The Art of Preaching

Effective Preaching

Homiletics

"How shall they hear without a preacher"
Romans 10:14

Bruce R. Edwards

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HOMILETICS

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PREFACE

Every Sunday morning, as millions of people gather in churches across America, there is an extraordinary exchange happening—one billion words spoken from pulpits, yet the most common complaint remains: sermons are often perceived as dull and disconnected from everyday life. This staggering statistic underscores a critical challenge for pastors and preachers alike.

For nearly four decades, I have stood behind the pulpit, delivering messages that seek to resonate deeply with the hearts of those listening. As a pastor and teacher, I've had the privilege of imparting biblical truths to thousands of eager students of the Word. Through these experiences, I've come to understand the profound responsibility and privilege of preaching effectively.

In 1 Corinthians 2:1-5, the Apostle Paul reminds us that the power of preaching lies not in human eloquence or wisdom but in the simplicity and sincerity of the message empowered by the Holy Spirit. The pulpit is not a platform for personal opinions or worldly philosophies—it is sacred ground where the Word of God is proclaimed and the life-changing Gospel of Jesus Christ is shared.

This book is a culmination of lessons learned and insights gained over years of ministry—a handbook crafted with aspiring preachers and seasoned pastors in mind. Reflecting on my own journey, I asked myself, "What knowledge would have most

benefited me when I first stepped into the pulpit?" The answers form the foundation of this work.

Throughout these pages, I delve into crucial topics: the divine call to preach, the art of delivering transformative messages, and the importance of authenticity and relevance in preaching. Each chapter is designed not only to educate but to inspire and equip those who have been called to proclaim God's Word.

In crafting this book, I am deeply grateful for the support and wisdom imparted to me by my wife, Pastor Billy Joe Daugherty, and the countless mentors, friends, and coworkers who have shaped my ministry. Their contributions have been invaluable, and their encouragement has fueled my passion to continually strive for excellence in preaching.

As you read through this book, Effective Preaching, may you be inspired to embrace the sacred task before you with renewed vigor and dedication. May these pages ignite within you a desire to preach messages that are powerful, authentic, and firmly rooted in the Word of God.

Welcome to a deeper understanding of the art of preaching—a journey where the pulpit becomes a gateway to transformation and the Gospel shines forth with clarity and conviction.

In His Service,

Pastor Bruce

INTRODUCTION

The sanctuary was full, the lights dimmed, and the worship had faded into a sacred hush. All eyes turned toward the pulpit. The preacher stepped up, Bible in hand, heart pounding. He opened his mouth—and within five minutes, half the room was already checking their watches.

Have you ever sat through a sermon that felt like it lasted an eternity—but said almost nothing eternal?

On the other hand, maybe you've been there as the preacher—the one behind the pulpit—feeling the weight of the moment, knowing you were called, yet unsure if what you had to say would truly reach anyone. Maybe you've walked off that platform wondering: *Did that really connect? Was anyone changed? Did I preach... or just speak?*

That moment, friend, is why this book exists.

Preaching is not just speaking. It's not just teaching. It's not a performance or a motivational talk. Preaching is divine communication—God speaking through man to reach the hearts of people. It is one of the most sacred, powerful, and transformational callings on earth. But here's the hard truth: not all preaching is effective. Not every sermon leaves a mark. And not every preacher knows how to shape the message into something that actually changes lives.

This book—"Effective Preaching"—was born out of nearly 40 years of standing behind pulpits, preaching thousands of messages to people from all walks of life. I've seen what works. I've learned (sometimes the hard way) what doesn't. And through years of trial, error, and grace, I've discovered that

preaching is an art—one that can be studied, sharpened, and Spirit-led.

Inside these pages, you'll discover not only what preaching *is*, but also what it is *for*. You'll learn the purpose of preaching—not just to inform minds, but to transform hearts. We'll walk together through the fundamentals of homiletics, the process of preparing a message, and—just as important—how to prepare yourself to be the vessel God uses. You'll be equipped to structure your sermon in a way that flows with clarity and power, to deliver it with authenticity and authority, and to close in a way that demands a response. But more than that, this book will challenge you.

It will challenge you to never settle for just "getting through the message." It will call you higher—to preach in a way that breaks chains, awakens faith, and invites the presence of God. Whether you're a young preacher just stepping into the call, or a seasoned pastor seeking fresh fire, this book will stretch your vision and sharpen your voice.

If you read with an open heart, by the time you finish this book, you won't just be a better preacher—you'll be a more effective minister. Your people will grow. Your church will be blessed. And the messages you deliver will carry the weight of heaven and the relevance of now.

So lean in. The art of preaching is not just for the gifted—it's for the called. And if God has called you, He intends to use you mightily.

There's a golden thread woven through every chapter ahead—a nugget of wisdom that could transform your next sermon and set your congregation on fire with truth. Don't miss it.

Let's begin.

Chapter One

What Is Homiletics?

Homiletics is the art and discipline of preaching effectively. The word originates from two Greek terms: *homileo*, meaning "to converse or communicate," and *homilos*, meaning "a crowd." Together, they describe the act of engaging and communicating with a group of people. The goal of biblical homiletics is to effectively communicate the message of the Bible to an audience through preaching or teaching.

It involves organizing and presenting the message of the text in a structured and persuasive manner that is relevant and engaging to the audience.

Homiletics seeks to apply the insights gained from biblical interpretation to the lives of the listeners, helping them understand and apply the Scriptures to their own lives.

It aims to inspire, challenge, and encourage the audience, fostering spiritual growth and transformation. Biblical homiletics is an essential aspect of pastoral ministry and Christian education.

I heard someone once say, "Homiletics is the science, of which preaching is the art, and the sermon is the product." That pretty much sums up homiletics.

Homiletics also finds its root in *homologeo*, meaning "to say the same thing." A preacher aims to convey God's Word in human terms—to preach divine truths using human language. As Acts 20:11 demonstrates, homiletics involves deep communication:

“They all went upstairs again and broke bread and ate. After talking [homileo] until daylight, he left.”

This discipline involves more than speaking well; it requires studying God’s Word, seeking His guidance, and delivering His truths effectively.

Dispelling Myths About Homiletics

Myth 1: Preparation Is Unnecessary

Some erroneously believe that relying solely on faith negates the need for sermon. They may quote Psalm 81:10: *“Open your mouth wide, and I will fill it,”* but they take this verse entirely out of context. This misconception often results in disorganized messages that lack substance. While inspiration is vital, diligent study, prayer, and reflection lay the groundwork for the Holy Spirit to guide preachers toward impactful messages.

"Preparation is not a sign of distrust in God; rather, it is a demonstration of stewardship over the message entrusted to us." – Pastor John Piper

Myth 2: Human Ability Is Enough

There exists a belief that natural talents alone suffice for effective preaching, disregarding the need for divine guidance. While eloquence may impress, true transformation comes from the anointing of the Holy Spirit. Effective preaching combines human effort with spiritual surrender, where prayer infuses words with divine power.

"God doesn't call the equipped; He equips the called." – Pastor Rick Warren

Myth 3: Homiletics Makes Sermons Effortless

Homiletics serves as a valuable tool but does not replace the hard work of study and prayer. Like a map, it provides structure, guiding preachers through the message's terrain. However, true effectiveness in preaching requires personal exploration and spiritual preparation beyond mere methodology.

"Homiletics is the servant of inspiration, not a substitute for it."
– Pastor Charles Spurgeon

Myth 4: A Sound Knowledge of Homiletics Is All You Need

While essential, technical proficiency in homiletics alone cannot ensure a powerful sermon. Without the Holy Spirit's anointing, even the most meticulously prepared message can lack spiritual impact. Preachers must rely not only on technique but also on the transformative power of God's presence.

"Technique without anointing leads to theology without doxology." – Pastor Timothy Keller

Homiletics, therefore, serves as a bridge between human effort and divine intervention. It equips preachers to deliver messages that resonate deeply, inspire faith, and reveal the wisdom and power of God. Through diligent preparation and reliance on the Holy Spirit, preachers can effectively communicate the Gospel with clarity and spiritual vitality.

What is Hermeneutics

“Hermeneutics” comes from the Greek word “hermēneutikos,” meaning “interpretive,” derived from “hermēneuein,” meaning “to interpret.” It refers to the art of interpretation.

Biblical hermeneutics is the process of interpreting the Bible to understand its original meaning. It begins with a careful reading of the text, noting keywords, phrases, and literary structure.

The historical and cultural context of the text is then studied to understand its original audience. The language of the text, including word meanings, grammar, and syntax, is analyzed.

The literary genre and style of the text are considered as they can affect interpretation. Commentaries, scholarly articles, and other resources are consulted to gain insights from experts.

The goal of biblical hermeneutics is to interpret the text accurately and understand its original meaning.

Homiletics and Hermeneutics

Hermeneutics and homiletics are closely related disciplines within biblical studies. The relationship between the two is essential for effective ministry.

Accurate interpretation through hermeneutics provides the foundation for preaching that is faithful to the biblical text.

Homiletics then takes the insights gained from hermeneutics and communicates them to an audience in a relevant and engaging manner.

Together, hermeneutics and homiletics work to enrich our understanding of the Scriptures and apply them to our lives.

Homiletics and Preaching

Homiletics and preaching are closely related concepts in the field of biblical studies and ministry.

Homiletics is the art and discipline of crafting and delivering sermons, while preaching is the act of communicating the message of the Bible to an audience.

Homiletics provides the tools and techniques for effective preaching. It involves organizing the message of the text in a structured and persuasive manner, using rhetorical techniques, illustrations, and applications to engage the audience.

Preaching, in turn, is the application of homiletics in practice. Together, homiletics and preaching work to convey the message of the Scriptures in a way that is relevant and impactful to the listeners.

Homiletics in its purest form is a labor of love for the pastor, and his love is first and foremost for God, for handling His Word rightly, and also for his congregation. The pastor shouldn't be consumed by what he would like to say but by what his congregation needs him to say (1 Corinthians 13:1-3). This distinguishes effective preaching from ineffective preaching.

In the following chapters, we will explore practical principles and methods to refine this sacred art. We will focus on what preaching is and how to prepare and deliver a powerful, effective, and anointed Biblical message. Let us journey together in becoming effective messengers of God's eternal truth.

Chapter 2

What is Preaching

Preaching the Word of God is both one of the greatest privileges and one of the most profound responsibilities a person can undertake. When someone stands to preach, they do so as a representative of Almighty God, interpreting the Bible to convey the mind and heart of God Himself. The gravity of this task is unparalleled, for it is through what may seem to the world as the "foolishness" of preaching that God reveals Himself to mankind.

Preaching is one of the most visible parts of ministry. One of the main reasons why there is a Sunday worship service is to hear God's word. Our worship services will be lacking something without preaching, even though many people come for the worship music and songs..

The dictionary defines preaching as: "To proclaim or publish tidings; specifically, to proclaim the gospel; to discourse publicly on a religious subject, or from a text of Scripture; to deliver a sermon.

Preaching has been God's chosen method of sharing His messages from the beginning. Noah is referred to as a preacher of righteousness "And spared not the old world, but saved Noah the eighth person, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood upon the world of the ungodly" (2 Peter 2:5).

The protesting prophet Jonah finally agreed to go to Nineveh, and his preaching brought national repentance, sparing them

from God's wrath. "Arise, go unto Nineveh, that great city, and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee" (Jonah 3:2).

Jesus and His disciples were involved in preaching. (See Matthew 3:1; 4:17; 10:7.) "He went throughout every city and village, preaching and shewing the glad tidings of the kingdom of God: and the twelve were with him" (Luke 8:1).

Preaching was vital in the Book of Acts—a story about the actions of the early preachers. Its pages contain one thousand verses and three hundred of them (twenty-five percent) are parts of sermons. The book contains twenty-three sermons or speeches. "Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word" (Acts 8:4).

A close look at Acts 15:7 reveals that God makes a choice in four areas:

- who preaches,
- who listens,
- what is preached, and
- The preferred response.

"And when there had been much disputing, Peter rose up, and said unto them, Men and brethren, ye know how that a good while ago ***God made choice*** among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel, and believe" (Acts 15:7).

God made a choice. Peter preached (by my mouth); Gentiles listened (should hear); the gospel is preached; the response was they believed

"It pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe" (1 Corinthians 1:21). Preaching is God's choice.

The preaching task has been turned over to us as an inheritance; a trust.

“He brought his word to light through the preaching entrusted to me” (Titus 1:3, *NIV*). God brings His Word to light through preaching.

“The entrance of thy words giveth light; it giveth understanding unto the simple” (Psalms 119:130).

Paul told Titus that preaching was entrusted or committed to us. Preachers have a call from God—a commission to preach the Word. Ministry is a trust—an inheritance, and not something we choose for ourselves. God has confidence in His chosen men. How humbling to know God has chosen us as His mouthpiece, to speak His Word to the world.

Preaching is not something a person chooses to do on his own. You do not wake up one morning and think, “Yes, I’m going to be a preacher. Look out, world. Here I come.” No, God does the choosing. However, when the choice is made, we must preach!

Preaching and Teaching

Have you ever wondered why some pastors are praised as good teachers but not great preachers, while others are celebrated for their preaching yet lack recognition as teachers? The distinction between preaching and teaching, though often used interchangeably, holds significant importance in understanding how messages are conveyed in church settings.

In Matthew 11:1, we read that Jesus "went on from there to teach and preach in their cities" (ESV). The distinction is subtle yet crucial: teaching involves imparting knowledge and

understanding, while preaching focuses on proclamation and exhortation. This dual approach is evident in Acts 5:42, where the disciples were "teaching and preaching" daily.

Biblical Foundations of Preaching and Teaching

The apostle Paul emphasizes in 1 Timothy 5:17 that elders who labor in "preaching and teaching" deserve double honor. Here, Paul distinguishes between the roles of elders who primarily teach and those who preach, underscoring their complementary yet distinct functions within the church.

Common Misconceptions

Before delving into the differences, let's address common misconceptions. Contrary to popular belief:

1. **Preaching and Teaching are Not Synonymous**: While often used interchangeably, biblical contexts demonstrate unique applications for each.
2. **Preaching vs. Teaching**: It's not merely about speaking to the heart versus the mind. Both can engage emotions and intellect.
3. **Application vs. Information**: Effective teaching applies knowledge, just as effective preaching informs with conviction.

Understanding the Differences

In Greek, "preaching" (kerysso) involves proclamation, much like a herald announcing news, while "teaching" (didasko) focuses on education and instruction. Jesus exemplifies this balance in Matthew 4:23, where He "teaches in their synagogues and proclaims the gospel."

Illustrative Comparison

Imagine receiving news that all your debts are canceled by your bank. Initially, this proclamation (preaching) sparks joy and curiosity. However, without subsequent instruction (teaching) on how to verify and receive this blessing, confusion ensues. Likewise, effective ministry requires both announcing the gospel's good news and guiding disciples in its application.

The Synergy of Preaching and Teaching

In essence, preaching involves both proclamation and education. It calls for declaring God's Word passionately while also imparting understanding and relevance to listeners' lives. As pastors, our duty is to proclaim boldly and instruct diligently, mirroring Jesus' holistic approach in ministry.

"Preaching is truth set on fire. Teaching is truth set on simmer." - Charles R. Swindoll

"The task of the preacher is to make the word of God fully known. Teaching fills in the details, preaching sets them on fire." - John Piper

The distinction between preaching and teaching is pivotal. While preaching proclaims God's truth, teaching ensures its depth and application. Together, they form a dynamic partnership essential for effective ministry and spiritual growth.

By embracing this dual role, we honor God's call to both proclaim His Word boldly and equip His people with understanding and wisdom. As pastors, we should be preaching and teaching the Word of God.

In the remainder of this book, as we talk about effective preaching and how to prepare and deliver a message, it will be with the done with understanding our messages should include both preaching and teaching.

The Power of Preaching

Paul captures this paradox beautifully in 1 Corinthians 1:21:

"For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe."

Notice the distinction: it's not the act of preaching foolishness but the preaching of Christ crucified—the very message that the world, especially the Greeks, deemed irrational. What they called foolishness is, in fact, the profound wisdom and power of God. This divine plan not only redeems sinners but restores them into the very image of God (2 Corinthians 3:18).

The message of Christ crucified acts as a double-edged sword, cutting through cultural biases and personal defenses. As Revelation 1:16 describes:

"Out of His mouth came a sharp, double-edged sword."

This sword represents the Word of God and the Spirit of the messenger, working in perfect harmony. When a preacher delivers a message from God, it should feel as though Word and messenger unite as one voice, carrying divine truth with piercing power. Hebrews 4:12 reminds us:

"For the Word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and

spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart."

In preaching, the divine (God's Word) and the human (the preacher) work together as one formidable instrument, bringing conviction and transformation.

The Two Dimensions of Preaching:

Every sermon has two aspects:

1. **The Divine:** The truth and revelation come from God.
2. **The Human:** The preacher serves as a vessel, communicating this truth.

Effective preachers focus on mastering the human aspect—learning how to present God's message with clarity, passion, and impact.

The power of preaching is in the message. The message is Christ and Him crucified – which is the gospel. As pastors, we need to do all we can to prepare ourselves and prepare the message, which the rest of this book is about, but if we don't preach the gospel, there is no power. As Paul said in Romans 1:16-17, "***For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for <u>it is the power</u> of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "The just shall live by faith."***

What is the power? The gospel. Let's not be ashamed or timid about preaching the gospel with clarity and boldness. It is the key to power in our preaching and the biggest key to being effective as preachers.

Chapter 3

The Call to Preach

Answering Heaven's Invitation

There is no greater honor on earth than to be summoned by Heaven to declare God's Word. Yet of all the spiritual experiences a person can have, perhaps none is more mysterious and deeply personal than the call to preach. It is not something earned, requested, or inherited—it is **divinely initiated**, **Spirit-confirmed**, and **Christ-centered**. As Charles Spurgeon once said, *"If God has called you to be a preacher, don't stoop to be a king."*

Let's take a deeper look at this sacred calling and unpack what the Bible teaches, what experience affirms, and what the heart must embrace when one is called to preach.

The Call Comes from Christ Alone

First and foremost, the call to preach is not from man—it is from Christ Himself. This is non-negotiable. **No denomination, no institution, no elder, and no man can call someone into the ministry.** Only Jesus, the Head of the Church, holds that authority.

Ephesians 4:11 says, *"And he [Jesus] gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers."* The structure of this verse shows us that Jesus is the one who appoints and distributes these ministry gifts—often referred to as the *fivefold ministry*. These are not career choices; they are divine assignments.

Pastor Adrian Rogers put it this way: *"The man of God is not a volunteer; he's a conscript. He has been drafted by the Commander-in-Chief."*

There is a profound difference between someone who chooses ministry as a career and someone who is *called* by the voice of the Lord. The former may build a platform. The latter builds the Kingdom.

The Holy Spirit Confirms the Call

The Holy Spirit is the divine Agent who impresses and confirms the call upon the human heart. It may begin with a deep burden, an overwhelming desire, or a sudden clarity that God is setting you apart for His purposes. Sometimes this call is immediate—like Paul on the road to Damascus. Other times, it unfolds slowly, like a sunrise, growing brighter with each passing day.

Acts 13:2 tells us, *"As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, 'Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them.'"* Notice that the call was **already placed by God**, and the Holy Spirit confirmed it in the midst of prayer and worship.

Imagine the call like the burning bush Moses encountered. The bush burned but wasn't consumed. It caught his attention, and then God spoke. For many preachers, there's an internal fire they can't explain. It draws them closer to God until He speaks, "Go, I am sending you."

With the Call Comes the Irresistible Desire

When God calls a person to preach, He often places within them a holy compulsion—a desire that cannot be quenched. The person called may try to run, hide, or ignore it, but the desire keeps returning. The fire in their bones won't let them rest until they answer.

Jeremiah expressed this tension when he said, *"His word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing, and I could not stay"* (Jeremiah 20:9).

Pastor Tony Evans once said, *"When God calls you, you'll never be satisfied doing anything else."*

Whether it is full-time or bivocational, public or behind the scenes, the person called will find themselves preaching the Word whenever and wherever they can—because they can't help but do so.

God Equips Those He Calls

God never calls the equipped; He equips the called. He is not looking for ability but availability. That said, He will not leave His servants unprepared.

Moses didn't think he could speak. Jeremiah thought he was too young. Timothy needed encouragement not to fear. And yet, God molded each one, supplied what was lacking, and used them mightily.

When God calls you, He provides you with:

- **Spiritual Gifting** – "Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us…" (Romans 12:6)
- **Practical Opportunities** – Doors will begin to open for service and growth.
- **Wise Counsel and Mentors** – God often places seasoned pastors and leaders in your path to help you develop.
- **Spiritual Formation** – Time in the Word, prayer, trials, and training are all part of His preparation plan.

Illustration: Imagine God calling David. At the time, he was just a shepherd boy. But in the field, God taught him to worship, lead, and fight lions and bears. When the day came to face Goliath, David was ready—not because of a title, but because of God's preparation.

The Call Must Be Publicly Acknowledged

There is something powerful about making your calling public. It is a declaration of surrender, accountability, and availability. In Acts 13, Paul and Barnabas were publicly separated and commissioned. Jesus called His disciples openly. The call is deeply personal—but it is not private.

As a matter of fact, when someone is truly called, it becomes evident to others. People will begin to notice, often before the person ever announces it.

Quote: Pastor John Piper says, *"God's call to the ministry is not a private whisper without public fruit. It shows itself in spiritual gifts and affirmation from the body of Christ."*

If God has called you, don't hide it—declare it. Your "yes" could unlock someone else's courage to obey.

The Call Demands Preparation

A calling without preparation is a crisis waiting to happen. God does not want you to preach out of zeal without knowledge. Young preachers especially must hear this clearly: **You are called to preach, but you are also called to prepare.**

This preparation is not optional—it is obedience. Paul told Timothy, *"Study to show yourself approved unto God, a workman who need not be ashamed…"* (2 Timothy 2:15).

Preparation includes:

- **Spiritual Formation:** Developing a deep prayer life, holiness, and humility.
- **Biblical Training:** Learning sound doctrine, interpreting Scripture accurately.
- **Practical Experience:** Serving under other leaders, receiving feedback, and honing your communication.
- **Emotional Maturity:** Growing in character, learning patience, and handling criticism well.

Just as a surgeon spends years training before operating, a preacher must spend time in God's training ground before standing behind a pulpit. Souls are at stake.

The Danger of Running from the Call

Perhaps one of the most tragic realities in ministry is when someone knows they are called and yet refuses to answer. Jonah tried that. He ran in the opposite direction. But God brought him back—with a storm, a fish, and a second chance.

Many preachers can testify that their lives only began to bear fruit when they finally said yes to God. Running from the call will rob you of joy, peace, and purpose.

Pastor Vance Havner said, *"The tragedy of today is that the situation is desperate, but the saints are not."* Don't be found asleep in the boat while the storm is raging.

Answer the Call – Commit to the Call

If you feel the pull, the fire, the burden—don't ignore it. Test it. Pray. Talk to godly leaders. Look for confirmation through open doors and affirmed gifts. But do not delay obedience.

“Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, 'Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?” And I said, 'Here am I. Send me!” (Isaiah 6:8)

Commit to the call. Pursue it with all that is within you. Trust God and do what He tells you to do. He is faithful. Even when you feel weak or inadequate, know that He is with you. He does not call the equipped but equips the called.

The call to preach is not about ego or ambition—it’s about souls, truth, and eternity. God is still calling people today to preach His Word with power and clarity. If He’s calling you—answer. There’s no higher purpose.

“Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine.” — 2 Timothy 4:2

Chapter 4

The Purpose of Preaching

What is the purpose of preaching? Why has God chosen this seemingly simple act—one person proclaiming truth to others—as His primary method for advancing His Kingdom? The answer is far more profound than we often realize.

Preaching is not an outdated religious tradition; it is a divine strategy. It is the voice of heaven echoing in the earth. Preaching is not merely the art of public speaking with a religious twist. It is not motivational talk mixed with a few Bible verses. Nor is it a performance designed to entertain an audience for thirty minutes on a Sunday morning. Preaching, in its truest form, is the proclamation of divine truth under the anointing of the Holy Spirit. It is the delivery of God's Word to people in such a way that their lives are forever changed by the power of that Word.

It is God's chosen vehicle to reveal His heart, release His power, and reshape lives. The power of preaching lies not in performance, but in its purpose. And when the preacher understands *why* he preaches, the pulpit becomes more than a platform—it becomes a launching pad for transformation.

As pastors, we have the mandate from II Timothy 3:16 to not only teach content but to urge (motivate, compel, challenge) people to change, believe, and act upon the Word. Our preaching should share text from the Bible, explain what it means, and cause people to take action.

Let's explore the divine purposes of preaching and the different ways preaching is applied to fulfill God's eternal plan.

1. Preaching Calls People to Salvation

The first and foremost purpose of preaching is to call people to repentance and faith in Jesus Christ. Romans 10:14–15 asks the piercing questions: *"How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?"*

The preaching of the gospel is the lifeline that pulls souls from the grip of sin and death into eternal life. It is through preaching that the gospel is announced, the cross is explained, the resurrection is proclaimed, and grace is offered. Without preaching, people remain unaware of the good news that can save them.

The apostle Paul wrote, *"It pleased God through the foolishness of preaching to save those who believe"* (1 Corinthians 1:21). That's not to say preaching is foolish—it appears foolish to a world that prefers intellect over revelation, but it is God's divine tool to bring the lost home.

