting It All Together (an example of a legal text and one of a narrative text). I resonated with many of Vogt's points and concepts and his way of expressing them. His footnotes show use of many of the best sources on the issues.

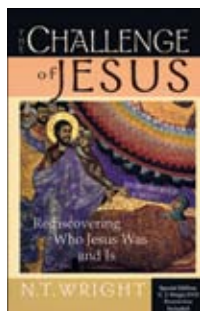
Most students of the Scriptures will benefit from the clear, accurate, and insightful understanding of the laws of Moses that Vogt provides. He puts them in the context of a helpful overview of church history and current views of the Old Testament Law. His explanation of the relationship to the Christian is one of the best. Vogt's instruction on the nature of the Bible narratives is also helpful to the modern reader. The author's understanding of biblical Israel expressed in this book will open up the Old Testament to all who read it. I found Vogt effectively explained every subject for the busy pastor or inquiring layperson.

I hope potential readers who do not relate to academic terminology will not be put off by the title, particularly the subtitle. For its length, this is one of the best introductions to the study and understanding of the Pentateuch.

— Reviewed by **Roger Cotton, Th.D.**, chair Bible and Theology Department, Old Testament professor, Assemblies of God Theological Seminary, Springfield, Missouri.

The Challenge of Jesus: Rediscovering Who Jesus Was and Is

N.T. WRIGHT (InterVarsity Press, 204 pp., hardcover with accompanying DVD)



This is a new edition of Wright's seminal work from 1999. The text is unchanged; what is new is an accompanying DVD. Though the content is not new, Wright's importance and subsequent writings make this work, a summary of his views on the search for the historical Jesus, a good introduction to this former Anglican bishop's method.

Wright believes we can only understand the historical Jesus by placing Him within the thinking and expectations of the first-century Jewish world. By doing this, we discover a Jesus consistent with His time and not a product of a later Gentile church.

This is the kind of theology that pastors can read profitably. It is a serious read, but not too dense. While Wright does repetitiously bog down occasionally in chapters 2-5, stick with him, because the payoff is in chapter 6: "The Challenge of Easter." Here everything ties together in how the Resurrection both fulfills and goes beyond first-century expectations. For in all of his use of Jewish thought, Wright recognizes the incredible newness of the gospel through Jesus.

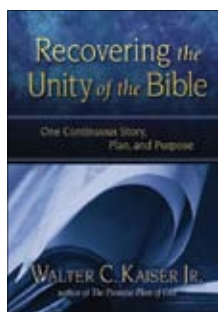
Chapters 7,8, while not central to his thesis, which wraps up neatly in chapter 6, is a nice addition. In them, he attempts to recast the story of Jesus in a postmodern telling.

The accompanying DVD is well done. Wright discusses the evidence for the Resurrection and its theological importance. Filmed on location in Israel, this is not a Josh McDowell approach, but is much more thoughtful and thought-provoking. It would make the basis for a Sunday School or sermon series on the Resurrection.

— Reviewed by Bob Caldwell, Ph.D., theologian-in-residence at Network 211 and professor of Bible and Theology at Global University, Springfield, Missouri.

Recovering the Unity of the Bible: One Continuous Story, Plan, and Purpose.

WALTER C. KAISER (Zondervan, 256 pp., hardcover)



Kaiser upholds the idea that the Bible presents one continuous story, plan, and purpose. To support his claim, he presents the role of biblical theology throughout church history with an emphasis on the unity of the Hebrew Bible, the New Testament, and the Bible as a whole. He then presents a biblical theology of messianic promises, God, the morally offensive character and acts of Old Testament people, the people of God, the kingdom of

God, the promise-plan of God, the law of God, and the doctrine of salvation. Kaiser finishes with discussions on the unity of the missionary

message in the Old Testament, the unity of the Bible and hermeneutics, and the unity of the Bible and expository preaching and teaching.

Kaiser uses a grammatical-historical approach to weave through these topics with clarity. He addresses challenging topics along the way that tend to promote division within the body of Christ. For example, he differentiates between what the Bible reports versus what it approves, presents the relationship among the Synoptic Gospels and the Gospel of John, expresses the difference between Paul of the Book of Acts and Paul of the Epistles, and identifies the role of redemption and salvation in the Old Testament.

