

PREPARING TO PREACH – by Pastor Penn Clark

“Having the right heart with the right words”

“The Preacher was a wise man who taught the people well; and he pondered and collected many proverbs and classified them. The Preacher was not only a wise man but a good teacher; he not only taught what he knew to the people, but taught them in an interesting manner. A wise man’s words are like goads that spur to action. They nail down important truths. Students are wise who master what their teachers tell them.” (Ecclesiastes 12:9-11, based on the Living Bible)

- What do you hope to accomplish with in this sermon?
- What is the big point you want people to come away with?
- What are the sub points you are making that would support the main point?
- Who are you aiming at mainly?
- How does this fit in with what the Spirit has been saying to your church lately?
- What is the best text that says the same thing your main point is about?
- Are there other verses confirm or shed more light on what you are trying to say?
- What is my real motive for your teaching this at this time? Be real honest here.

PREACHING TO EVERYONE IN CHURCH

It is important that your message will speak to the broad spectrum of listeners who will be in attendance. To answer this, you should ask yourself the following questions:

- What will the kids get out of it?
- What will the Youth get out of it?
- What will the new believer get out of this?
- What will the well-established believers get out of this?

HOW TO CREATE AN OUT-LINE

Here are some tips on how to draft a sermon. I call it thinking on paper.

Start with the questions above, which is the big circle to build around.

Then write out everything I can think of that pertains to the topic. This kind of brainstorming does not have any order to it and is for no one’s eyes but my own.

In order to begin pulling it together and making it flow, I do what is called “Cluster Writing”, which involves writing out the main points I want to make.

I may do this several times on paper, refining it more and more, before I put it into the computer.

ASK YOURSELF THESE QUESTIONS BEFORE YOU PREACH

Ask yourself the following questions now so others won't question your preaching later:

Ed Rowell, who worked as an assistant editor of Leadership and editor of *Preaching Today*, wrote about how he asks himself the following questions before he preaches:

In one sentence what am I preaching about?

What do I want my listeners to know?

What do I want them to do?

What do I want them to become?

How does this sermon fit with the larger vision?

Do I believe this message will make a difference?

How has this sermon made a difference in my life this week?

Have I earnestly prayed for God to speak through me?

Have I used other people's material inappropriately, giving credit where credit is due?

Have I tried to make myself look better than I am?

Will my listeners know I care about them when all is said and done?

So what?

Asking this question may save your listeners from having to ask, "So what if the Philistines stopped up the wells dug by Isaac's father, Abraham? Did I sign up for a class in ancient Middle Eastern history?"

The idea of this study is based upon "Before You Preach" by Ed Rowell, Leadership Journal Fall 1997

MAKING MAPLE SYRUP

Preparing beforehand, even writing out my sermon in full helps put my thoughts on paper in an orderly way so that it flows from thought to thought, point to point. Then I work at boiling this down until all I have is an outline before me, with as few memory joggers. You might even be surprised to find that you will not even need this, once you start speaking. All that preparation pays off because the message is now part of you. You are free to stray from the outline because things will come to mind because it is free because of the discipline you put into it.

It helps to remember that preaching is not about having all the right words. We tend to focus on the right words, but people usually remember our attitude, our spirit, our sincerity, and our willingness to put ourselves in a place where God can use us to help them.

Cut yourself some slack. Brush aside your mistakes or laugh them off. There is no way to avoid them. Being perfect is not the goal, being transparent is.

Keep your eyes on the big picture - what the Lord is saying?

You should realize that people prefer that you are not perfect in the pulpit. They can relate to you better if you are not too polished or have things down pat.

You can practice your sermon in a conversation format with someone. In fact, most of my sermons come out of these kinds of conversations. I can see what ideas work, and what points make them think, what notions are acceptable or not. Then I try to discipline myself by writing out the flow of these conversations putting them in sermon form.

I also try to read aloud the Bible verses that I plan to use. This helps me get a feel for the sentence structure and helps me practice pronouncing the more difficult names beforehand.

Choose to speak about those things that you know by personal experience. This is where your authority lies.

BUY THE TRUTH AND SELL IT NOT

As you begin to preach more, you will find yourself looking for fresh material all the time. There is an unspoken pressure put on pastors to always be clever or interesting. This can cause us to resort to taking what we have heard, or that which we have gotten a buzz from and re-teaching it as our own.

If it is no our own, it will tell on you.