Evangelistic preaching aims to introduce unbelievers to Christ and call them to repentance. Whether in crusades, Sunday services, prison ministries, or street corners—this is the starting point of every believer's journey.

2. Preaching Builds Up the Believer

Salvation is only the beginning. Preaching also serves to strengthen, equip, and mature the saints. Paul's instruction to Timothy in 2 Timothy 4:2 gives us a multi-layered view of preaching's purpose: *"Preach the Word; be ready in season and*

out of season; correct, rebuke, and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction."

Each of those functions—correcting, rebuking, encouraging, and instructing—is a critical aspect of spiritual formation. Preaching feeds the believer's soul, challenges the flesh, renews the mind, and stirs the spirit. It aligns the people of God with the will of God.

As Charles Stanley once said, *"The goal of preaching is not just information—it's transformation."* Week after week, faithful preaching builds up the church into a mature, powerful body of believers.

Discipleship preaching brings biblical truth to bear on the lives of believers. It teaches doctrine, addresses behavior, and nurtures spiritual growth. Whether it's a midweek Bible study or Sunday morning exposition, this type of preaching deepens the roots of faith.

3. Preaching Equips for Ministry

Ephesians 4:11–12 tells us that Christ gave leaders to the Church—including pastors and teachers—*"to equip the saints for the work of ministry."* Preaching is a primary means of this equipping. It clarifies the mission, releases vision, and provides practical wisdom for ministry.

When a preacher teaches the principles of leadership, the gifts of the Spirit, the call to serve, or the character of a servant, they are shaping ministers in the pew. Preaching releases people into purpose.

As Bill Hybels put it, *"The local church is the hope of the world, and its future rests primarily in the hands of its leaders."* Preaching is how those leaders are trained and mobilized.

Equipping preaching is often found in leadership conferences, Bible colleges, and pulpit teaching that aims to train believers for ministry in and beyond the church.

4. Preaching Confronts Culture

Preaching doesn't just nurture believers—it also stands as a prophetic voice in the world. Throughout Scripture, God raised up preachers to speak truth to power, confront sin, and call nations to repentance. From Elijah on Mount Carmel to John the Baptist crying out in the wilderness, preaching has always carried a confrontational edge.

Today's preachers must do the same—addressing the moral drift of society, exposing lies, defending truth, and calling people back to righteousness. Preaching is not just for comforting the afflicted; it's also for afflicting the comfortable when they've settled into compromise.

As Dr. Tony Evans once said, *"The job of the church is not to reflect the culture; it's to correct it."* Preaching serves as a compass, pointing society back toward God's standard.

Prophetic preaching often occurs during moments of crisis, cultural upheaval, or spiritual decline. It may not always be popular, but it is always necessary.

5. Preaching Reveals God's Will

When people are lost, confused, or stuck, they don't just need encouragement—they need direction. Preaching reveals the heart and will of God. It helps people discern their next step, understand God's timing, and align their lives with heaven's agenda.

In Acts 13:2, the Holy Spirit spoke to the church at Antioch during a time of worship and fasting, giving clear instruction: *"Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them."* That direction came through prophetic preaching and spiritual leadership.

Preaching becomes a channel through which God's will is made known—not just in general terms, but in personal, practical ways.

This kind of preaching is essential during vision casting, church planting, transitions, or moments of decision. God uses preaching to guide His people corporately and individually.

6. Preaching Brings Comfort and Hope

Life is full of hardship, grief, and loss. In those moments, preaching becomes a balm to the soul. The prophet Isaiah said, *"Comfort, yes, comfort My people!" says your God. "Speak comfort to Jerusalem..."* (Isaiah 40:1–2).

Preaching doesn't ignore suffering—it enters it with the hope of the gospel. It speaks of a Savior who suffers with us, who conquered death, and who promises eternal joy. It reminds us that we are not alone, that our trials have purpose, and that our pain will not last forever.

As Rick Warren says, *"People don't need your explanation; they need your presence—and God's promises."* Preaching brings both.

Preaching comfort is especially vital during funerals, tragedies, and personal crises. It also forms a regular part of pastoral preaching that strengthens hearts in a broken world.

7. Preaching Declares Victory

Preaching not only begins with salvation—it ends in triumph. It reminds the Church that we are part of a Kingdom that cannot be shaken, that Christ has already won, and that we live from a place of victory. Preaching celebrates the finished work of the cross and the power of the resurrection.

It declares that healing is available, deliverance is possible, restoration is real, and the best is yet to come. It shouts the promises of God louder than the problems of life.

Jesus said, *"This gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come"* (Matthew 24:14). Preaching will usher in the return of Christ. What a glorious purpose!

Victorious preaching lifts the atmosphere, renews hope, and inspires perseverance. It is often found in revival services, celebrations, and any setting where the Church gathers to declare God's greatness.

The Bigger Picture

The Bible paints a clear picture of God's ultimate goal for every believer: to become like Jesus. Romans 8:29 (NIV) declares, *"For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters."* Until that truth becomes the driving force behind your preaching, you haven't fully grasped the divine purpose of your calling.

Yes, we are always on mission to bring people to Christ. Every sermon should, in some way, extend an invitation for people to be born again and become a new creation in Him. But salvation is only the beginning. As pastors, we are not just proclaimers—we are shepherds. Our calling is to nurture, feed, guide, and spiritually grow our people until Christ is formed in them (Galatians 4:19). Preaching must do more than inform the mind—it must transform the life.

Preaching for Transformation

Second Corinthians 3:18 (TLB) gives us the blueprint: *"As the Spirit of the Lord works within us, we become more and more like him."* God's desire is not merely church attendance or biblical knowledge. His number one goal is Christlikeness. He wants people:

- To **think like Jesus** (Philippians 2:5)
- To **feel like Jesus** (Colossians 3:15)
- To **act like Jesus** (Colossians 3:17)

Our preaching, therefore, must aim at developing Christlike **convictions** (thinking), Christlike **character** (feeling), and

Christlike **conduct** (acting). When these three elements are aligned in a believer's life, transformation is inevitable.

Yet, here lies the modern challenge: much of today's preaching informs without transforming. People are taught to read the Word but not to do the Word. Sermons are rich in content but often poor in application. We end up with spiritually educated believers who aren't spiritually mature.

George Gallup once observed, *"Never before in the history of the United States has the Gospel of Jesus Christ made such inroads while at the same time making so little difference in how people actually live."*

Preaching That Produces Doers, Not Just Hearers

Before you step into the pulpit again, take a hard look at your message and ask: *Does this sermon challenge the way people think and believe? Does it call them to action? Does it help them apply the Word to their everyday lives?*

James 1:22 and 25 puts it plainly: *"But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves... But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it... this one will be blessed in what he does."*

The blessing is not in the hearing—it's in the doing.

Let me illustrate: Imagine a person who spends every morning looking into a mirror, studying every detail of their appearance, but then walks away and forgets what they look like. That's what James says it's like to hear the Word but never do it. Preaching must be the mirror that not only reveals but also motivates change.

Charles Spurgeon said, *"A sermon without application is like a letter posted without an address."* It may be eloquent, it may be truthful—but if it doesn't lead people somewhere, it misses the point.

Preaching for Maturity

The end goal of all preaching is spiritual maturity. Paul expressed this so powerfully in Colossians 1:28–29 (NKJV): *"Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus. To this end I also labor, striving according to His working which works in me mightily."*

That's the preacher's mission: to present every believer fully formed in Christ. Not just saved. Not just churched. But mature, equipped, transformed into His likeness.

Rick Warren once said, *"God is far more interested in who you are than in what you do. He's more concerned with your character than your career, because you will take your character into eternity, not your career."* This is why preaching must go beyond motivating behavior and reach into the soul—forming character that reflects Christ.

The Preacher's Challenge and Joy

We live in a world that is constantly shaping people—from the media they consume to the values they absorb. If we are not intentional in shaping them through preaching, the world will gladly do it for us.

Preaching is more than a lecture, more than spiritual entertainment, and more than a motivational pep talk. It is a

divine partnership with the Holy Spirit to chisel the image of Christ into human lives.

To preach is to participate in God's greatest work—transforming lives from the inside out.

Let us not waste that privilege. Let us preach with purpose, aiming not just for applause but for transformation. Let us preach Christ, form Christ, and glorify Christ—until the people we lead begin to *think like Him, feel like Him, and live like Him*.

Final Thoughts: Preaching Matters

Preaching is God's chosen method to change lives, shape nations, and advance His Kingdom. It is a divine calling and a sacred responsibility. The preacher must not merely seek to be clever or popular but faithful and powerful.

When preaching is done right—when it is Spirit-empowered, Bible-based, Christ-centered, and eternally focused—it shakes the gates of hell and opens the windows of heaven.

Let us rise to the high calling of preaching with reverence and boldness. Let us be heralds of truth, not entertainers of culture. Let us speak with fire, with love, with clarity, and with urgency. Because when the Word is truly preached, the world can never be the same.

Through effective preaching, God works *through* His Word. The Holy Spirit works through His Word. As John Calvin said, "The Holy Spirit works through the Word of God, and the two are inextricably connected."

When they voiced what the Lord said to them, the Old Testament prophets proclaimed, "Thus says the Lord" (Exodus

4:22; 5:1; Joshua 24:2; 1 Samuel 2:27; Jeremiah 28:13, etc.). Their first charge was to get it right according to what the Lord told them to proclaim. The prophets were the preachers.

The New Testament commands that the Scriptures be preached, and it also gives practical guidance and examples of preaching.

2 Timothy 4:2 commands us to "preach the word; be ready in season out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and teaching." There's never a time when preaching God's Word is prohibited by the Bible.

In Romans 10:14-15, Paul writes,

> "How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher? And how will they preach unless they are sent? Just as it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who proclaim good news of good things!"

He follows this statement up with a key truth: "So faith *comes* from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ" (Romans 10:17).

One more verse will add an exclamation point to our call to preach the Word of God. 1 Corinthians 9:16 is clear about the state of one who refuses to preach the Word: "For if I proclaim the gospel, I have nothing to boast, for I am under compulsion. For woe is me if I do not proclaim the gospel."

Preaching is not merely about speaking; it's about embodying the truths of God and communicating them in ways that transform lives.

Chapter Five

The Preachers Toolbox

Before we share the steps needed to prepare a message, we need to be aware of the tools available to help us craft a powerful and transformational message. There are many resources available to help us prepare the message God has given us to preach.

Study Tools

Here is a list of 8 tools to put in your preacher's toolbox.

1. **The Holy Spirit**
   Don't overlook this master tool. If our preaching is to be effective, the Holy Spirit must be involved from start to finish in the preparation, delivery, and the hearts of the people, and throughout the altar call. Every message you preach should be Holy Spirit inspired. The Holy Spirit is in you, but are you using Him? He is there to help, teach, and guide you. This is true for the life of every believer, and it is true for you as you prepare your messages. Being led by the Holy Spirit is a must-use tool for every preacher. The message you preach needs to be inspired by the Holy Spirit.
2. **The Bible**
   The Bible provides the content for the message the Holy Spirit inspires you to preach. The Bible is the Word of God. It is the source of the text, topic, or subject the Holy Spirit leads you to share. We are to preach the Word!

The Holy Spirit and the Bible are all you NEED to prepare a message. Any other tool is an additional resource to assist and help you better explain and impart what the Word of God says and the message inspired by the Holy Spirit.

3. **Concordances**

   A Bible concordance provides an alphabetical listing of every word in the Scripture to help you easily find all the verses that contain a particular word. By looking up a particular word or phrase, you can quickly find all instances where it appears in the Bible and gain deeper insights into its meaning.

   A concordance is like a master key, unlocking doors to deeper understanding, richer teaching, and more accurate interpretation of God's Word. It's a tool that can elevate your sermon preparation, helping you gain a better understanding of context and avoid misinterpretation.

4. **Commentaries**

   Bible commentaries contain observations and interpretations surrounding a biblical text, typically organized according to the text's sequential flow. Often, commentaries cover a single book of the Bible, but sometimes they focus on a particular section (e.g., the Sermon on the Mount) or they include several books of the same genre (e.g., the Minor Prophets).

   Most commentaries are written by Bible scholars, many of whom work at institutions of higher education like Bible colleges, universities, and seminaries. Not all Bible

Commentaries are equal. Commentaries are not one hundred percent correct. This why I recommend using commentaries after you have done all your work. if you go to a commentary first or other sources, you can lose your own voice, and then you're at the mercy of what other people have said.

I think the main benefit a commentary provides a pastor is that commentaries help pastors see other perspectives that they didn't consider before. They also, can help provide accountability. If no one else sees a text the way you do, there's a good chance you have it wrong.

5. **Topical Bibles**

   Topical Bibles are Bibles that arrange scripture references by subject or theme, rather than the traditional canonical order of books and chapters. Topical Bibles excerpt verses from throughout the Bible and compile them under headings for easy lookup and study.

   One of the biggest benefits of a topical Bible is that it saves you time searching through the entire Bible for verses on a particular subject. Instead of flipping through book after book, you can go straight to the topic you're interested in and find key scriptures all in one place.

   This makes studying or preparing a sermon, especially a topical sermon, so much easier and more efficient. No more hunting aimlessly for that perfect verse – it's right there waiting for you!

6. **Interlinear**
   An interlinear presents the biblical text in its original language along with a translation immediately below each word. (Some interlinear are formatted reversely, i.e., they present a translation on top with the corresponding original language immediately underneath.)

   An interlinear can be a helpful tool for those who want to incorporate the original language in their study but maybe don't know Greek or Hebrew or maybe know Greek and Hebrew but want the aid of an interlinear to make working in the original languages a bit easier.
7. **Lexicons**
   A biblical lexicon is a reference tool that provides meanings, semantic ranges, and significant uses of biblical words in their original language. This data is organized according to an inventory of lexemes (i.e., a meaningful linguistic unit). Lexicons are particularly helpful in word studies.
8. **Sermon Calendar**
   A Bible dictionary is an alphabetical listing of keywords found in Scripture and their definition so that people can learn their meaning**.**

These are the most common Bible Study reference resources. Every person is different in how they may or may not use them. I encourage you to keep them handy in your office or study. Today, the internet and Bible apps make using these resources much easier. I am going to mention a few online resources I use, but there are many others. The important thing is to build

your own ”toolbox” that contains the tools you need to prepare the messages you need to prepare for your ministry.

Suggested Free Digital Resources.

1. **Online Bible and Bible Apps**
    - YouVersion.com, available online and with a user-friendly mobile app, has most translations and several features, including reading plans and audio Bibles.
    - BibleGateway.com is a searchable online Bible with over 100 translations in 50 languages. It works well for copying and pasting scriptures into your sermon manuscript. The highlighting feature and note-taking function work well
2. **Concordance**
   The Strongs Exhaustive Concordance at eliyah.com/lexicon.html
3. **Comprehensive Bible Study**
    - Blueletterbible.org provides powerful tools for an in-depth study of God's Word through a full reference library, with study tools that are grounded in the historical, conservative Christian faith. It has most of the tools mentioned above available online and many apps. You can also access the Bible app offline.
    - Biblehub.com is an online suite of Bible study resources, including topical, Greek, and Hebrew study tools, plus concordances, commentaries, sermons and devotionals, and others. Also has an app.

4. **Commentary**
   Enduringword.com, The Enduring Word Bible Commentary is structured by each book of the Bible. with each book organized by chapter and verse. Each chapter has the main point extracted from the text. Additionally, the main point is then organized in an easy-to-follow outline that flows through the Bible Text. The creator David Guzik includes throughout the commentary quotes from other commentators to add additional perspective.

There are many other online resources available; these are some of my favorites and are free.

Types of Sermons

The next tool we have in our toolboxes is the 3 major types of sermons: Expository, Textual, and Topical—each a legitimate, Spirit-used avenue for declaring the Word of God. There isn't *only one way* or *the right way* to preach. Some people will tell you this is the case, but each of these methods can be a faithful way to preach. We are going to briefly introduce and explain each, and then in the next chapter, "Preparing the Message," we will go into more detail about each, the positives and negatives of each, when and why to use each, and how to prepare each.

1. Expository Preaching

Expository preaching is often regarded as the gold standard for Bible teachers. It involves a careful, verse-by-verse unpacking of Scripture, with the goal of uncovering and explaining the

meaning of the passage in its original context, then applying it to life today.

Expository preaching keeps the authority in the text, not the preacher. It forces us to deal with every subject the Bible covers—even the uncomfortable ones.

Why It Matters:

- It teaches the congregation how to study the Bible. As you walk through entire books, your church learns how to interpret Scripture for themselves.
- It avoids preacher bias. You can't skip the hard stuff. You preach what's next, not just what's easy.
- It roots people in God's Word, not the pastor's ideas. Faith becomes anchored in truth, not charisma.
- It strengthens biblical literacy. Over time, believers gain a panoramic understanding of the Bible's big picture.

There are many different kinds of expositional preaching. The four most common are verse-by-verse, thematic, narrative, and topical.

Think of expository preaching like taking your church on a hike through the entire Bible. You're not flying over with a helicopter (topical) or taking just a few snapshots (textual). You're walking every trail, pointing out every landmark, exploring the terrain of God's truth, step by step.

Dr. John MacArthur, a champion of expositional preaching, said:

“The meaning of Scripture is the Scripture. If you miss the meaning, you miss the message. And if you miss the message, you miss God’s voice.”

2. Textual Preaching

Textual preaching focuses on a specific passage or a brief section of Scripture—often a paragraph or chapter—and draws out the main ideas, themes, or spiritual truths from that portion. It’s like expository preaching on a smaller scale.

This method is especially helpful when addressing a theme found in a single passage or when walking the church through a short series like the Beatitudes (Matthew 5) or the Lord’s Prayer (Luke 11).

Why It Works:

- It allows for rich exploration of a focused passage. You can dive deep without having to cover a whole book.
- It fits the liturgical or seasonal calendar. Many churches use textual preaching during Advent or Lent.
- It provides structure for a short-term series. For churches with rotating congregations—like military bases or college towns—it ensures essential doctrines are taught regularly.

Imagine you’re giving a guided tour of a historical room. Rather than walking through the whole house (expository), you focus on a single room and show every detail—the artwork, the architecture, the history. It’s concentrated, but powerful.

Chuck Swindoll has effectively used textual preaching in many of his sermon series, noting:

“A single passage, rightly unpacked, can shift a person’s worldview when the truth of God pierces through their assumptions.”

3. Topical Preaching:

Topical preaching focuses on a theme or subject, pulling together Scripture from multiple books to explore what the Bible says on that particular issue. This method is the most flexible and often the most accessible to visitors or newer believers.

Done right, topical preaching can powerfully demonstrate the unity of Scripture and God’s consistent message across time.

Why It Connects:

- It provides biblical answers to real-life questions. People are asking about marriage, depression, justice, purpose—and this method meets them where they are.
- It addresses urgent cultural issues. A topical message on forgiveness, anxiety, or identity can speak directly to the soul in today’s climate.
- It showcases the harmony of Scripture. By linking verses across Old and New Testaments, people see how God’s truth weaves together.

Word of Caution:

Topical preaching can be misused. If a preacher is not careful to interpret verses in context, it becomes easy to twist Scripture

to fit a personal agenda. This is why spiritual integrity and theological discipline are so important in topical sermons.

Howard Hendricks once warned,

“A text without a context is a pretext for a proof text.”

Topical preaching is like assembling a mosaic. You gather tiles (verses) from across the Bible to create a compelling picture of God's truth on a subject. Done skillfully, the result is beautiful, accurate, and transformational.

Choosing the Right Tool for the Moment

When it comes to communicating a God-inspired message, it’s important to find the right type of sermon to effectively drive home the point of your message. Even if you are more inclined to preach one type of sermon over the other, it’s worth trying new ways of effectively communicating God’s Word to the congregation.

Expository, topical, and textual sermons each offer distinct strengths and applications in the preacher's toolbox. Whether unveiling the riches of Scripture, addressing pressing issues, mining insights from specific passages, or weaving captivating stories of faith, each sermon type serves the ultimate purpose of proclaiming the timeless truths of the gospel in ways that engage, challenge, and inspire listeners.

Each method has its place in a preacher’s toolbox. The goal is not to elevate one over the other but to discern which approach best serves the moment and the message. A balanced pulpit will often include all three:

- Expository preaching for building depth and biblical literacy.
- Textual preaching for targeted, theme-based series with deep roots.
- Topical preaching for addressing the felt needs and challenges of daily life.

As H.B. Charles Jr. puts it:

"Biblical preaching is not about mastering the text—it's about being mastered by the text."

There are other types of sermons, but these three and variations of them are the primary types of sermons.

All of these tools are important and helpful, but they are most effective in the hands of those who are prepared. We will discuss the "***preparation of the preacher***" in a later chapter.

For now, as Pastors, we must remember effective preaching is not just about delivering content—it's about delivering truth in a way that transforms lives. To that end, the type of sermon we use is more than a stylistic preference; it's a vital part of our effectiveness as communicators of the Gospel. The type of sermon we use is the foundational framework that shapes how we preach the Bible. Each has its own strength. Each can be used effectively. But like tools in a craftsman's box, the power lies in knowing *when* and *how* to use each one for maximum impact.

The Preacher's Mandate

We need to remember that what we preach is infinitely more important than how we preach. The act of preaching is in vain if the message preached is not true. Paul charged Timothy, *"Preach the word"* (2 Timothy 4:2a). He did not charge Timothy to preach as if the function of preaching has any power of its own. Paul instructed Timothy that he must preach. Moreover, he explicitly stated what Timothy must preach. The pulpit is not a place for personal opinion, human wisdom, or worldly philosophies. The pulpit is the platform for the proclamation of the glorious word of God and the saving testimony of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The preacher's mandate is clearly outlined by Paul:

"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 (NIV)

Our authority is not in our personality or even in our presentation—it's in the Word of God. That's why the type of message we use must help elevate the text, not eclipse it. John Stott once said, "We are not to be like chefs who invent new recipes. We are to be like waiters who deliver the meal prepared by the Master Chef without messing it up."

Chapter Six

Message Planning & Preparation

INTRODUCTION

Picture a lone prospector peering into a cave on a barren Arizona mountainside. He's heard "there's gold in them thar hills," so with nothing more than some grub, a lamp, and a pickaxe, he's come to this mountain looking for a vein of gold. He lights his lamp and heads into the darkness in the hope of striking it rich.

Preparing to preach is like that. For most of us, it is quiet, solitary prospecting. In school, we learned how to study the Bible, the pickaxe work. Diligent study is harder and longer than most people imagine. Sermon Prep can be grueling and not always a spiritual experience, but it is crucial if we want our preaching to be impactful and effective.

Sermon preparation is as important to preaching as the act of preaching itself, if not more so. We not only need to prepare our message, but we need to prepare our hearts as well. Accomplishing both should be the goal of our preparation.

Preaching God's Word is a privilege we have. God demands that we don't take that privilege for granted. The message you preach might be the difference between life and death or heaven and hell for somebody. How can we claim to be faithful stewards if we don't even allocate time to prepare? Someone said that for each minute you spend behind the pulpit, spend one hour in preparation. Abraham Lincoln once said, "Give me six hours to chop down a tree, and I will spend the first four sharpening the

axe." The time we invest planning and preparing our message is time spent "sharpening our ax".

Let me ask you a question:, How can you know that your sermon will touch SOMEBODY? The only way to know for sure is if it touches you! Think about it… You can't know if it really affected somebody else, but you can know if it affects you. You know that your sermon has encouraged someone if it encourages you. You know that your message has "stepped on some toes" If it has stepped on yours. You know that your sermon has applied the balm of Gilead to the wounds and hurts if it is applied to yours. You know your message actually has the imprint of God on it because God uses it to touch your soul.

I'm not saying just preach for and to yourself, but I am saying INCLUDE yourself in the congregation that needs a word. It's like sampling the food you're preparing for guest at home. You are checking to make sure it tastes right and has all the right seasonings and flavors before you serve your guest. I am just saying do the same for the messages you prepare

That's all preaching is…Tasting it and saying, "Come on everyone, Taste and see that the Lord is good." Psalm 34:8. If you're not shouting in the preparation room….then stop trying to force somebody else to shout in the sanctuary! This is why sermon planning and preparation is so important.

In this chapter, we cover several key ingredients and processes of preparing a message that will be powerful and transformational. I approach the subject from the perspective of a pastor and their unique need to prepare messages for weekend services, mid-week services, and special services. All of the principles, concepts, techniques, and steps we discuss

apply to evangelists or anyone preparing to share a message, however, pastors need to approach their preparation not only from one message but to the totality of what they will be preaching throughout the year and even years. This means proper planning becomes an important part of the preparation process.

Planning

As Pastors, I believe that to be effective in our preaching and teaching, we need to follow a plan that builds the faith of our people, teaches them sound doctrine, prepares them to live an overcoming and victorious life, challenges them to serve, prepares them to do the work of the ministry, and understands the vision of the church. The plan needs to be prepared and thought out so no matter where a person starts they can follow.

There a few basic consideration we should include in our planning;

- what our congregation needs
- fulfilling our mission and vision
- types and lengths of series to be preached
- special events and holidays
- community calendars
- scope and sequence
- who are audience is (more on this later)

Scope and Sequence

Let's talk about the importance of scope and sequence and what it means. Scope and sequence in preaching and teaching

refer to the framework that outlines what content will be taught (scope) and the order in which it will be presented (sequence). This approach helps ensure that the material is covered comprehensively and logically, helping believers to build on their faith progressively. For example, in elementary school teacher who teach math need to teach students how to add and subtract before they can teach them to multiply and divide. Scope and sequence are important for each individual message we preach, but it is crucial for pastors and their long term planning.