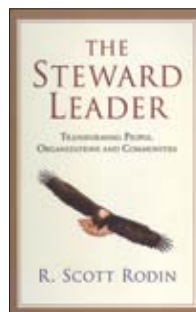
On the other hand, Kaiser disregards and attempts to negate the value of understanding the socio-historical-cultural backgrounds of the biblical authors and their initial recipients without giving a solid reason for doing so. If he would have taken these aspects into positive consideration, he might have concluded that the socio-historical-cultural aspects and the hermeneutical approaches available to the authors and recipients of the biblical time period further his perspective rather than diminishing it.

Any minister, student, or layperson interested in biblical theology or in understanding how the Old Testament relates to the New Testament from a linguistic and grammatical approach should read this book.

— Reviewed by Alaine Thomson Buchanan, Regent University Ph.D. candidate, Ewa Beach, Hawaii.

The Steward Leader: Transforming People, Organizations, and Communities

R. SCOTT RODIN (InterVarsity, 199 pp., paperback)



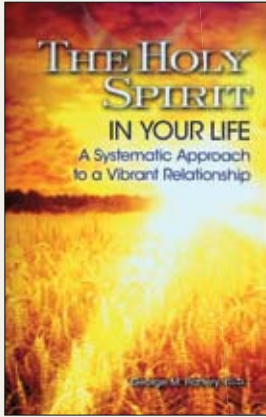
R. Scott Rodin, president, Eastern Baptist (now Palmer) Theological Seminary offers a perspective on leadership that goes beyond how to be a leader by presenting leadership from the biblical perspective of stewardship. Rodin encourages the reader to think of leadership more in terms of becoming involved in the work God is doing in the world and in the leader himself.

The Steward Leader centers on who the leader is rather than on what or how things are done. Consequently, the leader's relationship with God is the starting point for success in leadership. The calling and anointing of God coupled with an attitude of submission and service toward God are essential for the leader to benefit the organization he or she serves. A healthy relationship with God allows the leader's relationship with self to produce a confidence in self and purpose. Finding purpose in God allows one to invest in the lives of others and live in harmony as caretakers of creation. The author sees these relationships with God, self, others, and creation effecting four corresponding transformations and trajectories that must take place as one lives out the life of a steward leader.

It is refreshing to see a book on leadership that focuses on the character of the leader and on the leader's relationships rather

The Holy Spirit in Your Life: A Systematic Approach to a Vibrant Relationship

GEORGE M. FLATTERY (*Network211*, 157 pp., paperback)

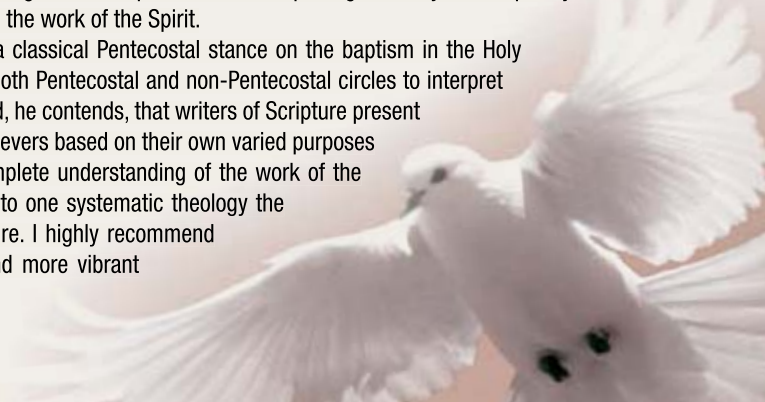


Dr. George M. Flattery, long-time missionary and founder of ICI University and Network211, believes that one's relationship with the Spirit involves every aspect of a person's life. In *The Holy Spirit in Your Life: A Systematic Approach to a Vibrant Relationship*, Flattery presents a comprehensive study on the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer. The book is a condensation of his earlier three-volume *A Biblical Theology of the Holy Spirit*.

While the book has many commendable features, one of particular interest to me is the way Flattery insightfully addresses the different pneumatological emphases of each New Testament author. He contends that, in describing the personal work of the Spirit in believers' lives, John, Luke, and Paul exercised a much greater flexibility in their use of terms than do their 21st-century interpreters. These biblical authors often spoke of different works of the Spirit using the same or similar terminology, including such much-debated terms as "receiving" or "being baptized in" the Holy Spirit. According to Flattery, an understanding of this simple fact could help mitigate many contemporary arguments concerning the work of the Spirit.