“Buy the truth, and do not sell it, also wisdom and instruction and understanding.” (Proverbs 23:23)

It does not mean borrow the truth or steal it. It means you have purchased it with you with your life. It means truth you own because you have experienced it personally.

I knew a pastor who had the manner of a Bible teacher but did not have much in the way of personal revelation. He was only one book ahead of the rest of us. Sometimes, he would have to take back what he shared just the week before. Eventually he became irrelevant and was never able to teach to a larger audience.

I have watched a couple of men who considered themselves to be Bible teachers, who once re-taught what was once cutting-edge stuff. At first it was exciting, and the people ate it up, but there was no real lasting effect from their message.

There is no such thing as having the gift of being a parrot.

1. You cannot impart what has not been really imparted to you.
2. You may have to retract some things that you teach too soon that don't square with the rest of the Bible.
3. After a while you may find that it contradicts other messages you have preached.
4. If the source loses credibility, so will you.

When something has been ingested and is becomes part of you, it takes on a life of its own; that is where the authority and power lies.

Young Charles Spurgeon was testing the acoustics in his newly build sanctuary. He raised his voice and spoke, *“Behold the Lamb that taketh away the sins of the world.”* Workmen, doing construction high in the beams of the ceiling began to climb down, coming to the altar and gave their hearts to Christ. That happened because it was part of his message.

GIVE CREDIT TO YOUR SOURCES

Don't be afraid to say what other people's sermons or books have done to influence you and that parts of what you are sharing has come from them. It will add to your credibility, not lessen it.

THE THREE-MONTH RULE

I heard one senior pastor of a large church tell his staff that they not preach what they heard from others for about three months.

They were to ask themselves, "What has this produced in me?"

I ask this same thing of those who teach at WellSpring. Do not preach what you just heard at a conference or what you just read out of a book until it has borne fruit in your life.

ALWAYS FORAGING FOR THE PULPIT

Spurgeon told his young students, "Always by foraging for the pulpit."

I am always looking for illustrations, jokes, humorous stories, quotes, testimonies. I collect them and file them away.

GIVING OURSELVES TO IT

If you are going to be good at something, you will have to give yourself to it, which is also what the following scripture says:

"Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith; or ministry, let us use it in our ministering; he who teaches, in teaching; he who exhorts, in exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness." (Romans 12:6-8)

"Through the grace of God we have different gifts. If our gift is preaching let us preach to the limit of our vision. If it is serving others let us concentrate on our service: if it is teaching let us give all we have to our teaching; if our gift be the stimulating of the faith of others let us set ourselves to it; Let the man who is called to give, give freely; let the man who wields authority think of his responsibility; and let the man who feels sympathy for his fellows act cheerfully." (Romans 12:6-8 from the Philips New Testament)

FINDING ILLUSTRATIONS

*“I went by the field of the lazy man,
and by the vineyard of the man devoid of understanding;
and there it was, all overgrown with thorns;
its surface was covered with nettles;
its stone wall was broken down.
When I saw it, I considered it well;
I looked on it and received instruction:
A little sleep, a little slumber,
a little folding of the hands to rest;
so shall your poverty come like a prowler,
and your need like an armed man.”* (Proverbs 24:30-34)

This proverb is referring to the process of getting illustration and truths out of life as we go through it. This is how illustrations come to me. When I see something and considered it well, I receive instruction. Ask the Lord to work this same thing in you. It is a work of His Spirit. The best illustrations come out of my own circumstances.

- Make sure people can relate to it. The best ones come from your own life.
- I often share them conversationally first, to see how they work or to see if they minister to the listeners.
- I don't read them. I try to tell them as naturally as possible.
- I don't rely on illustrations that come out of a book of illustrations. They will feel canned.

WRITE FOR YOU OWN BENEFIT FIRST

What I learned from author Stephen King, who wrote a book called “On Writing”, which is one of the best books I have found about the craft of writing. He says that he always writes the first draft for himself. It is for his pleasure and benefit. This allows him to write things that he would not normally write. Sometimes this is where the good stuff comes out.

As it pertains to sermons, we should write for your benefit first. What need does it meet in you? Address your own struggles and wonderings first, rather than that of a larger audience. It will be an entirely different message if it addresses your need. The second phase of the process is that you rewrite it to address the needs of the audience you are speaking to. Then, if need be, write it the third time to address an even wider audience, if your work is to be published.