Why Scope and Sequence Matter

Everyone loves a journey. Whether it's a cross-country road trip, a long hike through the mountains, or a pilgrimage of the soul—journeys move us forward. They promise discovery, growth, and transformation. And every Sunday, pastors are entrusted with leading people on the most important journey of all: a journey into the truth and power of God's Word.

Preaching isn't just about producing weekly content. It's about *guiding a congregation through spiritual formation*, step by step, week by week, message by message. When done with intentionality, preaching becomes a journey with purpose—a journey that deepens faith, strengthens character, and equips believers for every good work. That's where **scope and sequence** come in.

One of the challenges we have as pastors is the diversity of our congregation. We can have different generations, different backgrounds – culturally, economically, educationally, and politically and different levels of Bible knowledge. We have those who attend every week, some monthly, some two or three

times a year, and then there are visitors. All of these create a dynamic that can make sermon planning complex.

Therefore, we need to plan and prepare the best we can with all these various complexities in mind. We will not always be able to address every situation, but we should be aware of the differences and do our best. For example, if you are dealing with a topic that is personal and specific to the church, you might preface that content by saying something like, "I know we have a number of visitors in the house today, but I need to take a few minutes to address our congregation." This lets those visiting know what you are about share is for current church members.

Make sure you are preaching at a level that the average person can understand. Use wisdom in the theological terms you use. Use discernment on when and how to deal with a sensitive or potentially controversial topic or message.

When preaching a series, it is good to give a brief overview of the previous message or messages that gives a good lead into the message. This is not only helpful to those who missed last week's message but is a great review for everyone.

Scope and sequence are not just academic concepts; they are pastoral tools. They help us define **what** we'll teach (scope) and **when and how** we'll teach it (sequence), so that our people grow in the faith *line upon line, precept upon precept* (Isaiah 28:10).

We must help believers build spiritual understanding in the right order—starting with foundational truths and growing into deeper revelation and maturity.

Pastor Andy Stanley once said, *"Preaching doesn't just inspire people; it builds them. And what we build is shaped by what we plan."*

Yet, if you ask most pastors, "How far out do you plan your sermons?" the answer is often, "A few weeks at a time." Some may have embraced four-week series, which is a good step forward—but often, those series lack continuity or connection to one another. The result? A congregation that receives fragments of truth, but not the full picture. A meal here, a snack there—but rarely a full, nourishing diet.

Preaching Calendar

If we want our churches to be spiritually healthy, we must move from preaching momentarily to preaching **progressively**.

That's the power of a preaching calendar.

A preaching calendar is more than a spreadsheet filled with sermon titles and Scriptures. It's a map for the journey. It helps you plan the terrain—mountaintop moments like Easter and Christmas, as well as valleys of discipleship, sanctification, and struggle. It gives clarity, focus, and freedom. And most importantly, it ensures that the people you're called to lead are consistently and intentionally fed the whole counsel of God.

You might get away with winging it for a while, but eventually, you will either burn out or fail to reach your God-given potential. Preaching calendars leads to better sermons, helps your team, and saves you time.

For many pastors, the thought of using a sermon calendar can feel like a tug-of-war between structure and spontaneity—as if

organizing your preaching means sidelining the Holy Spirit. It can seem like you're choosing between divine inspiration and a spreadsheet. But what if planning ahead doesn't limit the Spirit—but actually invites Him in more deeply?

Pastor Chris Hodges once said, "The Holy Spirit is not afraid of a calendar." In fact, planning your sermons prayerfully can create sacred space for God to speak with greater clarity and purpose. When you take time in advance to seek His direction, you're not replacing His voice—you're making more room to hear it.

If you've wrestled with the balance between preparation and being Spirit-led, here's the good news: you don't have to choose. You can do both. Start with prayer, not just a planner. Ask the Holy Spirit to guide your year—not just your Sunday. Remember, He already knows what your church will need next week, next month, and six months from now.

As Pastor Craig Groeschel often reminds us, "Preparation is not the enemy of inspiration—it's the partner of revelation." Be flexible. Build a plan with open hands. Let God breathe on your calendar, and trust Him to lead you in both structure and spontaneity. The result? Greater clarity, deeper impact, and a church that's fed with intentional, Spirit-anointed truth all year long.

Pastor Chris Hodges put it this way:

"A preaching calendar doesn't limit the Spirit—it gives Him room to move. Planning isn't unspiritual; it's wise stewardship."

So, pastor, let me ask you:

- Do you carve out time each year to prayerfully plan where you're leading your people through preaching?
- Do your sermons build upon one another like chapters in a book—or do they feel like disconnected short stories?
- Are you feeding your congregation with a spiritual diet that's balanced, strategic, and full of life?

In the next few pages, we'll walk through how to build a powerful and practical sermon calendar. One that brings structure to your preaching, depth to your messages, and health to your church. Along the way, we'll explore principles of planning, how to preach to your people's real needs, how to balance your content, and how to remain flexible for the unexpected moments when the Holy Spirit redirects the journey.

Let's begin the process of creating more than just a schedule—let's build a *pathway of discipleship* that leads people deeper into the heart of God.

How to Create a Powerful and Practical Sermon Calendar

Each week, pastors across the globe step into the pulpit with a singular goal: to proclaim the Word of God in a way that transforms lives. But behind every powerful sermon is intentional preparation—and one of the most valuable tools in a preacher's toolkit is a well-thought-out sermon calendar.

A sermon calendar isn't just about organization. It's about stewardship. When you plan your preaching in advance, you make room for the Holy Spirit to work through structure rather

than chaos. It allows you to feed your flock with consistency, clarity, and spiritual nutrition that builds them over time.

Here's 7 steps to help you build an effective sermon calendar that will not only help you as a pastor but strengthens your church as a whole:

1. Plan at Least One Year Ahead

Imagine preparing a hearty meal for your family every single day without knowing what's in the pantry. That's what it's like preaching week to week without a plan.

Planning at least a year in advance provides structure that benefits your schedule, your staff, and most importantly, your congregation. When you know what's coming, you can pray more specifically, study more deeply, and collaborate more effectively.

Dr. Tony Evans once said, *"God does His best work with a prepared heart."* A preaching calendar opens your heart—and your ministry—to preparation rather than desperation.

Without a plan, you're constantly under pressure, juggling sermon prep with counseling, meetings, and emergencies. It's what some call *"the tyranny of the urgent."* A yearly plan sets you free from scrambling on Saturday night and gives your team time to build worship sets, promotions, and creative elements around the message.

2. Don't Plan More Than Three Years Out

While planning brings peace, over-planning can bring rigidity. Most churches evolve in ways we can't predict. Your congregation today may not be your congregation three years

from now—people move, demographics shift, new challenges arise.

Planning three years out can be helpful for big-picture themes or long-term series, but hold those plans with an open hand.

As Pastor Craig Groeschel puts it, *"Be organized, but always be interruptible by the Holy Spirit."*

God often reveals timely messages in timely moments. Make space for that.

3. Preach a Balanced Diet

Your congregation doesn't need dessert every Sunday. They need spiritual nutrition—a variety of messages that feed the whole person.

A balanced sermon calendar includes:

- Old and New Testament series
- Topical and expositional messages
- Discipleship and evangelistic focus
- Theological depth and practical application
- Short series and longer, deep-dive series

Think of it like a well-rounded menu. If all you ever serve is meat, some will go malnourished. Mix in the vegetables, grains, and even a little dessert from time to time.

Pastor Rick Warren shares, *"The most important thing a preacher can do is feed the sheep with the whole counsel of God."* A well-balanced sermon calendar makes that possible.

4. Plan for the People You Have, Not the Ones You Wish You Had

Before you start building your calendar, ask this crucial question: *"What does my congregation need right now?"*

It's tempting to preach to a hypothetical audience—church leaders, theologians, or a younger crowd you wish would attend. But true pastoral preaching serves *your* people.

Don't preach your problems. Don't chase trends. Instead, bring the Word of God into the real lives of your congregation.

Picture a shepherd preparing a meal for his sheep. He doesn't guess what they *might* want—he feeds them what they *actually* need. That's the heart of a shepherd-preacher.

5. Keep the Seasons in Mind

Just as the natural year has rhythms, so does the church calendar. Build your preaching around those seasons to maximize engagement and rest.

- **Christmas and Easter** are high-attendance seasons ideal for evangelistic series.
- **Summer** might be better suited for lighter, stand-alone messages or a practical series.
- **January** is great for vision casting or spiritual disciplines.
- **Fall** often brings momentum—consider starting major series then.

Also, plan intentional *breathers*—shorter series or guest speakers to give you and your team margin.

6. Preach to Your Strengths—and Grow from There

God has wired each preacher uniquely. Some of us come alive in narrative texts, others thrive in theological exposition. Know your strengths and start there. But don't stay there.

Stretch yourself. Add topics and texts to your calendar that challenge you to grow. And if there's a subject your congregation needs that you're not ready to preach, invite a trusted guest speaker who can deliver it with excellence.

As Charles Spurgeon once said, *"He who would speak well must first hear well."* Learn from others. Expand your perspective. But also—don't force yourself into styles that aren't you. Let God use *your* voice.

7. Make Your Plan Flexible

A calendar is a guide, not a god.

There will be moments—a tragedy, a national crisis, a stirring from the Holy Spirit—when your plan needs to change. That's not failure. That's faithfulness.

The plan should serve you, not shackle you.

I once had an entire month planned out, but on the Sunday after a local tragedy struck our city, I knew I had to change course. That morning, I preached a message on hope from Psalm 46—*"God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble."* It wasn't in the plan. But it was exactly what our people needed.

Final Thoughts: Feed the Flock Well

The heart of sermon planning isn't control—it's care.

It's the desire to be a faithful steward of the sacred trust we've been given. Your sermon calendar is more than a schedule. It's a shepherd's plan to feed the sheep well, week after week, season after season.

Know your people. Know the Word. And let the Holy Spirit lead the way.

As you begin crafting your calendar, remember: you're not just planning messages. You're shaping lives, one sermon at a time.

Approach each moment with open hands and hearts, recognizing God's presence already at work in the places you'll touch. This mission isn't just a journey; it's a divine opportunity to impact lives and be transformed in the process.

Preparing

We are going cover a number of different aspects of how to prepare a sermon. We will share the 3 parts of any sermon, 3 types and 3 methods of preparation, we will cover the 3 different sermon structures including a template for each structure, I will share with you the 6 steps I use to prepare my preaching outlines, we are going to talk about the need for research and the importance of rehearsing your message. All of these different parts of sermon preparation are based on the four pillars of homiletics; concept, content, clarity, and connection.

The Four Pillars of Homiletics

Preaching isn't just about public speaking—it's about divine communication. It's the sacred art of taking God's eternal truth and delivering it with clarity, conviction, and compassion to a generation in need. Great preaching doesn't happen by accident. It requires spiritual sensitivity, careful thought, and a methodical process. That's where homiletics—the art and science of preaching—comes in.

Whether you're a seasoned minister or just starting out, understanding these four foundational pillars of homiletics will sharpen your effectiveness. I call them the **4 C's of Preaching**: **Concept, Content, Clarity, and Connection**. Master these, and you'll be equipped to preach sermons that inspire hearts, renew minds, and change lives.

1. Concept – Catch the Fire

Every life-changing sermon starts with a divine spark—a God-breathed idea that lights up your spirit. You know that feeling: You're praying, reading Scripture, or maybe just walking through your day, and suddenly a phrase, a passage, or an idea grabs you. That's your **"gold nugget"**—a seed from heaven ready to be cultivated into a message.

Pastor Jack Hayford once said, *"The preacher's first task is not to create a message, but to receive one."* Sermon concepts aren't just brainstormed; they're **birthed in the Spirit**.

Think of Moses at the burning bush. It was one moment of divine interruption that changed everything. Similarly, God often ignites sermon ideas in quiet moments of worship, study, or

reflection. These "seed thoughts" may not be full-blown messages yet, but they linger, stir your spirit, and grow over time.

Pro Tip: Keep a sermon journal or notes app handy. Don't lose those Holy Spirit downloads—they often grow into your most anointed sermons.

2. Content – Mine the Gold

Once you've caught the spark, it's time to dig deep. This is where study, prayer, and reflection come into play. Take your seed and mine it—unearth every insight, illustration, and scriptural connection possible.

This isn't the time to worry about structure. Just get it all out. Pour it onto the page like raw gold from the earth. Later, you'll refine it, but for now, gather everything the Spirit is showing you.

Charles Spurgeon, the "Prince of Preachers," said, *"The sermon begins in the closet."* In other words, depth in the pulpit starts with depth in the prayer room. Your time with God off the platform determines your impact on it.

Ask questions like:

- What does the Bible say about this theme?
- How did Jesus embody this truth?
- What stories or analogies illustrate it?
- How does this apply to everyday life?

Illustration: Imagine a miner who finds a vein of gold. He doesn't stop after a few shovels. He digs, and digs, and digs—

because he knows treasure lies deeper. Do the same with your sermon content.

3. Clarity – Build the Framework

You've got the gold—now shape it. This is where you move from inspiration to architecture. A sermon without structure is like a river with no banks—it spills everywhere and goes nowhere.

Jesus didn't ramble—He *taught*. His messages had clarity, direction, and focus.

At this stage, organize your ideas into a logical sequence: **Introduction → Main Points → Scripture → Application → Conclusion.**
Think of it like building a house. The foundation is your concept. The walls are your key points. The roof is your application and call to action. Everything needs to work together to create a sturdy, impactful structure.

Pastor Andy Stanley often emphasizes, *"Clarity is the win in preaching."* A confused audience doesn't get transformed—they get frustrated.

Use transitions to guide your listeners. Don't just drop truths—**walk them through** your message. Make sure each point builds on the last. And remember: what's clear to you on paper may be muddy from the pulpit. Rehearse and revise until your message flows like a river, not a swamp.

4. Connection – Preach with People in Mind

A great sermon is not just preached—it's **received**. Connection is the bridge between your message and your audience's heart. Without it, even the most well-researched sermon can fall flat.

You connect by being **real**, **relatable**, and **relevant**. Use stories. Paint pictures with your words. Share personal experiences. Speak to the season your congregation is in. Jesus did this constantly—talking about seeds, shepherds, coins, and storms. He met people where they lived.

Pastor Tony Evans puts it this way: *"A mist in the pulpit creates a fog in the pews."* If you're unclear or disconnected, your congregation won't know what to do with your message.

Application is key. Ask yourself:

- How does this message help someone with a struggling marriage?
- What can a teenager take away and use this week?
- How does this speak to someone battling fear, shame, or doubt?

Illustration: Think of your sermon as a bridge. On one side is biblical truth. On the other is everyday life. Your job is to lay down planks that allow people to walk from the Word into their world.

Final Encouragement: Preach from the Overflow

Preaching is not a performance—it's an overflow. When your heart is full of God's Word, your mind clear with structure, your notes rich with content, and your voice alive with passion, you'll preach with authority and anointing.

The great pastor E.V. Hill once said, *"When I get up to preach, I want the devil to say, 'Oh no, he's up again.'"*

That kind of preaching doesn't come from winging it. It comes from honoring the **Four Pillars of Homiletics**:

- **Concept** – Receive the divine spark.
- **Content** – Dig until you've mined all the gold.
- **Clarity** – Structure the message with excellence.
- **Connection** – Deliver it in a way that meets people where they are.

Keeping these 4 pillars of homiletics in mind lets continue our study on how to prepare our message.

3 Parts of any Sermon

First, regardless of the type of message we decide to preach, or the method all sermons should have 3 parts. Grasp this truth, and sermon preparation (Homiletics) will become a whole lot easier.

The three parts of a sermon are the

1. introduction,
2. the body, and
3. the conclusion.

The introduction introduces the body of your sermon or the main preaching point of your sermon. The body of your sermon is your sermon outline or what you are going to talk about in your sermon. The conclusion concludes the sermon and reinforces the main preaching point of your sermon.

I am absolutely amazed at how many preachers get this wrong.

In our discussion on sermon planning, we covered how to choose what you are going to preach – the verse or verses, topic, subject, etc. and when to preach the message. So, now that we know what we are going to preach and when let's look at how to prepare the message.

3 Types and 3 Methods of Preparation

Every sermon is a sacred opportunity—an open door to speak God's truth, ignite faith, and lead people toward transformation. But how we approach sermon preparation can greatly impact the clarity, accuracy, and power of our message. There are many different ways to deliver a sermon. However, technically, there are only three **types** of preparation:

1. Written out,
2. Skelton notes,
3. Inspirations

There are only 3 **methods** of preparation:

1. deductively,
2. inductively, or
3. a bit of both.

While these terms may sound a bit mechanical or confusing, understanding them will make you a sharper communicator and a more balanced messenger of the gospel.

Let's break them down—simply and practically.

1. **Written Sermon**
   - **Advantages:** This method ensures thorough coverage of the topic with every detail considered. It is especially useful for complex teachings that require precision.

- **Disadvantages:** It can feel overly formal or monotonous if read verbatim. Engaging the audience emotionally can be challenging.

2. **"Skeleton-Type" Notes**
   - **Advantages:** Brief notes provide a framework that keeps you on track while allowing flexibility and spontaneity during delivery.
   - **Disadvantages:** Requires the preacher to be well-prepared to flesh out the "bones" of the sermon effectively.
   - **Recommendation:** This is often the most effective and versatile method for teaching and preaching.
3. **Inspirational Sermon**
   - **Advantages:** Delivered spontaneously, it often carries strong emotional and motivational power.
   - **Disadvantages:** It can lack depth or become overly emotional without sufficient preparation.
   - **Best Use:** Ideal for evangelistic or revival settings where emotional engagement is key.

3 Sermon Structures

Once you have decided on the type of preparation and the method of preparation you are going to need to choose the approach to your sermon – how are you going to structure your message.

Will you prepare your message deductively, or inductively, or with a bit of both? Once you have decided how you are going to structure your sermon, you will need to write a sermon outline.

Before moving on to an explanation of how to make an outline, (on page 82) let's take a deeper dive into what deductive and inductive methods of preparing a message are.

What's the Difference?

Inductive preaching starts with a passage of Scripture and leads the listener toward a truth. You're discovering as you go, guiding your audience along the journey until they arrive at a powerful conclusion. It's like revealing a treasure map piece by piece.

Deductive preaching, on the other hand, starts with a clearly stated truth or principle, and then supports it with Scripture. It's more like a courtroom argument—you state your case, then present the evidence.

Both are powerful. But the key is knowing *how* and *when* to use them.

Inductive Preaching: The Power of Discovery

Inductive preaching is more passage-driven. You start by diving into a section of Scripture, exploring the context, studying the author's intent, and allowing the truth to rise naturally from the text. You're not preaching a conclusion—you're taking people on a journey *to* the conclusion.

This method is great when your goal is spiritual growth, reflection, and heart transformation. It invites the listener to discover the truth for themselves.

"The goal of preaching is not information, but transformation."
– Haddon Robinson

Pros of Inductive Preaching:

- Encourages spiritual discovery
- Often more engaging and relatable

- Helps listeners internalize truth
- Creates space for personal application

Cons:

- Can be subjective or unclear if not carefully grounded
- May lack theological depth without broader Scripture comparison

Deductive Preaching: The Power of Clarity

Deductive preaching is often used in topical or doctrinal sermons. You begin with a statement like, *"God is faithful,"* then support it with carefully chosen verses. This is useful when clarity and structure are essential—especially when you're addressing confusion, answering questions, or teaching foundational truths.

Pros of Deductive Preaching:

- Provides strong theological structure
- Offers clarity and confidence in teaching
- Excellent for apologetics and doctrine

Cons:

- Can feel too "heady" or impersonal if not delivered with heart
- Risks overlooking the context or full meaning of passages

It's Not Either/Or—It's Both

The best sermons often blend both methods.

Let's say you're preaching a message on *forgiveness*. You may begin inductively, walking the congregation through the parable of the unmerciful servant (Matthew 18). As they connect emotionally with the story, the truth begins to emerge: "We forgive because we've been forgiven." From there, you switch to a deductive approach—pulling in supporting verses (Colossians 3:13, Ephesians 4:32) to strengthen and support your central point.

In other words, start with *discovery*, and finish with *reinforcement*.

"Good preaching starts with the text, but great preaching helps people see themselves in the text." – Rick Warren

Here's How I Do It

When preparing a sermon, I often begin with prayer—seeking clarity on what God wants to say. Once I feel led to a topic, I begin with an *inductive* approach. I study every passage related to the topic, listening for the Holy Spirit's voice, looking for patterns, themes, and life-changing truths.

Then I switch to a *deductive* mindset—organizing those truths into a clear outline with supporting Scriptures. This becomes the foundation for my message. Once I have my main points, I add stories, illustrations, and transitions that tie it all together and lead to a compelling conclusion.

The goal isn't just to inform minds—it's to change hearts.

The best preaching is both *biblical* and *relatable*, *theological* and *transformational*. That's why both inductive and deductive methods matter.

Inductive helps you stay fresh, grounded in the text, and sensitive to the Spirit. Deductive helps you stay clear, solid in doctrine, and ready to give answers.

Together, they make you a well-rounded preacher.

"The preacher must never stop being a student of the Word—but he must also be a servant of the people." – John Stott

Are you using both approaches in your preaching? Are your sermons both Spirit-led and Scripture-anchored?

I have included templates you can use for each of the three methods on the next few pages. Use them to help you improve your message preparation.

Mastering these tools won't just make you a better preacher—it will help your people grow stronger, deeper, and more equipped to live the life God has called them to.

(***on following pages are sermon preparation templates for the 3 different sermon structures: inductive, deductive, and a lit of both)***

Inductive Sermon Template
(Start with the Text → Lead to the Truth)

1. Pray and Select a Passage
Ask the Holy Spirit to guide you. Choose a story, paragraph, or section that stands out.

2. Read Deeply

- Observe the context (what comes before and after?)
- Who is speaking? To whom? What's happening?
- Key words or repeated ideas?

3. Identify the Tension
What problem, question, or issue is being addressed? What might the listener relate to?

4. Guide the Discovery
Lead your audience through the text—highlighting the key moments and allowing the main idea to *emerge*.

5. Draw the Conclusion
Let the Scripture "reveal" the truth. Only after walking through the text do you make the main point clear.

6. Apply It
How should this truth change our thinking or living? Offer 1–2 strong takeaways.

7. Illustrate Along the Way
Use stories, analogies, or examples to help people emotionally connect.

Deductive Sermon Template
(Start with the Truth → Prove It with Scripture)

1. Pray and Choose a Central Truth
This could be a doctrine, promise, or principle like: *God is faithful*.

2. Define the Big Idea
Write out your main point clearly: *God remains faithful even when we fail*.

3. Gather Supporting Scriptures
Look up 5–10 verses that speak to your topic. Pick 2–3 that are strongest.

4. Build Your Outline
Each point supports your main idea. Example:

- God's faithfulness is part of His character (Lamentations 3:22–23)
- God remains faithful in our weakness (2 Timothy 2:13)
- God proves His faithfulness through Christ (Romans 5:8)

5. Illustrate Each Point
Include a story or example to bring the truth to life.

6. Apply It Clearly
How can this truth help someone on Monday morning?

7. End with a Challenge or Encouragement
Call people to respond in faith, obedience, or worship.

Blended Sermon Example: "You Can Trust God"

Big Idea: You can trust God even when life doesn't make sense.
Passage: Proverbs 3:5–6
Topic: Trust in God

Step-by-Step Walkthrough:

1. Begin Inductively (Start with the Text):
Read Proverbs 3:5–6 slowly.
Walk your audience through each phrase:

- "Trust in the Lord with all your heart…" – What does that mean?
- "Lean not on your own understanding…" – Why is that hard?
- "In all your ways acknowledge Him…" – What does that look like practically?
- "And He will direct your paths." – What's the promise?

2. Draw the Discovery (Inductive Conclusion):
Let the text unfold the main point: *Trusting God leads to divine direction*.

3. Then Move into Deductive Mode (Topical Support):
Now that the truth is clear, strengthen it:

- Abraham trusted God without knowing the destination (Genesis 12)
- David trusted God in the valley of the shadow of death (Psalm 23)
- Jesus trusted the Father even in Gethsemane (Luke 22:42)

4. Outline It Simply:

- **Point 1:** Trust requires surrender (Proverbs 3:5)
- **Point 2:** Trust overrules logic (Proverbs 3:5b)
- **Point 3:** Trust leads to clarity (Proverbs 3:6)

5. Illustrate with a Story:
Share a personal testimony or a story of someone who trusted God and saw Him work.

6. Apply the Truth:
Challenge listeners:

- What area are you struggling to trust God in?
- Will you surrender that today?

7. End with a Call:
Invite people to pray a simple prayer of trust and surrender. Encourage them to let go of control and lean into God's direction.

Final Tip:

When preparing for any sermon:

- **Inductive builds hunger.** It makes people lean in.
- **Deductive brings clarity.** It gives people something solid to take home.

Use inductive to explore the truth. Use deductive to anchor it.

(*Next page we pick up from page 73)*

Outlines

I am a big proponent of using an outline to preach. I know a lot of pastors who type out their whole sermon. Some read the total message from beginning to end, others will read parts of it while others will read most of it. Some use a teleprompter, others read from their tablet, and others have a typed-out manuscript. I know some who get up and preach totally extemporaneously. My preference is to use a well-designed and formulated outline.