While maintaining a classical Pentecostal stance on the baptism in the Holy Spirit, Flattery believes there has been a tendency in both Pentecostal and non-Pentecostal circles to interpret the work of the Spirit too narrowly. We must understand, he contends, that writers of Scripture present many dimensions of the Spirit's work in the lives of believers based on their own varied purposes in writing. According to Flattery, to obtain a more complete understanding of the work of the Spirit in the believer's life, one must bring together into one systematic theology the unique understandings of all of the authors of Scripture. I highly recommend this book to anyone wanting to enter into a fuller and more vibrant relationship with the Holy Spirit.

— **Reviewed by Denzil R. Miller, D.Min.,**
director, Acts in Africa Initiative



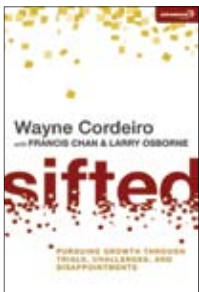
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than on the how-to of leadership. Rodin calls leaders to a closer, more disciplined walk with God out of which will flow a more servant-based leadership style. The author clearly believes leaders who are transformed by the power of God develop cultures, people, communities, and organizations that are also transformed by the power of God.

— **Reviewed by Michael D. Evans, pastor, First Assembly of God,**
Ellsinore, Missouri.

Sifted

WAYNE CORDEIRO with FRANCIS CHAN and LARRY OSBORNE
(Zondervan, 208 pp., paperback)



***Sifted* addresses the difficult seasons in ministry** and how leaders can or should approach them. *Sifted* not only gives readers an excellent way to approach difficulties, but it also demonstrates how to draw closer to God in difficult times. The authors look not only at difficulties due to failure or inadequacy, but also from the standpoint of difficulties associated with success.

The textual basis for *Sifted* is Luke 22:31,32. The authors define sifting as: "Coming to that moment when our strength is spent. It is a process that forms new character tearing away old perspectives and putting fresh new truth in its place. Former habits are discarded and wrong tendencies abandoned." The author provides a road map for successful navigation through our challenges and difficulties in ministry.

Cordeiro divides *Sifted* into three sections: Heart Work, Home Work, and Hard Work. Heart Work is the place where sifting begins. Home Work addresses the need for rest and balance in ministry and the importance of taking care of self and family as we walk in our calling. Hard Work deals with developing the character to work hard to be prepared for our seasons of sifting.

Scattered throughout the book are places to stop, reflect, and respond to the things you are learning as well as illustrations of different points from the life experiences of the authors.

Sifted is a great read for all pastors. At one time or another, whether in success or struggle, we will be sifted. It is a must read for all church planters. Much of the book speaks to church plants from the author's church-planting experience.

— **Reviewed by Paul DiGregorio, lead pastor,**
Bethany Christian Center, Bath, Ohio.

Donald R. Armstrong
Evansville, Indiana

Roger K. Banks
Des Moines, Iowa

Clarence E. Barr, Sr.
Carlinville, Illinois

Leo R. Barrans
Juneau, Alaska

Louise Barrett
Martinsburg, West Virginia

David T. Bartlett
Rochester, Minnesota

Facundo Benavidez
Santa Fe, New Mexico

Eugene A. Born
Marysville, Washington

Elsie Boze
Monticello, Indiana

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Atkins, Arkansas

Lloyd E. Clark
Hartford, Alabama

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Fairfield, California

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Arlington, Texas

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Springfield, Missouri

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Springfield, Missouri

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Salt Lake City, Utah

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Arthur W. Schmidly
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Virginia Shepherd
Greensboro, Florida

B.R. Shipp
Bedford, Texas

Vera M. Slater
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Grady Lee Sowell
Rossville, Georgia

Myra N. Thomason
Lexington, North Carolina

Betty D. Todd
Nixa, Missouri

Florence T. Tracy
Costa Mesa, California

Dorothy Weyandt
State College, Pennsylvania

Kenneth I. Wright
Garland, Texas



Monkey Business

MEGA Sports Camp® **Breaking Free** Features New Sport

Gospel Publishing House releases **MEGA Sports Camp Breaking Free**, the 2013 theme in the do-it-yourself sports outreach. Geared for first through sixth grade, the new theme lets kids choose from soccer, basketball, cheerleading, baseball, and a new one — flag football.