Think of a sermon outline as your roadmap to a captivating message. **It's a structured overview of your key points, transitions, and supporting elements, ensuring clarity and flow.** Just like a building needs an architect's blueprint, your sermon thrives with the foundation of a solid outline. For me, the process of creating the outline is, in essence, how I prepare my messages.

How to Create an Effective Sermon Outline

A well-structured sermon doesn't just communicate a message—it inspires transformation. Here are the steps I take that help me craft a clear, engaging, and Spirit-led sermon outline that connects with the congregation and delivers biblical truth with impact.

1. Choose Your Text, Subject, or Topic

Start with prayer. Ask God what He wants to say to His people.

Then, identify the central message you feel led to share. Is it based on a specific Bible passage, a theme relevant to your congregation, or a timely issue people are facing? I always like

to start with the Bible text, even if the central message is topic or event-centric. Let God's Word be the foundation for everything that follows.

We addressed the process of choosing your message in more detail in our discussion on planning and creating the preaching calendar. During the planning phase, we will often get the scriptures, topics, and subjects from the 20,000-foot big picture view, and then when we get to the point of developing the message, we will get additional clarity on the text or topic.

"The goal is not to find a verse for your message, but to find the message within the verse."

2. Create and Write a Captivating Introduction

Your introduction is your first impression—make it count.

Begin with something that grabs attention: a powerful question, a short story, a startling fact, or even a moment of silence. Let your listeners know why this message matters and how it relates to their lives. The introduction should stir curiosity and prepare hearts to receive the Word. I personally like to write out the introduction and memorize it. This ensures when I get ready to start I am prepared and gets me off to a good start. I am always able to adjust and flow in whatever direction seems right and then use the outline to keep me on track.

3. Build 2–3 Clear Main Points

These are the core ideas that carry your message forward.

Aim for 2 or 3 strong, memorable points that are rooted in Scripture and clearly connected to your main topic. Keep them

concise and easy to follow. Each point should build upon the last, moving the listener deeper into the truth you're sharing.

"A mist in the pulpit is a fog in the pew." – Dr. Howard Hendricks Keep your points sharp and focused.

4. Use Meaningful Illustrations

Stories make truth stick.

Support each main point with a story, personal testimony, biblical example, quote, or illustration that brings the point to life. Choose illustrations that your audience can relate to—something that connects with their experiences and emotions. When done well, illustrations make your message unforgettable.

5. Create Smooth Transitions

Help your audience follow the journey of your message.

Use clear and intentional transition phrases like "Let's go deeper," "That brings us to our next point," or "Here's where it all comes together." Transitions keep the message flowing and help people stay engaged from start to finish.

6. Write a Strong Conclusion

End with impact.

Reinforce your main points and restate your key message. Then, bring it home with a challenge, encouragement, or practical application, and an altar call that challenges the people to respond. Give your audience something to reflect on—and something to act on. A good conclusion leaves the message ringing in their hearts long after they leave.

"Don’t just end your sermon—land it with purpose."

I liked to write out completely the first part of the conclusion. One that flows perfectly from the message. I like to bullet point the key calls to actions. The first call to action should be directly related to the message. If I preached a message on the power of God’s forgiveness. My first call to action would be to ask how many of you need God’s forgiveness today? I may then include how many of you need to forgive someone? After dealing with the main point or points of the message I always include an invitation to receive Christ. I get into more detail in the chapter on altar calls.

With prayer, preparation, and the guidance of the Holy Spirit, your sermon outline becomes more than a structure—it becomes a channel through which God speaks. Stay faithful to the Word, speak with clarity, and trust God to do the rest.

There’s no one-size-fits-all approach to sermon outlines. In fact there are several different types of outlines. Each sermon is unique, and choosing the right outline can help you deliver your message with clarity and impact. Here are ten popular formats:

1. **Three-Point Outline** – A timeless classic. Organizes your message into three clear, memorable points with supporting sub-points. Simple and effective.
2. **Narrative Outline** – Tells a story from start to finish, drawing listeners in emotionally while revealing spiritual truths.
3. **Topical Outline** – Unpacks different aspects of a single theme or subject (e.g., grace, prayer, forgiveness) for well-rounded insight.

4. **Problem-Solution Outline** – Introduces a real-life problem, then provides biblical answers and practical steps for resolution.
5. **Chronological Outline** – Follows a timeline of events, often used for Bible stories, historical overviews, or life journeys.
6. **Q&A Outline** – Starts with engaging questions your audience may be asking, followed by scriptural and practical answers.
7. **Illustration-Based Outline** – Anchors each point with vivid stories, metaphors, or analogies that make the truth stick.
8. **Quotation-Centered Outline** – Uses key quotes—biblical, historical, or contemporary—as launching points for deeper teaching.
9. **Testimony Outline** – Builds the message around personal or others' life stories, showcasing God's power in real situations.
10. **Hybrid Outline** – Combines two or more styles (e.g., narrative + topical, Q&A + testimony) for a fresh, dynamic presentation.

The best outline is the one that fits your message, your audience, and how God wired you to preach. Try different styles, and let the Holy Spirit guide your creativity.

Then use the 6 steps shared to help craft your outline to fit your unique style, message, and preaching preferences. Don't be afraid to experiment and find what works best for you!

Sample Sermon Construction Framework

A. State the Truth

1. **Declare It** - Clearly present the main truth or scripture focus.
2. **Explain It** - Elaborate on the meaning and context.
3. **Clarify It** - Address potential misunderstandings or questions.

B. Amplify the Truth

1. **Develop It** - Expand the truth with examples or subpoints.
2. **Substantiate It** - Support it with scripture, doctrine, or illustrations.
3. **Prove It** - Reinforce it with testimonies, analogies, or evidence.

C. Conclusion – Climax – Closing

1. **Present Your Conclusion** - Summarize the overarching message.
2. **What May We Learn From This?** - Highlight key lessons.
3. **How May We Practically Apply It?** - Offer actionable steps.

D. Altar Call

- **Appeal to the Mind:** Summarize the main points concisely.
- **Appeal to the Will:** Persuade listeners to act on the message.
- **Appeal to the Emotions:** Inspire and motivate transformation.
- **Invitation to Respond**

Research

Use the resources in your preacher's toolbox to research and study the text and topic. Do word studies, read commentaries, compare translations, look for testimonies, and review notes you have in your files, previous messages, etc.

Research should be ongoing, something you're doing all the time, not just as you are getting ready to preach a message. What I mean by that is I am always looking for opportunities to gain insight into scripture and be sensitive to current events, I make notes and capture content that I think could be use in future messages. If I hear or see someone sharing something that touches me or really does a great job of explaining a certain text or scripture I will try to make note of it and give it to my secretary to file so I can refer to at a later date. I am always looking for powerful testimonies that bring the Bible to life.

2 Timothy 2:15 tells us to, "Be diligent (study) to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." As pastors we should always be learning and making sure we are prepared to present the truth of God's Word accurately, diligently, and faithfully.

Rehearse

Every time we step into the pulpit, we have an incredible opportunity to fulfill our God-given calling to share the transformative power of His Word. The Holy Spirit is with us, and our mission is to impact lives with the truth of the gospel. But we all know that preaching is not just about what we say; it's about how we say it. The delivery of our message can make all the

difference. (*in a later chapter we go into detail on how to deliver the message*)

While we can't control every factor—like distractions in the room or technical difficulties—we do have control over one essential thing: how well we prepare. And one often overlooked aspect of that preparation is **rehearsing**.

You may be thinking, "Why rehearse? Isn't that just for actors or performers?" While we are NOT about performance we are committed to excellence. Rehearsal is key to delivering your message with clarity, confidence, and passion, with excellence. It will help take your preaching to the next level!

Why You Should Rehearse Your Sermons

1. To Know Exactly What to Expect

Imagine a worship leader who hasn't rehearsed for the Sunday service. They might stumble through the songs, lose their place, or miss the key changes. In the same way, you don't want the first time your sermon leaves your lips to be when you're standing in front of your congregation. Too much is at stake.

Pastor Andy Stanley once said, *"The goal of preaching isn't to be impressive; it's to be clear."* Rehearsing helps you get clear—on your timing, your tone, your transitions, and your illustrations. That story about your first date might seem like a quick opener, but in real time, it may eat up five crucial minutes. Practicing beforehand shows you where you're long-winded, where your ideas stumble, and where your transitions need tightening.

Think of it like this: rehearsing doesn't restrain the Holy Spirit; it actually gives Him more room to move. When you're not

preoccupied with remembering what comes next, you can be fully present, fully yielded, and fully led.

2. To Align Your Notes, Slides, Videos, etc. and Mind

Preaching is not just about writing; it's about communicating. Writing engages one part of your brain, but speaking and listening activate two more. Rehearsing gives you the full mental picture of how your sermon will land. You'll notice mismatches between your notes and slides, awkward phrasing that sounded great on paper but not out loud, and maybe even discover a better way to say something entirely.

I can't count the number of times I've found a slide out of place or a sentence that needed tweaking—just because I ran through the message out loud. As Pastor H.B. Charles Jr. puts it: *"The pulpit is no place for guesswork."* Rehearsing is how you eliminate the guesswork.

3. To Stay on Time Without Looking at the Clock

One of the most distracting things a preacher can do is constantly remind the congregation how much time is left: *"I'm running out of time... Just a few more minutes... Almost done..."*

When you rehearse, you know exactly how long your message runs. You can trim the fat, cut that extra story, or rework that section that rambles. Instead of reacting to the clock, you're proactively managing your time. That frees your people to focus on the Word instead of their watches.

As Charles Spurgeon once said, *"Be brief, be brilliant, be gone."* Rehearsal helps you hit all three.

How to Rehearse Your Sermons for Maximum Impact

1. Find a Private Space.
Choose a quiet room where you can preach at full volume and with full expression. Don't whisper—preach it like it's Sunday.

2. Bring Everything You'll Use.
Have your notes, slides, props, or anything else you plan to use. Set it up like you would on Sunday morning.

3. Record Yourself.
Use your phone's voice memo app or a camera to record your run-through. Don't skip this—listening to yourself is one of the most powerful tools for self-evaluation.

4. Preach the Whole Message.
Resist the urge to just glance over it. Go through every point, every transition, every illustration. Click through the slides as you preach, just like the real thing.

Questions to Ask After You Rehearse

- Did I stay within my time limit?
- Did the sermon flow logically and clearly?
- Were my transitions smooth?
- Did the tone match the message?
- Do my slides enhance or distract?
- Are my notes easy to follow?
- Did I feel any part dragging or missing energy?
- Did anything surprise me when I said it out loud?
- Am I excited to preach this again on Sunday?

Rehearsing doesn't make your preaching stiff—it makes it stronger. It's not about memorizing every word; it's about owning your message. It's about removing distractions so that you can deliver the Word with power, precision, and passion.

As Pastor Bryan Loritts said, *"The best preachers bleed during preparation so they can soar during proclamation."* So go ahead—rehearse. Bleed a little. And then soar.

Specifics for Preparing Expository, Topical & Textual Sermons

In the next few pages, we're going to explore, in depth, how to prepare each of the three major types of sermons. While some of the principles we'll cover may echo what we've already discussed about sermon planning and preparation, it's important to revisit them—because they form the very foundation of powerful preaching. Repetition isn't redundancy; it's reinforcement. These truths are worth repeating because they are essential to fulfilling our high calling of preaching and teaching God's Word with clarity, conviction, and transformational power.

Keep in mind, while the core steps may remain consistent, each type of sermon—whether expository, textual, or topical—applies those steps in slightly different ways. Understanding these nuances will help you become a more versatile and effective communicator. So, approach each section with fresh eyes and an open heart. Let's sharpen our skills, deepen our understanding, and prepare to rightly divide the Word of truth—

so that lives can be changed through the message God has given us to proclaim.

How to Prepare an Expository Sermon

Expository preaching is one of the most powerful methods a preacher can use to faithfully communicate God's Word. It involves drawing truth directly from the biblical text—verse by verse—and delivering that truth with clarity, conviction, and relevance.

The goal is not to impose ideas onto the text, but to *expose* what is already there—hence the name *expository*. This kind of preaching honors the authority of Scripture, deepens the listener's understanding, and equips them to live out the Word of God.

Here's a practical and engaging guide to preparing your next expository sermon:

1. Choose the Right Text: Building on a Foundation

Every great expository sermon begins with a carefully selected passage of Scripture.

A. Seek the Holy Spirit's Guidance

Before anything else, *pray*. Ask God to lead you to the right passage that meets the spiritual needs of your congregation.

Illustration: Charles Spurgeon once said, "I never prepare a sermon without first pleading for the Holy Spirit to guide my thoughts. It's His Word; I'm just the messenger."

B. Look for a Passage with Rich Content

Choose a section with enough depth for exploration—typically 3 to 10 verses that form a natural unit of thought. Avoid pulling a verse out of context.

C. Consider Relevance to the Church

Is your church walking through a specific challenge—fear, apathy, or lack of unity? Ask, "What truth does this congregation need to hear right now?"

Example: A church in a season of transition may benefit from a series through Joshua 1, emphasizing God's presence in change.

2. Conduct Thorough Exegesis: Dig into the Treasure

Exegesis is the careful study of the text to understand its original meaning to the original audience.

A. Examine the Literary Context

- Read the verses before and after your passage.
- Understand how your text fits into the chapter, book, and broader biblical narrative.

B. Do a Word Study

Look at key words using Greek or Hebrew tools. Identify repeated words, verbs, or phrases that carry theological weight.

Example: In Ephesians 2:8–9, studying the word *"gift"* (Greek: *dōron*) emphasizes salvation as something undeserved and unearned.

C. Use Solid Resources

- **Commentaries** for historical and theological insight
- **Bible dictionaries** for terms and cultural references
- **Concordances** to trace themes throughout Scripture

Illustration: Preparing a sermon on Psalm 23, one preacher discovered through a commentary that shepherds would *break a sheep's leg* to keep it from wandering. That painful image helped him illustrate God's loving discipline.

3. Build a Clear Sermon Structure: Organize

A clear, logical structure helps your listeners track with the message and remember what they've heard.

A. Craft a Gripping Introduction

Start with a personal story, a surprising statistic, or a provocative question. Hook their hearts before you feed their minds.

Example: "What if I told you that God uses storms to strengthen, not destroy you?"

B. Develop a Verse-by-Verse Exposition

Go through the passage in order. For each verse or section:

- Explain what it means (Interpretation)
- Show why it matters (Theology)
- Illustrate what it looks like (Application)

C. Offer Life-Relevant Application

Help people see how God's truth intersects with their everyday lives. Don't just inform—transform.

D. Conclude with Purpose

Wrap up by restating your main idea and issuing a challenge or invitation.

Tip: End with a moment of reflection, a powerful quote, or a short story that brings the sermon full circle.

4. Illustrate and Apply: Make It Stick

Sermons don't need to be dry lectures. Use illustrations, stories, and analogies to bring your points to life.

A. Use Real-Life Examples

Draw from your own life, church history, or well-known figures. Make abstract truths tangible.

Illustration: Teaching about faith from Hebrews 11? Share the story of Corrie Ten Boom hiding Jews during the Holocaust—trusting God in the face of death.

B. Connect with Today's Culture

Use familiar language, movies, songs, or situations to help people see biblical truth in everyday life.
Example: "Just like your GPS reroutes you when you miss a turn, God's grace gives second chances even when we fail."

C. Make Application Personal

Ask:

- "How should we respond to this truth?"
- "What would it look like if we lived this out?"
- "Is there a sin to confess, a truth to believe, or a step to take?"

5. Practice Your Delivery: Preach with Passion

Don't just write your sermon—*own* it. Great content delivered poorly can still fall flat.

A. Read It Out Loud

Practice your sermon multiple times. This helps with timing, transitions, and confidence.

B. Adjust Your Tone and Pacing

Vary your voice. Slow down for emphasis. Raise your tone for passion. Pause to let weighty truths sink in.

C. Engage with Your Audience

- Make eye contact.
- Use gestures naturally.

- Speak with conviction—believe what you preach!

Tip: Record yourself and evaluate. Ask a mentor or trusted friend to give honest feedback.

6. Bathe It All in Prayer: Trust God for the Results

Preaching isn't a performance—it's a spiritual act.

A. Pray During Preparation

Ask God to open your understanding and give you fresh insight.

B. Pray Before Preaching

Ask God to soften hearts and prepare people to receive His Word.

C. Pray After the Sermon

Trust the Holy Spirit to apply the message and bear fruit. Remember, *you* plant the seed—*God* brings the growth.

7. Evaluate and Grow: Sharpen the Saw

Every sermon is an opportunity to grow as a communicator of God's Word.

A. Reflect on What Worked

Did the audience engage? Did the structure help or hinder? Were the main points clear?

B. Seek Feedback

Ask a few trusted people for specific input:

- "What part stuck with you?"
- "What was confusing or unclear?"
- "Did the application hit home?"

C. Keep a Sermon Journal

Track what you're learning, what illustrations worked, and what needs improvement. Great preachers are lifelong learners.

Faithfully Preach the Word

Expository preaching takes time, study, and spiritual dependence—but the reward is eternal. By letting the Word speak for itself and faithfully explaining its truths, you will nourish your congregation with lasting spiritual food.

Whether you're preaching to ten people or ten thousand, God's Word is *never* wasted. Isaiah 55:11 reminds us: *"So is my word that goes out from my mouth: it will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it."*

Prepare with diligence. Preach with boldness. Trust God with the results.

How To Prepare A Topical Sermon

Now that we understand how to prepare an expository sermon, let's delve into the step-by-step process of crafting a compelling topical sermon.

Step 1: Select Your Topic

Selecting a topic is the foundational step in topical preaching. Consider these factors:

- **Congregational Needs**: Address issues or struggles your church faces.
    - *Example*: If fundraising is underway, preach on generosity and support.

- **Current Relevance**: Address cultural or societal topics from a biblical perspective.
    - *Example*: Discuss biblical views on marriage amidst modern societal shifts.
- **Personal Passion**: Utilize topics you're passionate about or knowledgeable in.
- **Spiritual Guidance**: Seek the Holy Spirit's direction through prayer and meditation.

Step 2: Research and Study

Once your topic is chosen, thorough research is essential:

- **Biblical Exploration**: Study relevant passages and note key themes.
    - *Example*: Base your sermon on a primary scripture that encapsulates your topic.
- **External Resources**: Consult commentaries, articles, and stories for deeper insights.
- **Cultural Context**: Understand the original meanings of biblical texts.
- **Technological Tools**: Use AI resources like Biblos, Sermonly, iPreach, etc. for efficient organization and reference.

Step 3: Craft Your Introduction

Your introduction sets the stage for engagement and clarity:

- **Relevant Start**: Begin with a quote, statistic, or question related to your topic.
- **Personal Touch**: Share personal stories connecting you to the topic.
- **Direction**: Provide a preview of where your sermon is headed without revealing all points at once.

Step 4: Define The Main Points

Outline your sermon with clarity and coherence:

- **Proposition Statement**: Define the core message succinctly.
- **Subpoints Development**: Break down the main point into supporting themes.
    - *Example*: Each subpoint should be backed by scripture to root teachings in God's Word.
- **Logical Flow**: Arrange points logically to build understanding progressively.
- **Practical Application**: Relate biblical truths to everyday life for personal relevance.

Step 5: Illustrate The Message

Enhance comprehension with illustrative examples:

- **Variety of Illustrations**: Use personal anecdotes, biblical stories, and current events.
- **Relevance and Timing**: Ensure illustrations complement and reinforce sermon points.
- **Alignment with Scripture**: Validate illustrations with biblical truth for clarity and authenticity.

Step 6: Create Your Conclusion

Conclude with impact and purpose:

- **Summary and Challenge**: Recap the main points and challenge congregation for personal reflection.
- **Call to Action**: Encourage actionable response or commitment.
- **Spiritual Closure**: End with prayer, seeking God's guidance and transformation.

Step 7: Polish Your Sermon

Refine your sermon for effectiveness:

- **Clarity Check**: Ensure all points are clear and well-supported.
- **Gospel-Centered**: Connect teachings to Jesus and the gospel message.
- **Audience Engagement**: Use accessible language for all members.
- **Practice Delivery**: Rehearse to ensure smooth delivery within service time.

Final Thoughts on Preparing Topical Sermons

Topical sermons, though challenging, can profoundly impact congregations with diligent preparation and reliance on God:

- **Prayerful Preparation**: Trust in God's guidance throughout the process.
- **Effective Communication**: Deliver messages that resonate and transform lives.

By following these steps and relying on God's wisdom, you can prepare and deliver topical sermons that resonate with your congregation, bringing them closer to God's truth and purpose.

How to Prepare a Textual Sermon

Unpacking the Power of a Single Verse

Textual preaching focuses on drawing both the main idea and sermon structure from a single verse or short passage of Scripture. Unlike topical or expository preaching, textual sermons dive deeply into one concentrated portion of God’s Word, exploring its meaning, theology, and application in a focused and powerful way. It’s like holding a diamond up to the light and examining each brilliant facet—every word matters. Here’s the process of preparing a textual message.

Step 1: Choose the Verse – Find the Diamond in the Rough

The foundation of a textual sermon begins with selecting the right verse—one that carries enough theological and practical weight to support an entire message.

Tips for Choosing a Verse:

- **Key Verses:** Look for passages that are doctrinally rich or widely recognized. Verses like *John 3:16*, *Romans 12:2*, or *Philippians 4:13* already have weight, but they deserve fresh insight.
- **Relevance to the Audience:** Ask yourself, *What are my people going through?* Choose a verse that speaks to their real-time needs—be it anxiety, purpose, grief, or hope.
- **Clarity and Depth:** Aim for a verse that is short enough to be memorable but deep enough to mine spiritual gold from.

Illustration:

Imagine you're building a house. You wouldn't lay a foundation on shaky ground. Likewise, your verse must be strong enough to hold up an entire sermon.

Example Verse:

"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." – Philippians 4:13

This verse speaks to confidence in Christ, perseverance, and divine empowerment—an ideal launch pad for a powerful message.

Step 2: Analyze the Text – Dig Deep Before You Build Up

To preach the verse effectively, you must first understand it thoroughly. Dissect each word and phrase like a Bible detective.

Subpoints:

- **Study Key Words:** Look up terms in the original languages (Greek or Hebrew) to discover richer meanings.

Example: “Strengthens” in Greek is *endunamoō*, which means “to infuse with strength” or “make strong inwardly.”

- **Examine the Grammar and Structure:** Identify repeated patterns, contrasts, or connections. Is it a command? A promise? A principle?
- **Use Bible Tools:** Lean on trusted commentaries, word studies, and Bible dictionaries. Resources like *Strong’s Concordance* or *Vine’s Expository Dictionary* can be goldmines.

Illustration:

Think of a diamond miner. He doesn’t grab the surface rocks—he goes deep. The richest jewels in Scripture are often hidden beneath layers of meaning.

Step 3: Explore the Context – Zoom Out Before You Zoom In

Context protects us from misinterpretation. Understanding the "where, when, why, and who" helps bring clarity to the verse.

Subpoints:

- **Immediate Context:** Read the surrounding verses. What is the author saying before and after your chosen verse? How does it fit in the paragraph or chapter?
- **Book Context:** Understand the broader message and themes of the book. For example, Philippians is a letter filled with joy, written from a prison cell.
- **Historical Background:** Study the original audience, cultural setting, and author’s circumstances. Knowing

that Paul wrote Philippians 4:13 from a Roman prison underscores the verse's power.

Reading a Bible verse without context is like tuning into a movie halfway through—you might misunderstand the plot.

Step 4: Extract the Core Message – Clarify the Big Idea
Every sermon must have a central truth that ties it all together. This is the "main course" your audience will take home.
Subpoints:

- **Summarize in a Sentence:** Create a crisp, memorable statement that communicates the verse's essence.

Example: *"Christ empowers believers to overcome every challenge they face in fulfilling His will."*

- **Identify the Big Idea:** What's the "aha!" moment? What does God want His people to know, feel, or do based on this verse?
- **Connect to the Gospel:** Even if the verse isn't explicitly evangelistic, find a way to tie it back to Christ and the overarching story of redemption.

A good sermon is like a bridge. The core message is the beam that supports every other element, connecting ancient truth to modern life.

Step 5: Structure the Sermon – Build the House
Now it's time to organize your message into a clear and compelling outline.
Subpoints:

- **Craft a Compelling Introduction:** Open with a question, story, or problem that makes people lean in.
  "Have you ever felt like you were running on empty—spiritually, emotionally, physically?"

- **Develop 2–4 Main Points:** Let each point naturally emerge from the verse. Use supporting Scriptures and illustrations to reinforce each one.
- **Include Scripture Cross-References:** Let Scripture interpret Scripture. Back up your points with other relevant passages.

Example Outline: Philippians 4:13

1. **Introduction:** Share a personal story of feeling overwhelmed and learning to rely on Christ.
2. **Point 1: The Source of Our Strength – Christ Alone**
   - John 15:5: *"Apart from Me you can do nothing."*
   - Illustration: Like a power tool unplugged, we are ineffective without Christ's power.
3. **Point 2: The Scope of Our Strength – According to His Will**
   - 2 Corinthians 12:9–10: *"My grace is sufficient for you."*
   - Clarify: Paul isn't saying we can do *anything we want*, but *everything God calls us to*.
4. **Point 3: The Certainty of Strength – Strength that Never Fails**
   - Isaiah 40:29–31: *"Those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength."*
   - Story: A single mom finding supernatural endurance during a season of loss.