The MEGA Sports Camp program gives kids on-the-field experience and skills, making it a unique VBS alternative. *Outreach Magazine* declared it “Best Children’s Outreach Resource” two different years. In fact, churches usually report a 51 percent guest rate and 20 percent salvation response.

Pulaski Assembly of God in Pulaski, Tenn., saw even greater results. Their Sunday morning attendance runs 48. Here’s how they described their experience: “Last summer at MEGA Sports Camp we had 42 decisions for Christ. We’ve never seen anything like this at VBS.”

Churches choose to do MEGA Sports Camp outreaches for VBS, missions trips, back-to-school kick-offs, and Saturday camps. Sessions include group Rally Times with interactive worship and Bible stories.

MEGA Sports Camp Breaking Free features Bible stories about Gideon, Adam and Eve, and Peter. The theme verse is “Let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus” (Hebrews 12:1,2).

In addition, stories about athletes like football player Tim Tebow, baseball player Mark McGwire, and Olympic snowboarder Shaun White apply Bible lessons to life.

Lisa Olmstead Davis, a MEGA Sports Camp user, declared, “What an amazing week we had with MEGA Sports Camp. We had 25 of our own church kids attend, and 38 from the community. It’s an awesome way to reach the unchurched.”

For more information, visit www.MEGASportsCamp.com or call 1.855.642.2011.



SECURING THE FAITH FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS

A Digital Initiative to Produce New Christian Education Resources

Producing new, creative training materials for churches to use for discipleship and training is one of the major initiatives of Assemblies of God Trust, led by Dr. George O. Wood, general superintendent of the Assemblies of God and chairman of AGTrust.

AGTrust’s “Securing the Faith” campaign, in partnership with My Healthy Church, is an effort to create new, digital, Christian education resources for training children in Sunday School and children’s church.

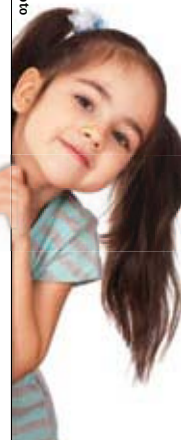
“For some time now, churches have been asking us for tools like these to help teachers capture the attention of their children and disciple them,” says Dr. Wood. “This project is by far the greatest, one-time investment we have made in the development of curriculum in our Fellowship’s history. I pray that God will speak to people throughout our Fellowship who will want to help support this digital initiative and be a part of securing the faith for future generations.”

Working together with digital development specialists, the Research and Development team at Assemblies of God National Leadership and Resource Center is committed to developing high-tech, high-touch Christian education resources for teaching and discipling children in God’s Word. The resources will utilize technology kids and leaders enjoy, without omitting the value of human interaction.

Speaking to the importance and timeliness of the AGTrust digital initiative, Mark Entzminger says, “Kids today are consumed with technology. They are what we call digital natives. One of the first languages they learn to speak is the digital language. Therefore, it’s imperative for us to be able to present the message and the truth of God’s Word in a way they will receive and understand it.” Entzminger is senior ministry business director of Children’s Ministries for the Assemblies of God.

To watch AGTrust’s Securing the Faith online video, which gives a preview of a few of the many kinds of digitized resources being developed, go to www.AGTrust.org.

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Cebuano Fire Bible Marks 39th Language Edition



The Assemblies of God Bible Alliance has produced the *Fire Bible* in 39 language editions during the past 12 years, with more than 7 million copies distributed in countries around the world.

The Cebuano *Fire Bible* is the most recent language edition produced by AG Bible Alliance. Approximately 20 million Filipinos live on Cebu Island and speak the Cebuano language. The Cebuano *Fire Bible* is the second language edition produced by AG Bible Alliance for the Philippines Assemblies of God. The first language edition Bible produced was the Tagalog *Fire Bible*, completed in 2004.

Today, the Assemblies of God work in the Philippines numbers more than 14,000 churches and 650,000 members and adherents.

The *Fire Bible* is the most widely translated and distributed study Bible ever produced, according to international Bible societies. This Pentecostal study Bible, with notes that emphasize the work and person of the Holy Spirit, is helping to fuel the flame and provide doctrinal purity for the Pentecostal revival that is sweeping the islands of the Philippines and the world.