Step 6: Apply the Message – Move It From the Pulpit to the Pew

A sermon without application is like a recipe with no meal. Help your audience live the verse out.

Subpoints:

- **Offer Practical Steps:** Give people something to do with what they've heard.

"This week, identify one area where you feel weak. Pray specifically for Christ's strength in that area."

- **Speak to Real-Life Needs:** Apply the message to marriage, parenting, work, trials, temptations, and faith battles.
- **Encourage Self-Examination:** Ask reflective questions:

"Where have you been relying on your own strength instead of Christ's?"

"What's one area where you need to take a step of faith?"

Think of application as the GPS that helps your people get from "the Word" to "their world."

Why Textual Sermons Matter

Benefits of Textual Preaching:

- **Clarity:** Focusing on one verse brings simplicity to your message.
- **Depth:** You uncover layers of insight that might be missed in broader passages.
- **Memorability:** A single-verse sermon sticks with your listeners throughout the week.
- **Flexibility:** Whether it's a familiar verse or a hidden gem, you can bring it to life with fresh fire.

Final Thoughts On Preparing Textual Sermons

Textual sermons give you the opportunity to dive deep and bring out timeless truths in a concentrated form. Whether it's *Romans 8:1*, *Psalm 23:1*, or *James 1:5*, trust that **God's Word is alive and active**, and the Holy Spirit will use your faithful study and passionate preaching to transform lives.

"The preacher is not merely a communicator of information, but a messenger of transformation."

So preach that verse like it's the only one your congregation will ever hear—and trust God to do what only He can do through it.

Conclusion

Every preacher develops their own unique rhythm and method when it comes to preparing sermons—and that's perfectly okay. Preaching is not a one-size-fits-all formula. It's a Spirit-led art form, shaped by your personality, your calling, and the needs of your congregation. What matters most is that your preaching bears fruit: that your people are growing in the Word, your church is healthy, and lives are being transformed.

The material in this book is designed to be a comprehensive resource to help you become a stronger, more effective communicator of God's truth. You may find that some ideas resonate with you deeply, while others may not fit your particular style—and that's fine. Use what helps. Adapt what works. Discard what doesn't. If you already have a system that's producing growth in your ministry, stay faithful to that, while remaining open to fresh insights that can sharpen your effectiveness.

That said, there are some essential steps and timeless principles that should be involved in the preparation of any sermon—regardless of the type and your style. The steps and ideas shared serve as guardrails to keep us faithful to the text and effective in our delivery. Whether you're a seasoned preacher or just starting out, studying and reviewing all of these foundational steps, I believe, can strengthen your process and reignite your passion for preaching God's Word with power and precision.

Chapter Seven
Preparing the Preacher

Effective preaching is not merely the delivery of a message; it is the expression of a life surrendered to God. It flows from the synergy of two vital elements: the divine and the human. The divine provides the message and the anointing. The human provides the vessel through which that message flows. As someone once said, "Without man, God will not; without God, man cannot."

This chapter delves deeply into the human element of preaching—not the mechanics or theology of a sermon but the preacher's life, personality, and all the things that impact and make up who he or she is. Because before a word is spoken, people see *you*. Who you are matters.

Personality: The Human Touch That Carries the Divine Voice

Personality is the unique blend of temperament, character, behavior, and attitude that defines how a person interacts with the world. An old preacher, when asked the most important human quality for effective preaching, paused and answered, "Personality." When asked to define it, he laughed and said, "If only I could!"

Though hard to define, personality is unmistakably powerful. It is the *delivery system* for your anointing. Your personality either magnifies the message or mutes it. It conveys your sincerity, your passion, and your authenticity.

Pastor Charles Spurgeon said, "The Gospel is perfect, but it is delivered by imperfect lips. It is the preacher's life and character that either clothe the message in power or strip it of impact."

A preacher's personality encompasses two deeply connected aspects:

1. **Character** – The inner integrity of your life.

2. **Personality** – The outward expression of your thoughts, emotions, and attitudes.

Both are critical. Character is the foundation; personality is the façade through which others see the foundation.

Even Jesus—sinless and divine—was known for a winsome and engaging personality. Mark 12:37 says, *"The common people heard Him gladly."* Why? Because His message was wrapped in compassion, joy, and authenticity.

Understanding Personality in Preaching

Personality is not simply innate; it is shaped by upbringing, experience, environment, and spiritual transformation. Yes, genetics plays a role—but so does grace. Just as Peter transformed from an impulsive fisherman into a rock-solid apostle, so God molds our personalities to reflect Christ.

The Fall introduced guilt, fear, insecurity, and selfishness into the human personality. But salvation begins a restoration process, transforming not just our spirit, but our personality into something useful and beautiful for God.

Romans 12:2 reminds us: *"Be transformed by the renewing of your mind."* That transformation impacts your personality, your speech, your attitude—and yes, your preaching.

Self-Assessment: Know Thyself Before You Preach

One of the keys to developing as a preacher is honest self-evaluation. Ask God to help you see yourself clearly. What are your strengths? Where do you shine? What are your blind spots or weaknesses?

Illustration: Think of your personality like a garden. Some areas are flourishing; others need weeding or watering. A skilled gardener

doesn't abandon the whole plot—he tends it until it thrives. The same applies to your personality.

Twelve Attributes That Enrich the Preacher's Personality

1. **Appearance** – Dress with respect and dignity. People often listen *after* they look.
2. **Countenance** – A smile and warm expression can say more than words.
3. **Ease and Confidence** – Confidence rooted in Christ, not performance.
4. **Pleasantness** – Kindness makes your preaching approachable.
5. **Positivity** – Hopeful preachers offer light in darkness.
6. **Good Humor** – A preacher who can laugh at himself connects with people.
7. **Attractiveness** – Inner grace that draws others, not vanity.
8. **Individuality** – Be authentic. Your unique story matters.
9. **Dynamism** – Preach with energy and conviction.
10. **Magnetism** – Cultivate presence. People lean in to listen.
11. **Effectiveness** – Speak clearly, practically, and biblically.
12. **Spiritual Success** – Anchor everything in God's Word (Joshua 1:8).

Practical Tips for Preaching with Personality

"God never anoints who you pretend to be. He anoints *you.*" – Pastor Steven Furtick

1. **Be Yourself** – Nerves shrink when you relax into your God-given identity.
2. **Be True** – Don't fake sincerity. Let your inner life match your outer words.
3. **Don't Copy Others** – Imitation is flattery, but in preaching, it's failure. Be inspired, but don't impersonate.
4. **Be a Clean Vessel** – God works best through purity. Galatians 2:20 must be your confession.

Spiritual Formation: The Foundation of Personality

Personality shines brightest when it's backed by deep spiritual formation. Remember, *you are a new creation* (2 Corinthians 5:17). Let God's Word inform your thinking, speech, and behavior.

- Read, Study, & Meditate on God's Word.
- Pray – Spend time with God.
- Confess who God says you are.
- Declare God's purpose for your life.

The Power of the Pulpit - A Preacher's Personal Integrity

"Why should we listen to someone preach about how we should live when their own life contradicts their words?" This sentiment was expressed by a dismayed church member, addressing a pastor whose moral failings had caused a scandal. Many believers resonate with this feeling when their spiritual leaders fall short of godly standards. When this happens, the pastor's influence on their consciences diminishes.

It is an unwavering truth: the day a pastor loses their integrity is the day they lose their effectiveness in preaching. The connection between personal godliness and pastoral power is inseparable. Lose one, and you lose the other. Therefore, it is crucial for pastors to safeguard their walk with God and continually grow in godliness. In moments of temptation, when offered the allure of sin, remember that yielding even once can jeopardize a lifetime of preaching. Don't be deceived by the lie that no one will find out—many have fallen into this trap and sidelined their ministries.

Loving God with Sincerity

True godliness springs from a heart that loves God sincerely. Seeking outward morality without genuine love for God is akin to attaching artificial fruit to a withered tree—it lacks authenticity. Human beings, similarly, cannot sustain mere appearances of godliness without a deep, heartfelt love for God.

Because godliness stems from loving God, those who are unconverted cannot authentically preach with power. Their hearts remain enslaved to sin, preferring darkness over righteousness. They may deliver impressive sermons initially, but their true nature eventually surfaces, casting doubt on their credibility. The ensuing disillusionment weakens their influence, hastening their departure from the pulpit to prevent further harm to their congregations.

First and Foremost, a Follower of Christ

It is essential to remember that pastors are first and foremost followers of Christ. Before assuming the role of shepherds, they are sheep themselves. Thus, every scriptural injunction for Christians to live holy lives applies equally to pastors. They are not celestial messengers temporarily on Earth to deliver sermons and then retreat to heavenly seclusion. Living in a fallen world, pastors grapple with their own sinful nature and must earnestly pursue holiness, just like any other believer.

Scripture admonishes, "As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct" (1 Pet. 1:14–16).

Personal and Family Integrity

The authenticity of a pastor's preaching is scrutinized through two lenses: personal conduct and family life. Paul underscores these areas when outlining the qualifications for church leadership, emphasizing the need for blamelessness, marital fidelity, sobriety, self-control, and respectability (1 Tim. 3:2–5). A pastor cannot preach, "Do as I say, not as I do." Rather, like Paul, they must invite others to imitate their example (1 Cor. 4:16, 11:1).

Thus, maintaining genuine godliness in personal and family life profoundly impacts pastoral effectiveness. A pastor's integrity should be so evident that their community can attest, "That one is a true pastor. We have seen their life and family—we aspire to emulate them." Make your marriage and family a priority. First, God, then family, then ministry. Get this right and keep it right. Such authenticity attracts listeners to their preaching and fosters spiritual growth.

The Impact of Godly Living

What makes a pastor's godly life so compelling in preaching? Firstly, it reinforces the application of sermons. People often resist change and justify their sins until they encounter a pastor who lives out the truths they proclaim. When congregants witness the pastor embodying biblical principles, their excuses for complacency dissolve. They realize transformation is achievable, motivated by the pastor's tangible example of holy living.

Establish Boundaries

We are called to do a marvelous work, but we must maintain certain boundaries or safeguards to insure our productivity as well as maintain a healthy balance in our personal life.

As pastors and leaders, we carry people's burdens, walk with them through pain, celebrate their victories, and often neglect one person along the way: *ourselves*.

We say yes too much. We stay up too late. We ignore the inner signals screaming for rest. And we do it all in the name of ministry. But here's the truth: **God never called us to burn out for Him.**

As Rick Warren wisely put it, *"Divert daily, withdraw weekly, abandon annually."* That kind of rhythm is only possible when we learn the life-giving practice of boundaries.

Boundaries aren't selfish—they're stewardship. They're how we sustain our calling for the long haul, protect our peace, and preserve our emotional, spiritual, and physical health. Let's explore **six essential boundaries** every pastor must establish.

1. Time Boundaries – Protecting What Matters Most

Time is the one resource we can never get back. And in ministry, time boundaries are the hardest to enforce. We want to be available, we want to help, and honestly, we often feel guilty saying no.

But here's the pastoral paradox: **saying yes to everything means saying no to your health, your family, and ultimately your effectiveness**.

"You can't be everything to everyone and still be something to someone." — *Andy Stanley*

Tips for Time Boundaries:

- **Learn to say no—with grace.** Not every opportunity is your assignment.
- **Create a filter.** Before saying yes, ask: Does this align with my calling, gifts, and season?
- **Guard your calendar.** Schedule time for your family, for rest, and for God—and treat those blocks as sacred as any meeting.
- **Set communication limits.** Don't sleep with your phone next to you. Mute notifications during rest hours. Let voicemail do its job.
- **Make appointments with yourself.** If Jesus withdrew from the crowds to pray, so can you.

Learn to prioritize your time. Time management is a must. Learn to discern the difference between the important and the urgent. There are things in life that are both urgent and important; those need to be our first priority, then the things that are important. Don't let the urgent rob you from being present for the important.

2. Emotional Boundaries – Guarding the Wellspring of Your Heart

Proverbs tells us, *"Guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it" (Proverbs 4:23).* In ministry, your heart is your headquarters. But when it's constantly under emotional siege, your tank empties fast.

You can't pour from an empty cup. You weren't designed to absorb everyone's emotions without limit.

Tips for Emotional Boundaries:

- **Limit media intake.** If the news or social media drains you, turn it off.
- **Handle critics wisely.** Not every online comment needs your attention. Have a trusted person filter hurtful feedback if necessary.
- **Protect yourself from "extra grace needed" people.** These are folks who consistently drain you emotionally. Their lives are always in crises, and they want you to fix it or at least listen to all their hurts and problems. Limit your interactions and keep conversations short and neutral.

"You can be a compassionate leader without being a constantly depleted one." — *Dr. Henry Cloud*

Pay attention to your emotional dashboard:

Ask: What leaves me feeling heavy or resentful? What renews me? Start setting boundaries based on those answers.

3. Physical Boundaries – Honoring the Temple God Gave You

Jesus had boundaries. He walked away from crowds. He took naps. He didn't heal everyone. Neither should you.

Physical boundaries are about protecting your space, your body, and your surroundings. Your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit—not a punching bag for people's demands.

Ideas for Physical Boundaries:

- **Exercise.** It's okay to say, "I prefer a fist bump."
- **Diet.** A closed door means "please don't disturb." Make it clear and consistent.

- **Rest & Sleep.** You decide what enters your home or workspace—whether that's food, media, or even certain people.
- **Your Space – Office, Study, Home.** Cluttered space often reflects a cluttered mind. Keep only what brings peace or purpose.

4. Internal Boundaries – Managing Yourself from Within

These are the invisible walls that govern our inner world—our thoughts, emotions, reactions, and impulses. Internal boundaries are what keep us from *self-sabotage.*

They help us process pain, manage anger, resist temptation, and stay emotionally healthy in a high-demand environment.

Tips for Internal Boundaries:

- **Check your anger.** Don't just vent—ask, "What's the real source of this emotion?"
- **Process past wounds.** Old hurts tend to resurface under pressure. Forgive and let go.
- **Filter criticism.** Not all feedback is truth. Separate what's constructive from what's destructive.
- **Use filters.** On computers and phones. Don't give the enemy easy access.
- **Limit your mental loops.** If you're constantly reliving the past or fearing the future, your inner boundary needs strengthening.
- **Know when to set burdens down.** Picture a small basket for the burdens you can carry today. When it's full, trust God with the rest. Cast all your cares upon the Lord.

“Maturity is when someone can trigger you, and you choose to respond from healing, not from history.” — *Unknown*

5. Spiritual Boundaries – Guarding Your Heart Above All

Perhaps the most neglected boundary for church leaders is the spiritual one. Ironically, the more we work for God, the easier it is to drift from God.

We mistake *serving Him* for *being with Him*. But activity isn’t intimacy. Ministry can become a substitute for relationship—unless we fiercely guard it.

“Never let your work for God destroy the work of God in you.” — *Christine Caine*

Tips for Spiritual Boundaries:

- **Schedule personal devotional time.** A daily quiet time that is uninterruptible. This is NOT sermon preparation time. Make a daily appointment with Jesus! Protect it.
- **Have accountability partners.** People who ask the hard questions and love you enough to confront you.
- **Use filters.** On computers and phones. Don’t give the enemy easy access.
- **Curate your influences.** Surround yourself with people, books, and content that feed your spirit.
- **Say no to soul-draining environments.** If something repeatedly leaves you spiritually empty, reconsider your involvement.

Illustration: One pastor made it a rule—he doesn't start his day by checking his phone. He starts it with Scripture and prayer. "I want God to be the first voice I hear each day," he said.

6. Opposite Sex Boundaries –

One of the most heartbreaking and pressing issues facing the Church today is the erosion of our evangelistic witness due to the moral failure of ministry leaders. Every time a pastor, evangelist, or church leader falls into sin, the ripple effects are devastating. The personal pain is immense—for the leader, for their family, and for their congregation. But the damage doesn't stop there. Our collective witness to a watching world suffers, and the name of Jesus is dishonored.

As leaders in the Body of Christ, we must take this seriously. For Jesus' sake, for the sake of the Gospel, for your sake and your family's sake—choose daily to walk in integrity, by the grace of God.

Pastor Chuck Swindoll once said,

"Nothing is more contagious than a leader who practices what he preaches."
But the opposite is also true: nothing is more damaging than when a leader publicly fails to live what they proclaim.

First Corinthians 10:13 (TLB) offers us hope:

"The wrong desires that come into your life aren't anything new and different. Many others have faced exactly the same problems before you. And no temptation is irresistible. God will show you how to escape."

Temptation is a common human experience. It is not a sin to be tempted; it becomes sin when we give in. But we are not helpless. God has provided a way out—an escape route. But we must take it.

I recommend one simple boundary for Pastors –

Never spend time alone with a person of the opposite sex other than your spouse.

I have been criticized for this stand. Some of my critics view it as legalistic and impractical.

Too legalistic? Unrealistic for today's day and age?

I don't think so.

If you need to counsel someone of the opposite sex, have someone with you. I use my wife often in these situations.

Never meet in an office or room alone with someone of the opposite sex. Have someone sit in the meeting with you or meet in an open space.

Never ride alone in the car with someone of the opposite sex. Just don't do it.

Don't go to lunch alone with someone of the opposite sex.

Guarding Your Life, Your Family, and the Gospel: The High Call of Integrity in Ministry

Here are **six practical, biblical ways** to take the escape route and guard your heart, your marriage, and your ministry:

A. Make a Commitment to God's Standards

You must resolve, in advance, to live by God's Word. Psalm 119:9 says,

"How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to your word."

The Bible is not outdated or optional—it's timeless truth. God's Word must become your moral compass, even when it contradicts cultural norms or personal convenience. As Billy Graham once put it,

"When the Bible speaks, God speaks."

Until you decide that God's Word will be your standard, you'll fall for every new temptation that comes your way.

B. Maintain Your Marriage

Your marriage is not just a personal relationship—it's a sacred trust and one of your greatest defenses against moral failure. Rekindle the fire and intentionally pursue your spouse.

Proverbs 5:18–19 urges us:

"Rejoice in the wife of your youth… may her breasts satisfy you always, may you ever be intoxicated with her love."

You will be tempted—attraction to others is not sinful in itself, but you must choose to direct those feelings back to your spouse. The grass is not greener on the other side of the fence; it's greener where you water it.

As Dr. Gary Chapman reminds us,

“The decision to love your spouse every day is the decision to invest in your future.”

C. Manage Your Mind

The battle against temptation is won or lost in your thought life. James 1:14–15 tells us:

“Temptation is the pull of our own evil thoughts and wishes… these thoughts lead to evil actions.”

Jesus warned in Matthew 5:28 that lust in the heart is the beginning of adultery. You can’t always control what pops into your mind, but you *can* control what stays there.

Lust isn’t just about desire—it’s the desire to possess. It's what you do with that desire that determines whether you stand or fall. The key is not just behavior modification but heart transformation—starting with your thoughts.

2 Corinthians 10:5 tells us to, “Cast down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ;”. Take captive ungodly thoughts and replace them with thoughts that are pure, lovely, noble, good, and praiseworthy. (Philippians 4:8)

D. Monitor Your Media Intake

We live in a hyper-sexualized society where lust is mainstream, and pornography is just one click away. Movies, music, and media have the power to shape your soul. Jesus said,

“The eye is the lamp of the body… if your eyes are healthy, your whole body will be full of light” (Matthew 6:22).

King David declared in Psalm 101:3,

“I will set no vile thing before my eyes.”

You cannot fill your mind with lustful images and expect to live a pure life. If you're serious about guarding your integrity, you may need to give up some of your entertainment habits. What enters the eyes eventually enters the soul.

E. Minimize the Opportunities for Temptation

Jesus told His disciples in Matthew 26:41,

“Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation.”

This means being proactive. Know your vulnerabilities and put boundaries in place. Don’t travel alone if possible. Avoid being alone with someone who is not your spouse. Guard your heart, your schedule, and your space.

Surround yourself with godly accountability. First Corinthians 15:33 warns,

“Bad company corrupts good character.”

Choose your friends wisely—especially those who influence your decisions and emotions.

F. Magnify the Consequences

Every time you face temptation, ask yourself: *Is this worth it?* The consequences of moral failure are enormous. Broken trust, damaged families, shattered ministries, lost opportunities, and most of all—dishonoring God.

Pastor John Maxwell said,

"Everything worthwhile in life is uphill. The problem is, we have downhill habits."

Make no mistake—sin will always take you further than you want to go, keep you longer than you want to stay, and cost you more than you're willing to pay.

But there's also a crown for those who overcome. James 1:12 promises:

"Blessed is the one who perseveres under temptation… that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love Him."

If You've Already Fallen…

If you're reading this and you're in the middle of moral failure—or you've already stumbled—there is hope. There is forgiveness, healing, and restoration in Jesus Christ.

Run to Him, not from Him. Confess your sin. Ask for forgiveness. Make amends. Restore what you can. And surround yourself with godly support and accountability.

Romans 8:1 says,

"There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."

You can be made clean. You can be restored. But from this moment forward, determine to walk daily in the grace and truth of God.

Boundaries Are a Blessing, Not a Burden

You are not infinite. You are not omnipresent. Only God is. And He never asked you to be. What He does ask is that you be faithful—and you can't be faithful if you're constantly fried, fractured, or faking it.

When you establish personal boundaries, you're not being selfish—you're being strategic. You're not pushing people away—you're keeping your soul healthy enough to keep loving them.

Strong boundaries create strong leaders. They honor God, preserve your peace, protect your relationships, and help you lead from a place of wholeness.

Let us be leaders who are not only gifted but *godly*. Not only anointed but *accountable*. Not only capable but *clean*. Because the world doesn't just need better sermons—it needs better lives.

For Jesus' sake, let's live in such a way that we honor His name, protect His people, and proclaim His Gospel with clarity, compassion, and credibility.

So go ahead—give yourself permission to rest, to say no, to close the door, to take a walk, to unplug, to weep, to worship… to be human.

"Come to Me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest." — *Jesus (Matthew 11:28)*

Take Heed of Yourself

"Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you."
—1 Timothy 4:16 (NKJV)

The Heart of the Matter

The calling to preach the Word of God is not merely a responsibility; it is a sacred trust. Preachers are not motivational speakers or orators—we are messengers of the Most High. Our task is to deliver the eternal Word of God with accuracy, humility, and power. But here is a sobering truth every preacher must grasp: **all the study and sermon preparation in the world means nothing if our souls are not first prepared.**

You can have a library full of resources, a well-structured outline, and a platform packed with people, but if your heart has not first been before the throne, your words will fall flat. **The anointing is not found in information; it is found in intimacy.**

Minister First to Yourself

Before you minister to others, you must minister to yourself. The Word must work in you before it can work through you. The Apostle Paul understood this balance when he urged Timothy, "Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine…" (1 Timothy 4:16). The order is intentional. **Your life comes before your message. Your soul must be nourished before you feed others.**

The late Charles Spurgeon, known as the Prince of Preachers, once said:

"We are not makers of the bread; we are servers. But we must taste it first, or we cannot serve it with joy."

There's a difference between preaching *about* the Bread of Life and having tasted it for yourself.

A Sermon Without a Prepared Soul Is Just a Speech

Anyone can prepare a sermon. You can follow a three-point structure, include a few quotes, tell a compelling story, and wrap it up with a nice closing thought. But true preaching is more than structure—it is a spiritual transaction. Heaven touches earth through a vessel yielded and ready.

Paul declared, "The letter kills, but the Spirit gives life" (2 Corinthians 3:6). Preaching without the Spirit may inform, but it cannot transform. The difference is the soul of the preacher—has he met with God, or merely prepared content?

Jeremiah knew this burning urgency:

"But His word was in my heart like a burning fire shut up in my bones; I was weary of holding it back, and I could not" (Jeremiah 20:9).

The fire didn't start in his voice. It started in his heart.

Private Devotion Precedes Public Proclamation

Jesus, our ultimate model in ministry, often withdrew to solitary places to pray. Before choosing the Twelve, before performing miracles, and after long days of ministry—He made time to be alone with the Father. Why? Because ministry flows from relationship, not routine.

Luke 5:16 tells us, “But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.” If the Son of God, perfect and sinless, needed time alone with the Father before ministering, how much more do we?

Leonard Ravenhill once said, *“No man is greater than his prayer life.”*

Your private preparation with God will either empower or undermine your public ministry. When your soul is full, your preaching flows with authority. When your soul is dry, you may still speak, but there will be no power behind your words.

The Danger of a Dry Soul

Preaching truth you no longer live is not just ineffective—it’s dangerous. It can lead to burnout, disillusionment, and even hypocrisy. Jesus rebuked the Pharisees for this very thing:

“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which outwardly appear beautiful, but within are full of dead people's bones” (Matthew 23:27, ESV).

You can look polished on the outside but be empty on the inside. And if you continue preaching from an unprepared soul, eventually the cracks will show. Your calling cannot be sustained by charisma—it must be rooted in character.

Preaching from the Overflow

When your soul is full—when you've been with God in the secret place—your preaching is not forced, it flows. You are not drawing from your intellect alone, but from your spirit. You are not trying to inspire with your words—you are releasing something heavenly.

Jesus said, *"Whoever believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them"* (John 7:38, NIV).

The most powerful preaching happens when you are preaching out of the overflow. It's not something you manufacture. It's something God releases through you.

How to Prepare Your Soul Before You Preach

Here are five practical ways to prepare your soul before standing behind the pulpit:

1. **Consume the Word Personally** – Study not just for sermon content, but to let the Word speak to you. Ask, "What is God saying to me?"
2. **Pray with Sincerity and Depth** – Linger in His presence. Don't rush. Let God soften your heart and align your motives.
3. **Repent Often and Honestly** – Let the Holy Spirit convict and cleanse you. A pure heart is a powerful vessel.
4. **Worship Freely and Privately** – Express your love for God without an audience. True worship prepares the soul.
5. **Ask for Fresh Fire** – Never assume yesterday's anointing is enough. Ask God to fill you afresh before you speak for Him.

Final Thoughts

Preaching is Not Performance—It's Overflow

The most effective sermons are not performed—they are lived. Preaching is the overflow of your walk with God. It is who you are – your personality saturated with the presence of God and

filled with the Holy Spirit. It is the miracle of God using your voice, your life, and your story to proclaim His eternal truth.

As Pastor E.V. Hill once said, “If there’s a mist in the pulpit, there’s a fog in the pew.” Clarity, authenticity, and fire must start with you.

There is no shortcut to spiritual power. You cannot fake the presence of God. You cannot borrow another preacher’s fire. If you want to preach with authority and unction, you must first meet with God yourself.

Before you stand behind the pulpit, kneel before the cross. Before you speak to others, let God speak to you. Before you prepare your sermon, prepare your soul.

So, cultivate you – work on you – let God work in you before He works through you. (Philippians 2:13) Let Christ transform you conforming you to His image. None of us are perfect. We are a work in progress. If you miss it repent. If you are digging yourself into a hole, stop digging. And watch as your preaching begins to reflect the beauty, boldness, and brilliance of Jesus Himself.

Let this truth echo in your heart:

“Before I preach to others, I must preach to myself.” – John Owen

Chapter Eight

Delivering the Message

A sermon is not just what you write—**it's what you say**. And more importantly, **how** you say it. Preaching is never just about transferring information. It's about transformation. And transformation doesn't happen through words on a page alone—it happens through **living words, spoken with conviction, urgency, and heart**. Your delivery is not a side note. It is not optional. It is not less spiritual than your manuscript. In fact, it is deeply theological. Your tone, your energy, your body, your voice—all of it is part of the sermon.

Unfortunately, in many preaching circles today, delivery gets left behind. It's treated as an afterthought, a non-essential. We act as if crafting the content is the "holy" part, while how we say it is merely style—optional, even suspicious. But this thinking is dangerous and incomplete. It's as if the written sermon is sacred, but the spoken sermon is somehow less so. That's not biblical. And it's not effective.

Let's be clear: **Flat, lifeless preaching is not a virtue.** Uninspiring delivery doesn't prove seriousness—it communicates indifference.

I've heard some well-meaning pastors criticize those who preach with energy and emotion—like TD Jakes or John Piper—for being "too passionate." But when I asked if they thought his passion was fake, they admitted it was real. "But," they said, "it's still dangerous." To which I say: **Sign me up for that kind of danger!** Give me preaching that burns with holy fire over sterile, passionless speech any day.

This wasn't a problem for Martin Luther. He famously said: "The church is not a pen house, but a mouth house… the gospel… must be preached and performed by word of mouth and a living voice."

Jesus didn't write anything down. He **preached**. The New Testament message is meant to be spoken aloud, heart to heart, and soul to soul.

Some try to use Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 2:1—"I did not come with lofty speech or wisdom"—to argue that style doesn't matter. But they miss the point. Paul wasn't rejecting delivery; he was rejecting **empty rhetoric** and **self-promotion**. His message was Christ crucified. And his passion for that message was unmistakable.

The people didn't reject Paul because he lacked delivery skills—they rejected him because the message of the cross was offensive to them. They wanted him to dress it up, to make it more palatable, more polished. But Paul refused. He didn't rely on human wisdom; he relied on **God's power**. His delivery pointed to **Christ, not himself**.

In Acts 14, when Paul healed a crippled man, the crowd shouted that "the gods have come down to us in human form!" They called Paul **Hermes**, the god of speech. Why? Because his words carried **power and presence**. That doesn't sound like someone who mumbled his way through a sermon.

Here's the truth: When your delivery matches the weight of the text you're preaching, your listeners know it. They see that the Word has first pierced **you**—and now, through your voice, it is piercing them. Preaching is more than content—**it's an**

encounter. It's where your soul meets the souls of others through the truth of God's Word.

So, pastor, **don't hold back**. Let your heart burn. Let your voice rise. Let your body move. Let your tears fall. Don't just say the truth—**feel it, live it, shout it, sing it**.

Let your passion reflect the passion of the cross.

Preaching is a sacred calling—a God-given, Word-based, Christ-centered, Spirit-empowered act. It's not a lecture. It's a living moment. A supernatural exchange. A glimpse of eternity. One day, every tribe, tongue, and nation will hear the voice of the Chief Shepherd (1 Pet. 5:2–4; Rev. 7:17; 22:4). Until then, **He speaks through you**.

So preach!

Spend yourself. Let every molecule of your being be used for this holy task. Study deeply. Pray fervently. And when the moment comes, **step into the pulpit with fire**.

Preach the truth—and preach it like it matters. Because it does.

This in no way diminishes the preparation of the message. It is the basis of the content that is preached. Going through the process of praying, seeking the Lord, planning, and preparing the message is extremely important. The point I am emphasizing is if we don't effectively deliver the message, all that work can go for naught.

7 Powerful Tips to Transform Your Preaching Delivery

Here are **seven essential tips** that will not only sharpen your preaching delivery but will help you preach with power, passion, and purpose.

1. Speak Loudly with Your Body: Mastering Nonverbal Communication

You've probably heard the statistic: *93% of communication is nonverbal*. Whether or not it's exact, the truth is undeniable—**your audience is always reading you**, even when you're not speaking.

Here's how to preach with your whole being:

- **Posture:** Stand tall—not stiff. Let your stance communicate confidence and humility. As John Maxwell says, *"People may hear your words, but they feel your attitude."*
- **Gestures:** Don't flail, but don't freeze either. Purposeful hand movements can emphasize your message like a highlighter on a page.
- **Eye Contact:** Don't preach to the back wall—or worse, your notes. Look into the eyes of the people God called you to shepherd. It builds trust and connection.
- **Facial Expressions:** Your face should reflect your words. If you're preaching joy, smile! If you're talking about brokenness, let it show.
- **Dress Wisely:** Your attire should never distract. Dress to honor the occasion and the people you're serving.

Illustration: Imagine a preacher speaking on the joy of salvation with a scowl on his face and hands stuffed in his pockets. The disconnect between message and mannerism is deafening.

2. Let Your Voice Preach Too: Refine Your Vocal Delivery

Your voice is your instrument—use it skillfully.

- **Pitch and Tone:** Don't drone. Vary your pitch to highlight emotion, urgency, or tenderness. Remember, a monotone voice can make heaven sound boring.
- **Volume:** Shout when the message demands it, whisper when it stirs the soul. Jesus preached to multitudes, but He also whispered life-changing words to individuals.
- **Pauses:** A holy hush can be louder than thunder. Use pauses for impact, reflection, or anticipation. As Craig Groeschel says, *"What you say in silence can often be louder than your words."*
- **Articulation:** Enunciate. Speak clearly. Sloppy speech can sabotage even the most Spirit-led sermon.

Challenge: Practice reading Psalm 23 aloud, emphasizing a different word each time. Watch how the meaning changes. Your voice interprets the truth you're preaching.

3. Preach with Fire: Let Passion Be Your Fuel

Passion isn't volume. It's authenticity on fire. People don't just want to know what you know—they want to feel what you feel.

Charles Spurgeon once said, *"Set yourself on fire with passion, and people will come from miles to watch you burn."* Your

passion shows that what you're preaching is not just true—it's alive in you.

- Speak with conviction.
- Make the message personal.
- Let the weight of eternity stir your soul.

Illustration: A passionate preacher once described hell with tears in his eyes—and no one left unchanged. Why? Because he *felt* the message before he preached it.

4. Show, Don't Just Tell: Use Visual Aids & Technology Thoughtfully

In a visual age, strategic use of technology can transform your sermon from a monologue into a multimedia encounter with truth.

- **Slides/Projections:** Highlight key verses or main points. Keep them clean and readable—less is more.
- **Videos:** A short testimony or a moving clip can pierce hearts in seconds.
- **Props:** Jesus used a coin, a fig tree, and mustard seeds. A tangible item can make your point unforgettable.

Example: When preaching on burdens, a pastor placed a heavy backpack on someone's shoulders—and the image stuck with the congregation long after the sermon ended.

Remember: *technology is a servant, not the savior*. Don't let it overshadow the Word.

5. Respect the Clock: Steward Your Time Wisely

An effective sermon respects the listener's time. Rambling loses hearts; rushing loses impact.

- **Plan ahead** and practice with a timer.
- Trim the excess—every story, quote, and point must serve the main message.
- Leave space for response, not just content.

Tip: "If you can't say it in 30 minutes, you probably can't say it in 45." Less really can be more.

6. Preach Like It's Your Last Chance

What if this Sunday were your last sermon? Would you preach differently?

Richard Baxter wrote, *"I preached as never sure to preach again, and as a dying man to dying men."* Let that mindset ignite your preparation and delivery.

Every message matters. Every soul matters. Every moment in the pulpit is holy ground.

Challenge: Prepare and preach as though eternity hangs in the balance—because it does.

7. Captivate with Story: Master the Art of Storytelling

Jesus didn't just lecture. He *told stories*—about farmers, widows, merchants, and wayward sons.

Stories:

- Capture attention
- Create emotion
- Clarify truth

How to make storytelling work in your sermons:

- **Personal Testimonies:** Share your journey. People relate to vulnerability.
- **Biblical Narratives:** Let Scripture characters speak. Their lives are mirrors and windows.
- **Vivid Detail:** Paint pictures with your words. Let your listeners see, hear, and feel the story.
- **Relevant Testimonies:** Share stories of transformation in real people's lives. It builds faith.

Quote: Andy Stanley says, *"Stories stick. Doctrine doesn't always stick, but stories do."*

Final Word: Preach with All You've Got

Improving your delivery is not about becoming a performer—it's about being a faithful messenger. Every movement, every tone, every pause is an opportunity to usher someone into a deeper encounter with Jesus.

Remember:

- Speak clearly.
- Move purposefully.
- Preach passionately.
- Connect genuinely.
- Trust the Holy Spirit fully.

As John Stott once said:

"We are not to see people as they are, but as they can become through the power of Christ."

So preach—*boldly, faithfully, skillfully, and lovingly*. Because someone's breakthrough may be just one sermon away.

Chapter Nine

How to Conduct a Powerful Altar Call

First, the altar call is not just for unbelievers. As pastors the focal point of most of our messages will be crafted for believers, after all our primary responsibility is to equip the "**saints"** to do the world of the ministry. (Ephesians 4:12). I believe the altar call is the most important part of any sermon. It is the "conclusion" of the close of the message. It's the moment you give people an opportunity to respond to what they just heard. It doesn't matter how powerful your sermon was if you don't close it with a convincing altar call that moves and challenges people to put what you just shared into action in their life. Every message you preach should include an altar call! The response to the sermon is the point of the message.

Would a salesperson spend all their time planning a pitch for the product without a thought as to getting the customer's name on the dotted line? That signature is the whole point. The altar call is your moment to get the people to put their signature on the dotted line, so to speak. It is a call to action

While the focus of most of our sermons will be direct towards believers I believe every altar call should include an invitation to receive Christ. To make a public declaration of their faith or seek a deeper walk with Jesus. I am always challenging our people to invite people to church. We put up billboards, put messages on social media, we hand out flyers, and other types of advertising to try and get people to come to our services. I never want a person to leave a service without an opportunity to receive Christ. It is part of our mission, a big part!

When the people leave the House of God, they should know they have heard from the Lord today. The conclusion to the sermon is a big part of that, how the message ends and how it leaves them.

So, how do we craft a powerful altar call that gets results? How to prepare a impactful close to a sermon?

7 Steps for Powerful Altar Call

Conducting an effective and powerful altar call is a pivotal moment in ministry, where individuals are invited to respond to God's prompting. This sacred time requires thoughtful preparation, clear communication, and a heart attuned to the Holy Spirit. Below are 7 key principles to guide you in leading impactful altar calls:

1. A properly prepared close – conclusion.

The effectiveness of the altar call is set up by how you close your sermon. Let's take a few minutes to discuss how to close a sermon.

How to Close a Sermon with Power and Purpose

A sermon's conclusion is not an afterthought—it's the crescendo. It's the moment where hearts soften, decisions are made, and the Spirit seals what was sown. The close of your message is sacred ground. It's where you **drive home your main point**, stir hearts to **action**, breathe **encouragement** into weary souls, and call people to **respond to the Spirit of God**.

Don't squander this moment by merely repeating yourself or rambling off a tired summary. Instead, **end with clarity,**

conviction, and purpose. As H.B. Charles Jr. puts it, *"If you can't land the plane, don't take off."*

Here are **7 powerful tips** to help you close your sermon in a way that's unforgettable and Spirit-led:

1) **End Your Sermon Intentionally**

   Great sermons don't crash-land—they descend with precision. Don't end your message because the clock ran out or your energy faded. **Plan your landing with the same passion and prayer you planned your opening.** Know in advance where you're going and how you want the Spirit to move at the end.

   Think of it like flying an airplane—takeoff gets people in the air, but the landing determines whether they walk away changed or confused. As Pastor Rick Warren says, *"People are not changed by truth they do not remember. And they don't remember what you don't repeat with clarity."*

2) **End Your Sermon Positively**

   Your conclusion should lift, not crush. Don't berate or shame—**call your listeners to a higher place**. Invite them to something greater. Inspire faith. Stir hope. Reignite passion. A negative close leaves people with guilt; a **faith-filled close** leaves them with grace and vision.

   Illustration: Imagine a coach at halftime—he doesn't just list what the team did wrong. He stirs belief, focuses the mission, and sends them out to win. That's your role in the close—**fuel your people with hope for victory.**

3) End So They're Left Wanting More

The close of your sermon should **create hunger**, not fatigue. Don't preach until they're worn out—preach until they're stirred up! Leave them leaning in, not checking out.

Charles Spurgeon once said, *"Always leave off with a hunger."* Your goal isn't to say everything—it's to say the **one right thing** so clearly that it echoes in their hearts all week.

Remember: **The Holy Spirit continues the sermon long after you've finished.**

4) End Seriously

The conclusion is not the place for a joke or a clever aside. The weight of eternity may hang in the balance. While humor and creativity can enhance your introduction, **your ending demands reverence** and focus.

Illustration: Imagine a surgeon finishing heart surgery with a comedy routine. **No he finishes carefully, deliberately, and with precision.** That's how your sermon should end. Bring the moment to stillness so the Spirit can speak. As Pastor Tony Evans says, *"A sermon should begin with a bang and end with a punch."*

5) End the Way You Began

Come full circle. If you opened with a story, **close the loop.** If you began with a question, **answer it.** This creates cohesion and drives the truth home in a memorable way.

Illustration: Jesus often used this method—starting with a parable or image, then circling back at the end to unveil the

deeper meaning. Follow His pattern. Let your ending echo your beginning with greater weight and clarity.

6) **End Clearly**

Clarity is kindness. Don't leave your listeners wondering what to do next. Be bold. Be specific. Call them to action. Whether it's coming to the altar, forgiving someone, surrendering to Christ, or stepping into a ministry—**make it plain**.

The altar call is not a ritual. It's a **sacred invitation** to respond to the living God. As Pastor Greg Laurie puts it, *"The invitation is the most important part of the message—it's when the harvest happens."* Don't muddle the moment. Be clear. Be urgent. Be Spirit-led.

7) **End with the Invitation in Mind**

Your final words should be a hand extended, not a period. This is your moment to **invite people into transformation**, into salvation, into obedience. Be compelling. Be compassionate. Preach as if souls depend on it—because they do.

Illustration: A farmer doesn't plow the soil and scatter the seed without expecting a harvest. Neither should we. Close your message with faith that the Word will not return void.

Great sermons don't just inform—they transform. And that transformation often happens in the final few minutes. So close with courage. Close with clarity. And above all, **close with the Spirit.**

As the apostle Paul told Timothy, *"Preach the word... with complete patience and teaching"* (2 Timothy 4:2). That includes the close.

Land the plane with purpose. Call people to action. And trust God to do the rest.

2. Recognize God's Sovereignty and Pray Diligently

Effective altar calls begin long before the service—they start in the prayer closet. Acknowledge that while we are instruments in God's hands, it is the Holy Spirit who convicts and transforms hearts. As 1 Corinthians 3:6 reminds us, "I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow." Prior to the service, dedicate time to seek God's guidance, asking Him to prepare the hearts of the congregation and to empower your words. Encourage your prayer team to intercede as well, creating a spiritual atmosphere receptive to God's movement.

Illustration: Consider the farmer who diligently prepares the soil and sows the seed, understanding that only through God's provision of rain and sunshine will the crop flourish. Similarly, we prepare and present the message, trusting God to bring the increase.

3. Provide Clear and Specific Instructions

Clarity is crucial during an altar call. Clearly articulate what you are inviting individuals to respond to and specify the action you are asking them to take. Avoid combining multiple appeals that could cause confusion. For instance, if your message focuses on God's forgiveness, you might say:

"If you recognize a need for God's forgiveness in your life—perhaps there's a burden you've been carrying, a mistake you've made, or a relationship that needs mending—I'm inviting you to come forward now to receive prayer and experience His grace."

Decide in advance how you want people to respond, whether by coming forward, raising their hands, or praying silently. Then, guide them through the process with gentle assurance, allowing space for the Holy Spirit to work. Ensure your ministry team is prepared to assist, offering support and prayer to those who respond.

Illustration: Imagine a guide leading hikers through a dense forest. Without clear directions, the hikers may become lost or hesitant. Similarly, providing explicit instructions during an altar call helps individuals navigate their spiritual journey with confidence.

4. Consistently Present the Gospel Message

Regardless of your sermon topic, always seize the opportunity to present the gospel. This isn't the time for an additional sermon but a concise invitation to accept Christ. Usually after I have given the altar call for the message and prayed for the people I will transition into an invitation for people to receive Christ. For example I may say something like:

"*As we finish praying with these here at the altar, I know there are some here that need to receive Christ. You have never personally asked Jesus into your heart or you have drifted away and today is the today to come back to Jesus.*"

Notice the assumptive format. I don't like to ask, "Is there anyone here who needs Jesus". I like to assume there are people there who need Jesus or need to get right with God. Then present the Gospel;

Know that God loves you deeply. He sent His Son, Jesus, to die for your sins and raised Him to life so that you might have eternal life. This gift is freely given; all that's required is to believe in your heart and confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord."

This brief yet concise presentation can be delivered in about a minute, followed by a prayer inviting individuals to commit their lives to Christ.

Illustration: Consider a lifeguard extending a hand to someone struggling in the water. The offer of rescue is clear and urgent. In the same way, presenting the gospel during an altar call is extending a lifeline to those in need of salvation.

5. Be Confident and Sensitive

It's natural to feel a degree of apprehension when leading an altar call, but it's essential to overcome personal discomfort to avoid creating an awkward atmosphere. Be mindful of two scenarios:

- **If no one responds immediately:** Resist the urge to prolong the invitation unnecessarily. Trust that the Holy Spirit is at work, even if the response isn't visible.
- **If individuals do respond:** Rejoice internally, but maintain a composed demeanor to ensure they feel comfortable and supported.

To help you build confidence:

- **Practice:** Rehearse your altar call privately to become more comfortable with the delivery.
- **Learn from Others:** Observe and listen to seasoned pastors who effectively lead altar calls to glean insights and techniques.

- **Cultivate a Heart for Evangelism:** Develop a genuine passion for seeing people come to Christ, remembering that this is central to the church's mission.

Illustration: Think of a musician performing before an audience. Through practice and experience, they learn to manage stage fright and deliver a captivating performance. Similarly, with preparation and reliance on the Holy Spirit, leading an altar call becomes a natural and powerful extension of your ministry.

6. Engage the Entire Congregation

One of the challenging things about altar calls is losing the attention of the rest of the congregation, In fact, often times people start walking out and leaving. This can be disruptive and potentially affect the impact of the altar call. Maintaining the congregation's attention during an altar call is vital. Here are some tips to foster engagement:

- **Respect Time:** Be mindful of the service length to prevent restlessness. If the Spirit leads to extend the time, consider briefly dismissing those who need to leave while inviting others to stay.
- **Invite Participation:** Encourage the congregation to pray collectively or extend their hands toward those responding. You might say, "Let's all join in prayer for our brothers and sisters who are stepping forward today."
- **Prompt Reflection:** Ask attendees to think of someone who could benefit from the day's message and to intercede for them during this time.

Illustration: Imagine a team supporting a runner in a marathon. Their cheers and encouragement provide the runner with the

strength to continue. Similarly, an engaged congregation offers spiritual support to those making life-changing decisions.

7. Celebrate Decisions and Conclude Gracefully

I believe it is appropriate and good in most situations to take a moment to celebrate what God just did in the service. Offer a prayer of thanksgiving, acknowledging His work in the hearts of the people and give Him glory. Then, officially dismiss the congregation with a blessing, encouraging them to live out their faith. Go out celebrating.

Conducting an effective and powerful altar call demands intentional preparation, crystal-clear communication, and a heart wholly surrendered to God's leading. Remember, it's not about your stage performance but about inviting the Spirit to change lives. As Pastor Rick Warren reminds us, *"God does not call the equipped; He equips the called."*

Final Thoughts

By investing the time to prepare a compelling close to the your message, recognizing God's sovereignty, providing clear instructions, consistently presenting the gospel, approaching the call with sensitivity, engaging the entire congregation, and closing with celebration, you create an environment where lives can be transformed in a profound encounter with Christ.

Expect God to move. Expect hearts to be changed. Expect that someone came to church that day desperate for hope—and this is the moment they've been waiting for. Step forward in faith, trusting that as you offer your sincere invitation, God will honor your efforts by drawing hearts closer to Him.

Chapter Ten

Know Your Audience

One of the most important but often overlooked elements of powerful preaching is this: **know your audience**. Every time you step into the pulpit, you are not just delivering a message—you are delivering a message to people. Real people. People with fears, questions, temptations, hurts, hopes, and hang-ups. And if we are going to be effective communicators of the Word of God, we must preach **with them in mind**.

As Hebrews 4:12 tells us, *"For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any double-edged sword."* But remember, a sword in the wrong hands can wound unintentionally. In the hands of a skilled surgeon, it can heal. When we know our audience, we handle the Word like that surgeon—with precision, wisdom, and care (Eph. 6:17).

Jesus Knew His Audience

Jesus is rightfully called the Master Teacher. He taught with divine authority and unmatched clarity. People marveled at His wisdom: *"No one ever spoke like this man!"* (John 7:46). Though divine, Jesus modeled an approach to teaching that earthly preachers can learn from: **He knew His audience.**

He didn't speak to Pharisees like He spoke to fishermen. He didn't approach the woman at the well like He did the Sadducees in the temple courts. In every encounter, He tailored His message to the listener. He told stories about seeds, sheep, and coins—parables that connected with common people (Luke 15). He engaged intellectuals with theological arguments (Matt. 22:29-32) and approached the outcast with empathy and revelation (John 4).

Charles Spurgeon once said, *"Christ's sermons were always adapted to the occasion. He never delivered a discourse which was out of place."* Let us do the same.

The Apostles Knew Their Audience

The early church learned this lesson well. At Pentecost, Peter stood before devout Jews and quoted Joel and David—Scriptures his audience revered (Acts 2). But when Paul stood before Greeks in Athens, he didn't begin with Moses. He began with creation and even quoted their poets (Acts 17).

Paul was unapologetic about his approach: *"I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some"* (1 Cor. 9:22).

The gospel didn't change, but the packaging did. Peter focused on Jewish messianic expectations. Paul highlighted the unknown God among Gentiles. This wasn't compromise. It was compassion. It wasn't watering down the truth. It was wise stewardship of the truth.

Know Your Congregation

Pastor, when you prepare your sermon, remember: you are not preaching to an academic panel or defending a thesis. You are not addressing social media critics or solving denominational debates. You are preaching to your congregation.

These are the people God has entrusted to your care—toddlers and teenagers, single moms and retirees, blue-collar workers, stay-at-home parents, business executives, and Bible newbies. Some are barely hanging onto their faith; others are mature but weary. Some need milk. Some are ready for meat. But all need Jesus.

A 15-minute Greek word study might thrill your seminary professors, but will it feed the broken-hearted mother who just lost a child? Will it help the young man battling pornography or the

widower struggling to pray? As Haddon Robinson warned, *"Preaching is not talking to people about the Bible; it is talking to people about themselves from the Bible."*

Simplicity is Not Shallowness

Jesus wasn't shallow, yet He was simple. The depth of truth is not compromised by clarity. Clarity is love.

If you're preaching in Alabama, don't pretend you're in Manhattan. If you're in a rural town, don't craft sermons aimed at urban debates. Be present. Speak to *your* people.

When Paul wrote to the Corinthians, he said, *"We have this hope as an anchor for the soul"* (Heb. 6:19). Be sure your sermons feel like that—anchored, steady, hopeful. Even hard truths should be delivered with the tone of a shepherd, not a sledgehammer.

Yes, rebuke sin. Yes, call for holiness. But remember who you're talking to. Even the most rebellious saint is still *"sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be holy"* (1 Cor. 1:2).

Preach to Everyone in the Room

Don't forget the elderly, the teens, the single women, the overworked dads, the single parents, the new believers, the skeptical visitors. Make sure your illustrations don't only come from the latest Netflix series or sports headlines.