A total of 26 additional *Fire Bible* language editions are in development and/or production at this time. To see a list of *Fire Bible* editions completed and in development, go to www.BibleAlliance.org.

U.S. MISSIONS CANDIDATE ORIENTATION

Just as Jesus commissioned early Christians to reach out to Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria,

and to the four corners of the earth, U.S. Missions is dedicated to reaching

America for Christ. Today we embrace the same commission.

U.S. Missions hosts two orientation sessions each year for new missionary candidates who share this same missional vision. Candidate orientation consists of interviews, training, evaluation, and preparing candidates for the emotionally and spiritually trying aspects of missions work. The week concludes with a candidate launch service. For more information, contact Paul Curtis at 417-862-2781, ext. 3269.

SPRING ORIENTATION:

March 16–22, 2013

FALL ORIENTATION:

September 21–27, 2013



Sustain Hope is a Christ-centered, best-practice approach to improve lives through community-initiated sustainable solutions. As we consistently and compassionately share the message of Jesus Christ alongside the local church, we spiritually, physically, and socially impact lives. Sustain Hope provides a holistic response to the felt needs within individuals and their communities.

Partnering with local missionaries and responding to the identified initiatives of national churches and communities, Sustain Hope provides on-site consulting, research, training, assessment, program design and evaluation.

Sustain Hope is working with several missions entities. At Global Teen Challenge Jamaica (GTCJ), GTCJ and Sustain Hope are working together on a business/

farm plan, including greenhouses and other agricultural techniques. GTCJ's goal is to become more self-sustaining.

In El Salvador, where cooking fuel often costs more than food, Sustain Hope partnered with AG missionaries Victor and Lynn Diaz in training Royal Rangers leaders to construct fuel-efficient rocket stoves. At the Good Shepherd Bible School in Djibo, Burkina Faso, Sustain Hope trained students in water filtration, solar cooking and dehydrating, and agricultural techniques. In Suva, Fiji, South Pacific Bible College, future national missionaries received training from Sustain Hope in many of these same areas so they, too, can reach out with the compassion of Christ to the nations.

For more information, contact: Sustain Hope, P.O. Box 8374, Springfield, MO 65801; phone: 417-866-1292; E-mail: info@sustainhope.org; www.sustainhope.org. Visit Sustain Hope's website: www.sustainhope.org or on Facebook, www.facebook.com/SustainHope.

Need help?

Confidential phone counseling is available free to Assemblies of God ministers and their immediate families living in the U.S. Call **HelpLine** at **1-800-867-4011** (Monday–Friday 11 a.m.–5 p.m. EST).

Life Publishers' goal is to provide 1,500 pastors and church planters in Myanmar with a Burma Pastor's Tool Kit of training materials in the Burmese language.



LIFE PUBLISHERS HELPS PRODUCE BURMA PASTOR'S TOOL KIT FOR MYANMAR

Myanmar (also known as Burma) is a country of about 50 million people in mainland Southeast Asia. China, Laos, Thailand, Bangladesh and India border it.

Church leaders from the Assemblies of God of Myanmar recently asked Life Publishers for help in producing a Burma Pastor's Tool Kit of training materials to help equip Burmese pastors and church planters in that nation.

"If we had these tool kits, they would be very helpful to us," says one of the AG district superintendents in Myanmar. "With better training, we could double the church in 10 years."

Several Assemblies of God missionaries ministered in Myanmar from 1947 to 1966, when all had to leave due to political upheaval. But they had established a strong, indigenous AG fellowship that continued to grow in the midst of turmoil. Today, Myanmar has about 1,300 Assemblies of God churches and more than 250,000 members.

The church has survived and thrived. The Burmese pastors are courageous and full of faith, but many of them lack biblical training.

Life Publishers' goal is to help produce and provide at least 1,500 Burmese pastors with the starter library (a Burma Pastor's Tool Kit) that addresses four areas of urgently needed training: Pentecost, stewardship, discipleship, and preaching. Each kit includes 10 contextualized ministry textbooks (study materials that every pastor should have) and a *Fire Bible*, all in the Burmese language; and an MP3 player with the 10 textbooks included in oral format for pastors who are illiterate.