Avoid always preaching to a past generation or only referencing your own era. If all your stories end in the 1950s or begin with "back in my day," you may unintentionally lose the hearts of those sitting in front of you.

In our ministry not only did we have a church we also had a Bible College and Christian School preschool through 12th grade. When I did the chapel for the elementary school how I preached for them

was different that how I preached in High School chapel or even in church. If I preached in a different church, different denomination, different nation I would always consider the uniqueness of those who were listening. We never compromise our message, but we are sensitive to the situation. Like the Apostle Paul who said, “to the weak I became as weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all *men*, that I might by all means save some” (1Corinthians 9:22), we need to be ready to be able to adjust the way we share the message God has given us so the people we are talking to will be more willing to listen and receive.

The prophets were masters at contextual preaching. Isaiah didn’t preach like Hosea, and Amos didn’t sound like Micah. Each was raised up by God to speak to a specific people in a specific time.

Jesus met Nicodemus with deep theology and the Samaritan woman with living water. The apostles contextualized the unchanging gospel based on geography, audience, and occasion.

Doing the same is not being trendy—it’s being **faithful**.

Balance is key. Relevance and reverence can walk hand in hand.

Get to Know the People

You cannot preach to people you refuse to know. Read their faces. Listen to their stories. Visit their homes. Sit with them over coffee. Discover what keeps them up at night and what brings them joy. Until you know the idols of their hearts, you won’t know how to apply the gospel as medicine.

Paul didn’t blast the Athenians without understanding them. He observed their city, noticed their altars, and complimented their religiosity (Acts 17:22-23). Then he led them to truth.

Similarly, we must listen before we speak. As one pastor wisely said, *"The best sermons are written with the ears."* Learn their

language. Understand their pain. Let your sermons feel like you've been with them, not above them.

Love Your People Well

At its core, knowing your audience is an act of love. Leviticus 19:18 says, *"Love your neighbor as yourself."* That means we preach *to* people, not *at* them.

Remember, the Word of God never changes, but our context does. Let the truth shine, but put it in a frame they can see. Speak with authority, but also with understanding.

And never forget: **You are not just a preacher of sermons; you are a shepherd of souls.**

"Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind" (1 Peter 5:2).

Final Thoughts

Let us, never forget—our message matters, but so does the heart of the one receiving it. Effective preaching isn't just about crafting powerful sermons; it's about connecting deeply with the people God has entrusted to your care. It's about knowing their struggles, their questions, their culture, and even their silence. When you truly know your audience, you'll speak not just *to* them, but *for* them—giving voice to what they're feeling and leading them to what God is saying.

Jesus, our master preacher was a master at adjusting His words based on who stood before Him—the curious crowd, the broken sinner, the religious elite, or the desperate parent. Why? Because He knew them. He loved them. And so must we.

Let this chapter stir your heart to know your people better—not as faces in chairs, but as souls on a journey. Walk their streets. Hear their stories. Learn their language. And then, speak God's truth in a way that reaches them where they are.

You can preach the greatest sermon ever written, but if it doesn't reach the hearts of those listening, it misses the mark. Adjust your tone, shape your illustrations, and refine your approach—not to water down the gospel, but to lift it up where it can be clearly seen and fully received.

Preach with love. Preach with understanding. And above all, preach as one who knows, sees, and cares for the people God has called you to serve. That's the kind of preaching that changes lives. That's *effective* preaching.

So, preacher, know your audience. Love them well. Speak their language. See their struggles. Walk among them. And when you preach, preach as one who knows them—and loves them—deeply.

Chapter Eleven

Preaching with the Anointing

In our journey through the principles of effective preaching, we now arrive at the most essential component: **the anointing of the Holy Spirit**. While preparation, delivery, and structure are all important, without the anointing, our preaching lacks the power to truly transform lives. This divine empowerment is not optional; it is absolutely essential.

The Necessity of the Anointing

The word *anointing* can spark debate in some Christian circles. Some avoid the term due to perceived emotionalism, while others use it in ways that lack biblical foundation. However, Scripture is clear: the anointing is real, and it is available to every believer.

1 John 2:27 (NIV) states:

> "As for you, the anointing you received from Him remains in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you. But as His anointing teaches you about all things and as that anointing is real, not counterfeit—just as it has taught you, remain in Him."

This is connected to verse 20:

> "But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and all of you know the truth."

There is only one Holy Spirit, but the anointing He gives manifests in various ways—to proclaim the gospel, to bring healing, to set captives free, and yes, to preach.

Pastor E.M. Bounds once wrote, *"What the church needs today is not more machinery or better, not new organizations or more and novel methods, but men whom the Holy Ghost can use—men of prayer, men mighty in prayer."* The same can be said of preachers. What we need most is the anointing.

The Difference the Anointing Makes

I've listened to hundreds of preachers over my forty years in ministry. Many are articulate, well-prepared, and biblically sound. Yet something is missing—**the anointing**.

Let me illustrate. We've all heard a singer perform a beautiful song with a technically perfect voice. Every note is in tune, the timing is flawless, but the performance is cold—it doesn't move the soul. Then, another singer, perhaps not as refined vocally, steps up. But this one is anointed. As they sing, the atmosphere shifts, hearts soften, tears flow. That is the difference the anointing makes.

Preaching is no different. We can prepare diligently, structure the message, and quote Scripture. But without the anointing, we may inform without transforming. **The anointing is what makes preaching a supernatural encounter.**

The Anointing on Jesus

Jesus modeled preaching with the anointing. Luke 4:18–19 is His personal mission statement:

"The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because He has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim

freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

In Acts 10:38, we read:
"How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how He went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with Him."

Jesus outlined the fivefold work of His anointing:

1. Preaching good news to the poor.
2. Proclaiming liberty to captives.
3. Restoring sight to the blind.
4. Setting the oppressed free.
5. Declaring God's favor.

This wasn't symbolic or poetic. Jesus followed up His message by saying, *"Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."* (Luke 4:21). He wasn't just talking about the anointing—He demonstrated it.

Consecrated by the Anointing

Psalm 92:10 says:
"You have exalted my horn like that of a wild ox; fine oils have been poured on me."

In the Old Testament, everything dedicated to God—priests, kings, prophets, even furniture—was anointed with oil. This act signified consecration. The oil symbolized the Holy Spirit, and the anointing set that person or object apart for holy use.

Exodus 28:41 instructs:

> "After you put these clothes on your brother Aaron and his sons, anoint and ordain them. Consecrate them so they may serve me as priests."

Once something was anointed, it was marked "Holy to the Lord." It could not be used for ordinary purposes. The same is true for us as preachers. Our calling, our voice, our gifts—once anointed—must be used for His glory alone.

Four Distinct Types of Anointing

1. The Priestly Anointing
Described in Exodus 29:20-21, this involved applying blood and oil to the ear, thumb, and toe of the priest. It symbolized sanctified hearing, actions, and walk.

Application: The priestly anointing enables us to minister with purity. Our words, our conduct, our lifestyle must align with our message.

2. The Prophetic Anointing
In 1 Kings 19:16, God tells Elijah to anoint Elisha as a prophet. Prophets spoke for God, calling nations to repentance and revealing divine truth.

Application: Prophetic preaching cuts through cultural noise and religious routine. It says, *"Thus says the Lord."* It convicts, confronts, and comforts.
As Leonard Ravenhill said, *"The preacher is not a diplomat but a prophet. He is not sent to make peace but to declare war."*

3. The Kingly Anointing
Kings like David were anointed to rule. This anointing imparted authority to lead God's people.

Ecclesiastes 8:4 says:
"Where the word of a king is, there is power."

Application: Preachers under this anointing speak with kingdom authority. They address strongholds, call out sin, release healing, and declare God's rule.

4. The Artificers' Anointing
Even craftsmen, like Bezalel in Exodus 31:3–5, were anointed to build the tabernacle.

Application: The anointing isn't just for preachers. It's for anyone who serves—writers, worship leaders, administrators. Every gift, anointed, becomes a tool in God's hand.

Living and Preaching Under the Anointing

The anointing is not a one-time experience; it is a continual need. We must seek a fresh touch of the Spirit for every message, every moment. Without it, we are performers. With it, we are instruments of heaven.

Charles Spurgeon once said:
"The gospel is preached in the ears of all men; it only comes with power to some. The power that is in the gospel does not lie in the eloquence of the preacher, otherwise, men would be converters of souls. Nor does it lie in the preacher's learning; but it lies in the anointing of the Holy Spirit."

When You Preach Under the Anointing...

- You don't just teach—you *transform*.
- You don't just inform—you *impart*.
- You don't just speak—you *release* the power of God.

Let every preacher cry out like Elisha: *"Let a double portion of Your Spirit be upon me!"* (2 Kings 2:9)

Final Exhortation

The anointing cannot be faked. It cannot be manufactured. It is not the product of charisma or training, but consecration and surrender.

So preacher, prepare diligently. Study thoroughly. Structure wisely. But above all, **seek the anointing**. Fall on your face before God and cry out for His Spirit. For when He comes, everything changes.

Let us be preachers who are not just skilled—but **anointed**. For it is the anointing that breaks the yoke, heals the brokenhearted, and turns mere sermons into divine encounters.

Chapter 12

How to Be an Effective Preacher

How to Be an Effective Preacher

We have covered everything from what preaching is to the purpose of preaching, from different types of sermons to how to prepare a message, from how to deliver the message to how to give a powerful altar call. All of this is to help make you a better preacher. To have an understanding of what good homiletics is.

In this final chapter, we review and refine some of those points, but we go a little deeper. We are going take a look at several other important aspects of preaching. We will talk about preaching to persuade. We will cover some pitfalls to avoid and the power of illustrations. We will discuss the art of preaching to persuade and other keys to becoming an effective preacher. We are going to start by sharing 10 essential practices every preacher needs to adopt in order to be effective.

10 Essential for Effective Preaching

1. **Preach Only After Waiting on God**
   An effective preacher begins by waiting on the Lord. This means serving the Lord, learning to be still, and discerning His voice within your spirit. It doesn't mean doing nothing, pausing until God responds. It is like a waiter in a restaurant who is waiting on you. Serving you. We are serving the Lord. Set aside time daily to wait on Him—not with the sole aim of crafting a sermon, but to allow His truth to work in your heart before you share it with others.

Rushing into God’s presence with a "deadline mentality" hinders the reception of divine revelation. Instead, approach Him humbly, ready to be shaped by His Word before attempting to shape others.

2. Preach Only After Studying the Bible

Effective preaching begins with diligent study of Scripture. Come before God with an open Bible and an open heart. Ask for His illumination as you read. It’s helpful to develop a habit of systematic Bible reading—continuing where you left off the previous day to ensure no part of Scripture is neglected.

Sometimes, the Spirit may prompt you to focus on a specific passage or theme. Whether following a plan or a prompting, immerse yourself in the Word, allowing it to inspire, correct, and guide you.

As a preacher, immersing yourself daily in God's word is imperative. It is through this discipline that you become thoroughly nourished with the living Word. Remember, you can only feed others if you are well-fed yourself. Therefore, to effectively deliver God's message, never overlook the discipline of dedicating a substantial amount of time to reading and understanding the word of God.

2. Preach Only After the Word Transforms You First

Avoid approaching Scripture solely as a source for Sunday sermons. Instead, let the Word speak to you personally before it speaks through you to others. Let it challenge, cleanse, and nourish your soul.

When God uses His Word to correct and inspire you, it provides a powerful basis for your preaching. Sharing

personal revelations and lessons resonates deeply because it comes from lived experience. As 2 Timothy 2:6 (NKJV) reminds us: “The hard-working farmer must be first to partake of the crops.”

Neglecting your own spiritual growth for the sake of ministry can lead to burnout. As illustrated in *Song of Solomon 1:6*, "They made me the keeper of the vineyards, but my own vineyard I have not kept." To effectively lead others, you must first nurture your spiritual well-being. When the Word takes root in your life, your preaching will flow with authenticity and power, drawing from what you have personally experienced.

3. **Preach Only the Word, Christ, the Gospel, and Kingdom**

“Preach the word! Be ready in season *and* out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching” (2 Timothy 4:1). This is a charge all pastors should take seriously. It is easy to begin to follow the latest trends and fads that the people want to hear. Paul warns us in 2 Timothy 4:3-4, “*For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.”* The pulpit is not a place for opinions, philosophy, psychology, or frivolous meandering. We need our messages to be from the Word of God and to preach Christ, all things about Jesus. “For we do not preach ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord” (1Cor. 4:5). Our preaching should also include all things about the Kingdom. Jesus said, “I must preach the kingdom of God to the other cities…” (Luke 4:43) That being said, we can add

our personality and make the delivery engaging, just never compromising or detracting from the Word

4. **Preach Only After Preparing**

   Be prepared. Never step into a pulpit unprepared. Preaching without preparation is like trying to harvest a field you never planted—there will be no fruit. It is your sacred duty to spend time in prayer, seeking God for the Word He wants spoken to His people. The message must come from His heart before it ever reaches yours. Once you've heard from heaven, the next step is to labor in the Word—rightly dividing it through careful study, research, and exegesis. Craft your sermon with a clear structure: a compelling introduction, solid biblical content, powerful illustrations, and a Spirit-led conclusion that includes a meaningful call to action or altar call. But preparation doesn't stop with the message—it includes preparing *you*. Spend time in the presence of God, let His Word work in you before you ever preach it to others. Your life, your heart, and your walk with God must align with the message you deliver. The power of your preaching will never rise above the depth of your preparation—both in the study and in your soul.

5. **Preach with Passion**

   The best preachers are passionate. They preach with a sense of anticipation of what amazing things God might accomplish in His people through His word in this moment.

   If you are not excited about what you are saying, how can you expect anyone else to be? It is tragic to make the most amazing story ever told boring.

Get fired up about the message. Bottle it up and stir it up within you all week so much that by Sunday (or whenever you preach), you cannot contain it anymore, and the message explodes out of you.

6. **Preach with Creativity**
   Break free from the routine. Effective preaching is a calling that demands passion, preparation, perspective, and creativity. To keep your messages fresh and impactful, it's essential to nurture your creativity and spiritual well-being. Always be looking for ways to help people connect with the message of God's Word. Jesus was a master of using stories and illustrations to help people understand the essence of what He was teaching and preaching. Look for ways to incorporate visuals, testimonies, skits, and other ways to engage the audience and help bring the message to life.

7. **Preach for Transformation**
   Our preaching has a purpose. It is to impact and affect those we are ministering to. When we preach the Word of God, it will transform the lives of people. They will come to Christ or become more like Christ. God watches over His Word to perform. Preach for transformation.

8. **Preach Because You're Motivated by Love for God**
   Above all, let the love for God be your primary motivation for preaching His word. Jesus was moved with compassion when He saw the people. (Mt. 9:36) This love will keep your passion burning and will motivate you to continually endeavor to improve your preaching skills.

9. **Preach as unto the Lord – with All Glory Going to God.**
Our preaching should always be done in a way that brings glory to God—never to ourselves. Everything we do, especially when we stand to proclaim His Word, must be done *unto the Lord* (Colossians 3:23). The pulpit is not a platform for personal recognition, performance, or ego—it is a place to lift up the name of Jesus. We must guard our hearts fiercely against pride, the desire for applause, and the temptation to make ministry about us.

As A.W. Tozer once said, *"The preacher who has no desire to glorify God should not preach."* Leonard Ravenhill echoed this truth, warning, *"We have too many puppets in our pulpits and not enough prophets."* Let those words stir you. If people leave your message talking more about you than Jesus, you've missed the mark. Stay humble, stay hidden in Christ, and let your preaching be a window through which people see His glory, not your gift. True power in preaching is found when the preacher disappears and Christ alone is magnified. Make it your aim that every word you speak draws attention to Christ, not the pulpit. Let your life and your lips declare: *Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but to Your name give glory* (Psalm 115:1).

Preaching to Persuade

Transforming Hearts and Minds

Preaching isn't just about crafting sermons or delivering eloquent speeches—it's about carrying the burden of eternity in your heart. Every pastor must carry within them a holy desire to *persuade* people toward transformation, not manipulation, but loving persuasion that points people to Jesus and motivates them to become more like Jesus. This kind of preaching doesn't happen by accident. It flows from a heart that aches to see people grow in their faith, saved, healed, restored, and set free.

Persuasive preaching is the bridge between eternal truth and everyday reality. It connects doctrine to decision, theology to transformation. And in a culture growing increasingly resistant to truth, pastors must not only declare but *persuade* with fire, love, and clarity. If you want your preaching to move beyond inspiration and into reformation—read on

The Purpose

Life Change Through Persuasion

Acts 18:4 sets a precedent: "Every Sabbath he [Paul] reasoned in the synagogue, trying to persuade Jews and Greeks." This scripture highlights the essence of preaching—it's not merely about imparting knowledge but about catalyzing profound life change.

Effective preaching goes beyond transferring information; it brings transformation. It's not enough for people to walk away thinking, *"That was a good sermon."* They should leave thinking, *"What must I do to respond?"* A sermon might be well-crafted,

yet if it fails to move people towards action and faith, it misses its divine purpose.

Our Examples - Models of Persuasive Preaching

Jesus' ministry exemplified persuasive preaching:

- **Empathy:** "Come to Me… I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28).
- **Contrast:** "You have heard… But I tell you…" (Matt. 5:21–22).
- **Clarity and Compassion:** Meeting people where they are, leading them where they need to go.

Jesus never manipulated, but He moved multitudes. He didn't flatter, but He pierced hearts. His sermons weren't just heard—they *haunted* people with divine truth that demanded response.

The apostle Paul was relentless in his mission to persuade. Whether standing before religious leaders, philosophers in Athens, or kings like Agrippa, Paul preached with the goal of moving people toward truth. He wasn't a slick communicator with persuasive techniques. In fact, he wrote:

"My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power."
— 1 Corinthians 2:4

Paul understood something every modern preacher must: *It's not about polish—it's about power.*

How We Can Preach to Persuade

1. **Preach with the End in Mind**

   Before stepping into the pulpit, ask: What is the sermon's purpose? Is it to educate, inspire, motivate, mobilize, or lead souls to Christ? True preaching isn't noise; it's a catalyst for spiritual metamorphosis—towards faith, repentance, and obedience.

   The best preaching has direction. It is not aimless—it is *missional*. Like arrows from heaven, persuasive sermons are launched with eternal targets in mind.

2. **Understand Your Audience**

   Compelling preaching always begins with compassion. Step into your congregation's reality:

   - What challenges do they face?
   - What doubts or wounds weigh on their hearts?
   - What truths do they need to embrace? Authenticity and compassion forge connections that transcend mere words.

   Step into their world, speak their language, and then deliver heaven's truth in a voice they can hear.

3. **Speak with Passion**

   Let your preaching be fueled by passion. Like Jesus and the early church, let conviction ignite your words. "We write this to make your joy complete" (1 John 1:4)—preach from what has transformed you. Your passion validates your message. You don't need theatrics—but you *do* need conviction. People may forget your points, but they will never forget the

feeling that gripped them when you preached with urgency, authenticity, and power.

4. **Be Moved with Compassion**

   Let love lead the way. At the core of all persuasion is *love*. Paul reminds us that even the most eloquent speech, if devoid of love, is just *noise* (1 Cor. 13:1). Compassion is what move Jesus. Love is what sent Jesus to the cross. Love is what drove Paul across continents. Love is what will give your preaching staying power.

   Charles Spurgeon said,

   "The sermon cannot rise higher than the man."

   If you want to reach people's hearts, you must first love them. People will not be persuaded by someone who seems indifferent to their struggle. They need truth, yes—but truth delivered in *love*.

Persuade with the Power of the Spirit

Preaching is not a performance—it is a sacred trust. It is a divine moment where heaven touches earth and the eternal invades the ordinary. Preach with the **urgency of Paul**, the **compassion of Jesus**, and the **confidence that the Gospel still saves**.

But here's the good news: **You are not alone in the pulpit.**

Our hope for persuasive preaching is the **Holy Spirit**.

He is the true persuader. And thankfully, no one is a match for His power. When you lean into His presence—during your preparation, in your delivery, and even afterward—He takes your

words and does what no human preacher can: He softens hard hearts, opens blind eyes, and transforms lives.

And yes, He'll even work on *your* heart too—persuading you away from worldly thinking, drawing you closer to Christ, and filling your soul with fresh fire.

So preach—

- not just to be heard, but to persuade.
- not just to present truth, but to **move people** toward it.
- not in your strength, but in the power of the Spirit.

Let heaven speak through you. Let the Holy Spirit work in you. And let every sermon be a call to transformation, not just information.

The Power of Illustrations

Stories, analogies, and real-life examples are powerful tools in persuasion. Jesus Himself often taught using parables to convey profound truths in relatable ways. Choose illustrations that resonate with your audience's experiences and make abstract concepts tangible. An effective illustration can bridge the gap between understanding and action.

The Art of Illustration
Bringing Sermons to Life

A well-chosen illustration is like sunlight pouring through a window—it brightens the room, reveals hidden corners, and makes everything clearer. In the same way, illustrations in a sermon can transform abstract truths into vivid realities,

allowing listeners not only to understand but to feel and remember what's being preached.

Without illustrations, even the most profound message can seem heavy or distant. But when a story, image, or analogy is woven in, truth becomes tangible—alive, relatable, and unforgettable.

Jesus
The Master Illustrator

Jesus didn't merely preach principles; He painted pictures with words. He spoke in parables—simple, down-to-earth stories that revealed profound spiritual truths. The Bible says:

"And with many such parables He spoke the word to them as they were able to hear it. But without a parable He did not speak to them. And when they were alone, He explained all things to His disciples." (Mark 4:33–34, NKJV)

The word "parable" comes from the Greek *parabole*, meaning "to place alongside." Jesus placed earthly stories alongside heavenly realities so His audience could see eternal truths with fresh eyes.

He knew that a story could bypass mental blocks and speak straight to the heart.

Why Illustrations Matter

Illustrations aren't optional trimmings or sidenotes—they're powerful tools that can elevate a sermon from informative to transformational. Here's why they're indispensable:

1. They Clarify Complex Truths

Spiritual concepts can be hard to grasp, especially for those unfamiliar with Scripture. A timely illustration acts like a bridge, helping people cross from confusion to clarity.

"But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God... because they are spiritually discerned."
(1 Corinthians 2:14, NKJV)

A story can make a mystery understandable.

2. They Make Abstract Ideas Concrete

Most people relate more easily to everyday situations than to ancient biblical customs. An illustration rooted in modern life translates timeless truths into today's language.

3. They Capture Attention

Nothing perks up a listener like a good story. If their minds are wandering, a compelling illustration can reel them back in—and keep them hooked.

4. They Break Monotony

A sermon filled only with instruction can grow heavy. Stories inject rhythm and variety, giving listeners moments of mental and emotional rest.

5. They Bridge the Gap to Real Life

Illustrations connect the ancient world to the present. They show how Scripture isn't just historical—it's practical, powerful, and deeply relevant.

6. They Stir the Heart

Truth isn't just meant to be understood—it's meant to be felt. A heartfelt illustration can move listeners to tears, laughter, or repentance, making the message resonate on a soul-deep level.

"A merry heart does good, like medicine, but a broken spirit dries the bones."
(Proverbs 17:22, NKJV)

7. They Are Memorable

You may forget the three points of a sermon—but you'll remember the story that made you laugh, cry, or think. And with that memory comes the truth it carried.

8. They Offer Emotional Relief

When preaching on heavy topics, a gentle, uplifting illustration can be a breath of fresh air, allowing the listener space to process and reflect.

9. They Invite Appropriate Humor

Humor can warm hearts and disarm resistance—when used wisely and with sensitivity. A well-placed laugh can make truth land more gently and stick more firmly.

Where to Find Great Illustrations

You don't need to dig through dusty books to find illustrations. They're all around you—woven into life itself.

1. The Bible
Scripture is full of rich imagery, metaphors, and stories. Jesus often used the Old Testament to illustrate His teachings, and so can we.

2. Your Own Life
Personal stories build connection. Your struggles, victories, questions, and revelations can powerfully reinforce your message.

3. Current Events
News stories, cultural trends, and world events can reflect spiritual realities and highlight Scripture's relevance today.

4. Nature
Jesus spoke of seeds, birds, flowers, and weather. Creation is brimming with spiritual metaphors—look around with fresh eyes.

5. Everyday Moments
From parenting challenges to grocery store encounters, ordinary experiences can become extraordinary illustrations when paired with truth.

6. Your Imagination
Jesus invited people to imagine: "Which of you, having a hundred sheep…" (Luke 15). Don't be afraid to use creativity to make your point vivid.

7. Conversations
A casual comment from a friend, student, or stranger can become the seed of a powerful illustration. Stay curious and attentive.

8. Testimonies

One of the greatest joys of Pastoring is hearing the testimonies of our people. It is always encouraging to hear people share how God has moved in their life, family, finances, jobs, and businesses. God is faithful, and He is at work. Whenever you hear a great testimony look for opportunities to use it in your messages. Testimonies are not about highlight the person, they are to highlight God and His Word. Then are to help illustrate a point in your message and encourage the people

How to Use Illustrations Effectively

Illustrations are powerful—but like seasoning in a meal, they must be used with care. Here's how to make sure your stories serve your sermon:

1. Make the Point Clear

An illustration should *highlight* your point, not *hide* it. If the connection isn't obvious, take a moment to draw it out.

2. Stay on Theme

Stick to stories that support your message. A great story that doesn't tie in is a distraction, not a help.

3. Keep It Brief

Don't let the story hijack your sermon. Tell it with just enough detail to engage—then land the point.

4. Be Authentic

Original, personal, or fresh stories connect better than recycled clichés. Speak from the heart, not just from a file.

5. Use Variety
Mix it up: humor, drama, emotion, simplicity. Variety keeps the audience engaged and creates a fuller experience.

6. Don't Overdo It
Too many illustrations can drown the message. One strong, well-placed story per major point is often enough.

7. Keep It Simple
Complicated analogies confuse rather than clarify. Jesus used things people saw every day—seeds, lamps, coins, sheep. You can too.

8. Use Discernment
Know your audience. Avoid stories that might alienate, confuse, or offend. What's funny to one may be painful to another.

Final Encouragement

Illustrations are the windows of your sermon—they let in light, color, and clarity. But remember: a house needs more than windows. It needs structure, foundation, and purpose. Use illustrations not as the message, but as a means to reveal the message.

Jesus used the power of story to change hearts, shift perspectives, and reveal the kingdom of God. As His followers and messengers, let's do the same. Let your stories shine, not to draw attention to yourself—but to point always and only to the One who is the Light of the world.

Tailor Your Messages

As pastors we have the opportunity to preach in many different settings. Obviously, our weekend service and midweek services, there are special occasions, and then there are times we are invited to share in other churches, conferences, men's breakfasts, business meetings, etc. Each setting requires different approaches, different kinds of messages, and other considerations. We need to prayerful tailor each message and sermon for the audience and occasion.

I've been asked to open city council meetings, open our state legislative sessions, to speak at large interdenominational meetings like "Promise Keepers", to share at ecumenical meetings attended by Jewish Rabbis, Mormon Elders, Roman Catholic Priests, and many other leaders from various religious organizations, I have preached in churches where my wife a I were the only Caucasian's there. I am grateful for every opportunity and door the Lord has opened for me to be able to share my faith, but each situation requires wisdom and the leading of the Holy Spirit. We need to tailor our message to each situation, audience, and circumstance.

Before crafting a message, ask yourself:

- Who will be listening?
- Are they believers or non-believers?
- What is the purpose of this gathering?
- Are there specific needs to address?

By considering these factors, you ensure your message meets your audience where they are, speaking directly to their hearts, and giving the Holy Spirit the opportunity do move in the hearts of those hearing.

Here are 7 different kinds of messages you can think about as you start the process of putting your message together. Even when preparing sermons for your people, these can be helpful in tailoring your weekend services. Sometimes a message will incorporate 2 or more of these in one message. Again, pray and be led by the Holy Spirit.

1) **Evangelistic Messages**
   These focus on salvation and healing, aiming to reveal the reality of sin and the hope found in Jesus. Evangelistic messages should be simple, passionate, and Spirit-led, emphasizing the convicting power of the Holy Spirit rather than human wisdom.

2) **Devotional Messages**
   Devotional messages inspire believers to deepen their love, loyalty, and commitment to God. They foster a heart of worship and a stronger relationship with Him.

3) **Pastoral Messages**
   Pastoral messages nurture the flock, addressing spiritual needs with love and guidance. They protect, encourage, and challenge believers to grow in their faith.

4) **Doctrinal Messages**
   These establish Christians in biblical truth, helping them understand key principles of faith and doctrine.

5) **Ethical Messages**
   Ethical sermons emphasize Christian conduct, urging believers to align their behavior with their beliefs.

6) **Special Occasion Messages**
Whether for weddings, funerals, or baptisms, these sermons address the unique needs of specific events with grace and relevance.

7) Unique Opportunity Messages
These are things like speaking at some organization, i.e., chamber of commerce, Jaycees, Rotary Club, businessmen's groups, ecumenical settings, or other invites you might receive and feel to accept. I never compromise my faith or witness, but I want to use wisdom in how and what to share. The apostle Paul was gifted in knowing how to share and defend the gospel regardless of the audience.

Prov 25:11 tells us, *"A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in settings (swift, smooth moving chariots) of silver*." As pastors we have the opportunity and privilege to speak into the lives of those we minister to a Word that is spoken in due season that can bring life, comfort, healing, encouragement, and correction. The appropriate word, i.e. the right word, spoken in the correct manner, at the right time and in the right circumstance, is like a silver chariot running swiftly and smoothly to its chosen destination.

Summary - Tailor the Message, Fulfill the Call

As pastors and preachers, every opportunity to share the Word is a divine assignment. Whether you're preaching in a Sunday service, a city council meeting, or a funeral, you must approach each moment with reverence, wisdom, and preparation. Tailoring your message to the audience and occasion is not about compromise—it's about effectiveness. Like Paul, who became all things to all people, we are called to speak the right word, the right way, at the right time.

Preaching isn't just about delivering truth—it's about connecting it to hearts. That requires prayer, study, sensitivity to the Spirit, and an unwavering commitment to rightly divide the Word of truth. Charles Spurgeon once said, *"A good preacher is like a tailor. He doesn't just throw a bolt of cloth at the audience—he fashions a suit that fits."* Let every message you preach be a Spirit-led, Scripture-grounded, Christ-exalting word in season.

And never forget—it's not about us. It's all about Jesus. Our preaching must glorify God, reflect Christ, and rely on the Holy Spirit's power. When we humble ourselves, God gets the glory—and lives are changed.

So rise up. Preach with passion and purpose. Be the best version of yourself—Spirit-filled, Word-saturated, and completely surrendered. God created you for this. Step into it. Let your preaching carry the weight of heaven and the heart of God. Keep preaching. Keep tailoring. Keep pointing people to Jesus.

5 COMMON PITFALLS TO AVOID

In seeking to be good stewards of God's truth and his church, we must be mindful of the common pitfalls that can undermine our efforts to be effective preachers. While effective preaching has the power to change the lives of people and expository preaching is a rich and rewarding method, there are pitfalls that can undermine its effectiveness:

1. **Having Too Many Points – Too Much Information – Preaching Too Long**

   The majority of people in your congregation will forget what you preached within 24 hours, no matter how great of a preacher you are. So the simpler you can keep your message the better. One main point is perfect. Anything over three and you're wasting your time and everyone else's. Avoid overwhelming the people with excessive detail or technical jargon. Balance depth with clarity, ensuring your message is both thorough and accessible. Very few pastors can preach for over 40 minutes and still keep the people's attention. The majority of us should keep our messages within the 25-35 minute range for our regular services. If you can't keep it shorter than 40 minutes, you have too many points, or you're belaboring the point. I often find that pastors don't know how to be flexible and adjust. They refuse to cut good things from their message. They are too compelled to preach everything they have prepared. Stay committed to your introduction and closing, but be willing to change everything in between.

2. **Neglecting Application**

   This is one of the things I often see. Pastors will provide the text and explain what it says and what it means but fail to show how the people are to apply it in their lives. Be intentional about guiding your listeners toward practical, faith-filled responses. Having your closing properly prepared with the appropriate altar call will help ensure you don't neglect apply the Word.

3. **Ignoring the Audience's Needs**

Preaching that fails to address the spiritual and emotional needs of the congregation misses the mark. Stay attuned to their challenges and questions. Know where you are leading the congregation and make sure you sermons are helping lead people to that destination.

4. **Not being prepared.**
   When you don't prepare, you tend to ramble and go off on tangents that have nothing to do with the message. If you're waiting for the Holy Spirit to give you your message on Saturday night or Sunday morning, you've waited too late. The Holy Spirit is a lot better prepared than that. Chances are you're procrastinating. Your congregation deserves better than that. Sermon prep looks different for everyone, but for me I type out my entire sermon and then preach it to an empty room at least three times before I ever get in front of an audience.

5. **Not Preaching the Word.**
   Let the Word of God take center stage. Resist the temptation to use the pulpit as a platform for personal opinions, stories, or agendas.

How To Improve Your Preaching

Becoming a Greater Preacher

Every preacher—no matter how seasoned or skilled—can grow in their calling. Whether you've preached a thousand sermons or you're just getting started, there's always room to improve. Why? Because the Word we preach is eternal, powerful, and life-changing. And as messengers of that Word, we have a responsibility to communicate it as clearly, passionately, and effectively as possible.

The great Haddon Robinson once said, *"Preaching that changes lives is the Word of God delivered by a person of God in the power of God."* That's what we're aiming for—not perfection, but progress. We want to steward our preaching gift with diligence and faithfulness, learning to shape our messages in ways that connect, inspire, and transform.

If you feel the weight of this calling—if you long to see lives changed by the power of God's Word, if you want your preaching to ring with clarity and anointing—then these final pages of this chapter are for you. They are filled with practical, proven steps that can help you elevate your preaching. Whether you're looking to sharpen your structure, better engage your listeners, or deepen your spiritual preparation, what follows will help you become the best preacher you can be.

Let's be honest—none of us have "arrived." We're all climbing, learning, growing. And that's a good thing. As Charles Spurgeon put it, *"He who ceases to learn ceases to grow. He who ceases to grow ceases to be effective."* So, let's lean in together. Let's take a fresh look at ten ways to become better preachers Let's dive in.

1. Determine To Grow

The first step to preaching better sermons is determining that you will be the best preacher that you can be.

It's about making the conscious decision to change, adapt, try new things and invest in yourself.

Good leaders are always growing leaders and great preachers have growing churches.

Decide to improve your preaching and your people will thank you.

As your messages become more engaging, step back and watch God start to transform lives, families and marriages as people begin to connect with God's Word on a whole new level.

2. Elevate Your Preaching

Watch yourself preach.

Andy Stanley watches himself preach. If anyone could have said, "You know what, I'm good. I don't need to improve," it would have been him. He could have said that when he was a 30-year-old youth pastor because he was probably a really skilled communicator then. But the reason we're still talking about him, and he's still relevant **in his mid-60's is** because he never stopped critiquing himself. He watches every sermon he preaches.

You and I should, too. You may be saying, "Oh, I can't stand to watch myself on video! Oh, I can't even bear!" Yes, you can. Just do it. Take notes and improve. Watch (don't just listen) to your sermons and see what you're actually putting people through.

Evaluating preaching is extremely difficult. I've heard sermons that are models of the craft, but lack all unction and power. I've also heard disastrous sermons, from a technical standpoint, that nevertheless communicate the biblical text in an effective way and connect with the heart on a deep level. I've preached both kinds of sermons. Evaluating preaching can be subjective. Some people will like your style and others will be annoyed. So, stay focused on the key elements:

1. Content – Biblical, Accurate, Contextual
2. Structure – Introduction, Points, Closing - organized
3. Delivery – Engaging, Communicated effectively, Illustrations
4. Life changing – Message connect with hearts of people, brings people to a decision,
5. Anointed – Not just a good Bible Study, Not just informational, but transformational – divine impartation – tangible presence of God – God is glorified.

The purpose of this process is to get better, so don't be over critical or get to discouraged. Just identify the things that you know you can improve on and work on them. It is an on going process.

3. Get Others to Evaluate Your Preaching

Pastors who have seen a massive improvement in their preaching are the ones who ask for feedback. Self evaluation is critical and important, but the input of others can bring balance. Often, then things we don't. My experience has been they often

provide a lot of positive feedback that is encouraging, but I always challenge them to give me something that bothered them or anything they heard that seemed off or could have been made clearer.

Asking trusted friends, colleagues, and others to provide honest and constructive feedback can be a huge help.

If you're like most preachers, the only feedback you'll get is the casual "*I really enjoyed your sermon today*" from some well-meaning church member as you're waving them off.

What worked well? What needs to be changed?

4. Practice

The one common denominator of anyone who is great at their craft is – PRACTICE! Research shows that no one – not Tiger Woods, not Mozart, not Jack Welch or any other super "talented" person – just simply arrived as a great performer in their industry. What made them become what they became?

It took years and years of focused and intentional practice.

It takes time to develop into a great "fill in the blank" no matter how we fill that blank in. The answer is the same. It takes deliberate practice to approach the status of world-class in anything.

And here's where some may get upset: the same is true for preaching.

Do I believe that God gifts us with spiritual gifts? Absolutely!

Do I believe that He is the one who gets the glory? Absolutely!

Do I believe that the preaching moment belongs to the Holy Spirit working through a broken piece of pottery – you and me? Yes!

At the same time, I also believe that we *must* develop those gifts in order for them to manifest fully.

I believe that we have a responsibility to fan into flame the gift God gave us.

I believe that we must work to improve in the art and craft of biblical preaching,

An acorn has the potential to become a large oak tree. But in order for it to grow, it has to be cultivated and cared for.

The same is true for our preaching.

Think about it: Are you a better preacher today than you were the first time you stepped into the pulpit? Of course you are. By simply getting reps, over time, we can improve tremendously.

Here are some tips on how to practice effectively.

1. Break your preaching down into specific areas like:

    a. Posture
    b. Movement
    c. Gestures
    d. Facial Expressions
    e. Other body language
    f. Voice – tone, volume, articulation, inflection, etc.
    g. Content
    h. Illustrations
    i. Visual Aids

Effective practice requires that you identify the areas or elements that need the most improvement and then work on them. If you just stand still behind the pulpit you might want to work on your movement. If you pace to much, you may need to work on that.

2. Schedule regular times
3. Always record your practice sessions,
4. Always evaluate your sessions and then reevaluate your progress – and refocus on the areas you need practice on.
5. Get others' feedback.

Here's the thing, the effectiveness of your practice will be determined on how well you plan and design you practice times.

5. Feed Yourself Before Feeding Others

A great sermon comes from a man or woman who has experience in wielding the sword of God's Word in the secret place.

Preachers who only open the Bible in preparing for a sermon are at risk of burnout.

Never forget that before you are a preacher, you are a child of God first and foremost.

This second step may seem obvious but research carried out by Francis A. Schaeffer Institute of Church Leadership Development reveals a dangerous pandemic amongst pastors:

Only 38% read the Bible for daily devotions and personal study.

Don’t be a statistic.

Your congregation know the difference between someone preparing lessons from a textbook and someone who is passionately sharing from a place of intimacy with the Word.

Don’t just preach it; live it.

6. Continue Learning - Study Preaching

One of the most important things you can do as a preacher is keep a posture of openness and continual learning. Otherwise, you’ll run the risk of drying up, of saying the same things the same way, and of losing your ability to illustrate the truth with powerful examples and analogies. Have a healthy appetite for life-long learning. Stop learning and you stop growing.

We are physicians of souls, tasked with expositing God’s inspired Word for His people. In the same way that good doctors read their journals, good pastors do things to continue growing and improving through reading, listening, and learning.

Reading is a must for preachers, and today, more than ever, we have 24/7 access to a vast array of books and online resources that are only a click away. I encourage you to invest in courses, workshops, and conferences. Be looking for ways to not only foster spiritual grow, but opportunities for professional growth, and ways to improve your communications skills.

As you commit to growing as a speaker and follower of Christ, you’ll not only fulfill your calling—you’ll inspire others to fulfill theirs too.

Preachers must be students—for life. The moment you stop learning is the moment your sermons start sounding stale.

Read widely. Attend conferences. Take preaching courses. Learn from communication experts, storytellers, and theologians. Expose yourself to fresh perspectives, new tools, and timeless truths.

We are physicians of the soul, entrusted with the eternal Word. Like a good doctor keeps studying, a good preacher keeps sharpening.

7. Listen To Great Preachers

How much preaching are you listening to?

One of the best ways to improve your preaching is to listen to great communicators and learn from them.

It's never been easier: in the past, this would mean flying out to conferences or travelling hundreds of miles to visit different churches, but the internet is a wonderful thing.

Now you can attend churches around the world anytime, anywhere, on your phone, iPod, computer or tablet.

Podcasts are amazing and best of all – they're free.

When I first discovered podcasts, my life changed. I searched and found as many good preachers as I could and devoured every sermon I could.

The more I listen and watch, the more I learn.

8. Keep Yourself Full and Well

The most important step—and the one that will sustain your preaching for a lifetime.

We've saved the best for last. If you want to preach with power and longevity, you must take care of yourself—spiritually, mentally, emotionally, and physically.

Too many preachers burn out because they ignore this vital truth: **you can't pour out what you haven't filled up**.

"For out of the overflow of the heart, the mouth speaks."
— *Matthew 12:34*

A little boy bursts into the kitchen, eyes wide with excitement, eager to tell his mom what just happened. His words tumble out like a waterfall—pure, unfiltered joy from a full heart.

That's what preaching should feel like. **Preach from the overflow**.

Don't rely on dry outlines or dead sermons. Speak from a place of deep intimacy with the Father. When your heart is full of God's love and your mind is renewed by His Word, your message will come alive—and so will your congregation.

Let your passion be contagious. Let your love for people be unmistakable. Let your time with God spill out into every word you speak.

But none of that is possible if you're running on empty.

- **Eat well.**
- **Get proper sleep.**
- **Take your days off.**
- **Go on vacation.**

This is not weakness—it's wisdom. An exhausted, unhealthy preacher is a poor witness for the life-transforming power of the gospel.

There's a saying: "Hurt people hurt people." The same applies to pastors. If we don't deal with criticism, disappointment, and pain in a healthy way, those wounds will bleed into our ministry.

Be quick to forgive. Guard your heart, for "out of it flow the issues of life" (*Proverbs 4:23*). Let God's love and healing flow into your soul so you can minister from a place of wholeness.

Stay full. Stay well. Stay strong.
Your preaching—and your people—depend on it.

You really **CAN** improve your preaching and make your messages more effective. When you do all you can, God steps in and does what you can't do. He is working in you every day! Stay committed to be you best – to the glory of God.

Conclusion
Preach to the Glory of God

"If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God… so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen."
—1 Peter 4:11

As we bring this book to a close, I want to speak directly to your heart—not just as a fellow preacher, but as someone who believes deeply in your calling. I believe that preaching is one of the highest callings on this side of heaven. And it is a calling that demands not only passion and gifting but deep preparation, submission, and surrender.

If you've read this far, you've proven you care about your ministry. You desire to grow, to improve, to preach more effectively. You've studied what preaching is, the holy purpose behind it, and how to prepare a sermon that is biblically sound and spiritually impactful. You've learned how to deliver that message in a way that connects with your audience, how to extend a powerful altar call that invites people into God's presence, and how to continually prepare yourself—spirit, soul, and body—to be ready in season and out.

But more than all the techniques, principles, and strategies, I pray you've grasped the heartbeat of this book: **Effective preaching is not about performance—it's about transformation. It's not about applause—it's about obedience.**

The Importance of Preparation

Great preaching begins long before the preacher steps onto the platform. Preparation is not merely a practical step—it is a spiritual discipline. It is where the preacher meets with God, listens for His voice, wrestles with the text, and allows the Holy Spirit to speak first *to them* before they speak *through them*.

Before we prepare sermons, we must prepare *ourselves*. That means spending unhurried time in the Word—not just to study it, but to be shaped by it. It means lingering in prayer, seeking the heart of God for what *He* wants to say to His people. Preaching is not just communication; it is divine representation. We are ambassadors, speaking on behalf of Heaven.

"If I had six hours to chop down a tree, I'd spend the first four sharpening the axe." —Abraham Lincoln

That's the power of preparation. It sharpens your spirit, mind, and message.

Your sermon preparation should include:

- **Seeking God in prayer:** Ask God what He wants to say, not just what you want to preach. Let the message be birthed in intercession.
- **Rightly dividing the Word:** Interpret Scripture with integrity. Avoid twisting verses to fit a theme. Let the Word speak for itself.
- **Exegesis and research:** Dig deep. Study the historical context, grammar, culture, and audience. Use trustworthy resources and commentaries.

- **Creating clear structure:** Your sermon should have a logical flow—an introduction, clear points, Scripture support, illustrations, and a call to action.
- **Using illustrations and visual aids:** Jesus used parables and stories to connect truth to life. Visuals and analogies help people see spiritual realities more clearly.

Then preach your message *to yourself*. Let it minister to your own heart before you ever deliver it to others. Examine your own life in light of the Word you are preparing.

Preach From the Overflow

The most powerful preaching flows from a life immersed in God. Fellowship with Him must be your first ministry. As you spend time in His presence—reading, worshiping, meditating, praying—your soul becomes a vessel ready to pour out what God has poured in.

"Preaching is truth through personality." —Phillips Brooks

If your spirit is dry, your preaching will be hollow. But when you are full of the Spirit, your preaching becomes a river of living water, quenching thirsty souls.

Don't just prepare a message—let God prepare *you*.

It's All About Jesus

When we step into the pulpit, it is not our platform—it's His. It is not our stage—it's His sanctuary. It is not about how good we are—it is about how glorious *He* is. As John the Baptist so humbly said:

"He must become greater; I must become less." —John 3:30

Preaching that changes lives doesn't point to the preacher—it reveals the Savior. We must preach Christ, and Him crucified. We must declare the Gospel with clarity and conviction. We must lift up the name of Jesus, for He promised,

"If I be lifted up, I will draw all people unto me." —John 12:32

Let every word we speak be aimed at glorifying Him. Let every sermon point people to the cross, to grace, to truth, and to the life-transforming power of the Kingdom of God.

The Power of the Word and the Spirit

God is not obligated to confirm *our* opinions, but He is absolutely committed to confirming *His Word*.

"The Lord worked with them and confirmed His Word by the signs that accompanied it." —Mark 16:20

Preach His Word—and you'll never preach in vain. Build your message on Scripture, saturate it with prayer, and wrap it in love. Then, trust the Holy Spirit to do what only He can do: open blind eyes, soften hard hearts, and bring dead souls to life.

Charles Spurgeon once said:

"The power that is in the Gospel does not lie in the eloquence of the preacher; otherwise men would be converters of souls. Nor does it lie in the preacher's learning; otherwise it would consist in the wisdom of men. The power lies in the Holy Spirit working through the Word."

Preach by the Spirit. Walk in step with Him. Let His fire burn in your heart and ignite your preaching.

Prepare to Be the Best Version of You

You don't have to be the next Billy Graham, or Charles Stanley, or T.D. Jakes. God's not calling you to be someone else. He's calling you to be *you*—the best version of the person *He created you to be*.

God created you on purpose, with purpose, for a purpose. You are uniquely gifted. Your voice matters. Your calling is holy. Now is the time to rise up and fulfill that divine assignment.

Don't settle for average. Don't coast on what worked in the past. Don't wait until "someday" to get serious about your calling. **Today is the day. Now is the time. Step into your full potential as a preacher of the Gospel.**

"The world does not need another copy. The world needs you—filled with the Spirit, grounded in the Word, ablaze with passion, and anchored in truth."

Make Room for the Miraculous

God confirms His Word with signs, wonders, and miracles. And while we do not chase the miraculous for the sake of spectacle, we do *expect* the supernatural because we serve a supernatural God.

When you preach in faith, with obedience and passion, and let the Holy Spirit lead, you create an atmosphere for heaven to invade earth. The altar becomes a place of encounter. The sanctuary becomes a birthing room for destiny.

"The Holy Spirit is not a luxury; He is a necessity." —Leonard Ravenhill

Let's never rely on our giftings more than we rely on God. Let's never lean on our outlines more than we lean on the Holy Spirit.

One Final Challenge

As you close this book, I challenge you:

- **Pray like never before.**
- **Study the Word like your life depends on it—because it does.**
- **Preach with passion, purpose, and purity.**
- **Call people to Jesus—not just to decisions, but to discipleship.**
- **Live the message you preach.**
- **And never stop growing.**

This is not the end—it's a beginning.

Let every sermon you preach from this day forward be bathed in prayer, grounded in the Word, ignited by the Spirit, and aimed at the glory of God.

"Whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus." —Colossians 3:17

"So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God." —1 Corinthians 10:31

Let those verses define your ministry.

Preach to the glory of God.
Preach Christ and Him crucified.
Preach the Gospel in power.
Preach with all your heart.

And may the world see *Jesus* in every word you speak.

Your calling is holy. Your voice is needed. Now go—preach the Word. Be ready in season and out. Fulfill your ministry. And never forget: It's all about Him.

"To Him be the glory forever and ever. Amen."
—2 Timothy 4:18

A Declaration for Preachers

Lift your voice and declare this over your life and ministry:

"I am a servant of the Most High God. I am called to preach the Word with boldness, clarity, and compassion. I will prepare with excellence, pray with fervency, and preach with power. The Holy Spirit lives in me, leads me, and speaks through me. My sermons will be anchored in truth and saturated with love. I will lift up the name of Jesus, point people to the cross, and call them into the Kingdom. I will not shrink back. I will not compromise. I will preach to the glory of God and fulfill my divine purpose in Jesus' name. Amen."

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Bruce Edwards is a pastor, teacher, and author with over 40 years of leadership experience in business and ministry. He has been married to his wife, Trudy, for over 50 years. They have two children and 6 grandchildren.

He has a master's degree in business management and a degree in pastoral ministry. He served over 28 years at Victory Christian Center in Tulsa, Oklahoma, as Senior Associate Pastor. He has written over 30 books and helps pastors grow their churches.

As a pastor, he has a passion for helping people experience the abundant life provided through Jesus and is committed to teaching and communicating the principles of God's Word with clarity, simplicity, and boldness.

Pastor Bruce R. Edwards

The Art of Preaching - Homiletics

Topics Cover Include:

- What is Homiletics?
- What is Preaching?
- What are Expository, Topical, & Textual?
- How to Prepare a Message/Sermon.
- How to Effectively Deliver a Message.
- How to Give a Powerful Altar Call.
- The Preachers Toolbox?
- The Keys to Being an Effective Preacher.
- And much more!

"Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature." Mark 16:15

Bruce R. Edwards