For 65 years, Life Publishers, a ministry of AG World Missions, has come alongside missionaries and national churches like the one in Myanmar and assisted them by publishing and distributing *Fire Bibles*; evangelism, discipleship, and ministerial training materials; and Christian education curriculum in many languages. For more information, go to www.LifePublishers.org.

NEW ASSEMBLIES OF GOD ONLINE GIVING SITE



The Assemblies of God National Resource and Leadership Center recently launched a newly retooled online giving site at giving.ag.org. The site offers contributors time-saving new features while incorporating the best functions of the former site.

Donors who make a faith promise commitment to support a missionary can do everything online. Donors can add a new

missionary, increase giving, make a special one-time gift, set up automatic monthly giving on a credit card — even access the information on a mobile phone.

Other features allow donors to manage giving online through an account summary, print annual giving receipts, and make one-time gifts for special projects and disaster appeals. With the proper information, the donor's church also receives giving credit. Plans are under way to offer more features in the upcoming months.

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Preaching

By **James T. Bradford**

In her book, *When God Is Silent*, celebrated preacher and author Barbara Brown Taylor describes a rather awkward family conversation: “My sister Kate, who — like me — did not grow up in the church, began attending one after her son Will was born. Trying to downplay my delight but eager to talk to her about it, I asked her one day which service they attended. ‘Neither one,’ she said. ‘We just go to Sunday School and then we go home.’”

When I asked her why, she told me how they *had* gone to church at first, and how she had sat there Sunday after Sunday listening to the preacher vent his spleen at God’s enemy of the week — alcohol, the lottery ... Santa Claus — until she felt as if she had been beaten with a stick. ‘One day,’ she said, ‘I stood up in the middle of the sermon, put my hands over Will’s ears, and led him out of the church. Now we just go to Sunday School, and we’re all a lot happier.’”

A lot is at stake when we preach. People’s eternal destinies are in the balance. Our task as preachers is to holistically exegete both the text and our audience. In doing so there is certainly room for prophetic, anti-sin preaching. But for preaching to be life giving and life transforming, it needs to do better than leave people either beat up or off the hook.

What was the apostle Paul’s take on effective preaching? “For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. ... so that your faith might not rest on human wisdom, but on God’s power” (1 Corinthians 2:2,5). Paul was probably not the

most gifted of public speakers, a fact his critics seemed all too eager to point out. But he contended that preaching centered in “Jesus Christ and him crucified” sets people up for an encounter with the living God himself.

It starts with “Jesus Christ” — who He is, His kingdom rule, and who we are *in Him*. Winston Churchill possessed a vision of the glory of the British Empire. By the outset of World War II, however, the British people shared no such visions of grandeur. They were discouraged, demoralized, and desperately unprepared to fight. Yet Churchill’s courageous leadership and soaring rhetoric lifted the British people to prevail over seemingly insurmountable odds.

How did he do it? According to Oxford philosopher Isaiah Berlin, Churchill idealized the English people “with such intensity that in the end they ... began to see themselves as he saw them.” In so doing, he “transformed cowards into brave men.” This is the preaching task.

We proclaim a kingdom whose King, the Christ, is supreme. *In Him* we are citizens of the age to come, no longer of this world. As people begin to see themselves as Christ sees them, cowards turn into brave men.

But the story does not end there. Evil is real, sin is powerful, and habits are stubborn. Some things need to die in our lives before freedom can come. It is therefore “Jesus Christ and him crucified.” Whether the subject du jour is tithing, sexual purity, prayer, marriage, obedience, or the Great Commission, the King along with His cross is where Spirit-encountering preaching ultimately needs to take us.

Early in my preaching life I felt such pressure to be relevant that I started focusing primarily on applied principles and self-help human performance. In the process I lost track of the gospel itself. One day I sensed the Holy Spirit convicting me that I had preached for months without mentioning Christ’s cross — even once. Yet it is “Christ crucified” that sources the Resurrection well-spring of lasting life change, not my talent as a communicator.

May the Lord help us minister His Word in life-giving dimensions. Let us preach with excellence and yet not miss the simplicity of Jesus, the humiliation of the Cross, and the “demonstration of the Spirit’s power, so that your faith might not rest on human wisdom, but on God’s power” (1 Corinthians 2:4,5). ■



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