We need to let God's word sink down into our own ears first. This is what the Lord told the prophet Ezekiel to do in chapter 3:10-11, *“Son of dust, let all my words sink deep into your own heart first; listen to them carefully for yourself. Then, afterward, go to your people in exile, and whether or not they will listen, tell them: ‘This is what the Lord God says!’”*

THE APOSTLE PAUL'S FEAR

“When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling. My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power.” (1 Corinthians 2:1-5)

“When we came into Macedonia, we had no rest. We found trouble all around us. We had fighting on the outside and fear on the inside.” (2 Corinthians 7:5)

“Also pray for me that when I speak, God will give me words so that I can tell the secret of the Good News without fear. I have been sent to preach this Good News, and I am doing that now, here in prison. Pray that when I preach the Good News I will speak without fear, as I should.” (Ephesians 6:18-20 New Century Version)

TIMOTHY'S TIMIDITY

“Therefore I put you in remembrance that you stir up the gift of God, which is in you by the laying on of my hands. For God has not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.” (2 Timothy 1:6-7)

The word for *fear* that Paul used in this verse is the word *deilia* which means *to be timid*. It is only used this one time in the entire New Testament. It was the kind of fear that prevented Timothy from moving in his gift. It may have also been the cause of his stomach problems. When you look up the word ‘timidity’ in a dictionary it will say, “Shy, or showing a lack confidence, or being nervous”. The word ‘timidity’ is also where we get the word *intimidation* from. The only solution Paul shared with Timothy was that he needed to become motivated by LOVE, which moves us beyond ourselves to meet the needs of others; POWER, because we don’t trust in our ability alone; and a SOUND MIND, because we need to have control of our thoughts rather than letting them determine our behavior.

No doubt the most difficult part of preaching is the nervousness. I am always nervous before I speak but have come to embrace it as “the price for the privilege”. Here are a few things I have learned about this thorn in every preacher’s side:

1. When it comes to public speaking, everyone struggles with nervousness. In fact, in many of the surveys of the things people fear most, speaking in public usually comes ahead of the fear of dying.
2. It is not something you get over. Nobody does. Even the apostle Paul said he had much fear and trembling when he first spoke at Corinth.
3. You have to learn to use nervousness to your advantage. It can be used as a signal that, if headed, can actually help you become a better preacher.

WHAT MY NERVOUSNESS REVEALS?

I become nervous whenever I am not prepared. This factor has forced me to work harder at preparing my sermons.

I become nervous whenever I focus on myself or meeting my own need. The fastest way to get past my own nervousness is to focus on the needs of others. I often do this by finding a need in the church, or a need represented by one person, then focus on meeting that need. I have not found anything that works better than this.

It reveals that I am afraid of losing people's acceptance. It reminds me to draw my approval from the Lord, rather than people. Try to preach to an audience of One and He already approves of you.

It tells me that I am afraid of failing. I need to trust the Lord more and begin relying on His power and wisdom to come through me. Paul said that our sufficiency comes from the Lord, but I often forget this and rely upon my own sufficiency.

We need to draw assurance from Him. The Lord told Moses that He would be with his mouth. He told Jeremiah that He would give him the words to say. We need to use our nervousness to draw assurance and grace from the Lord.

There is a degree of faith at work in preaching. You have to trust the Lord. King David said, "*What time I am afraid, I will trust in You.*" (Psalms 56:3)

WHAT REDUCES NERVOUSNESS?

I become nervous when I have too many notes in front of me. My mind goes blank and the pages often go blurry when I have lots of paper in front of me. I do better with just a brief skeleton or outline with a few key words to remind me of what points or illustrations I want to use. The less I have in front of me, the better. When I travel overseas, I carry a little book, which is about the size of my Bible. In it are some scripture references in an outline form on each page. There may be a few other reminders, but it is very simple. I can preach for days from this little book.

It helps to begin with a brief story, it always helps me to get past my nervousness. This will help me warm up and puts people at ease which, in turn, tends to put me at ease. I don't start with a joke, as that creates another kind of pressure for me; the pressure to be funny.

It helps to ask myself who is intimidating me and why. Usually I get nervous because of someone intimidates me. Well-educated people often intimidate me. If I can keep focused on their need they don't get to me the same way.

I become nervous when I ask, "Who am I?" It helps to remind myself that I am the Lord's servant and His ambassador.

I have learned not to apologize for anything as this only draws attention to myself, which makes me even more nervous. There are always things that throw me off before I preach, as things often go differently than planned. I don't blame anyone or anything; I just get into my message.

I try not to be something I am not. It helps to just be myself and to remind myself that I am a growing Christian, and not someone who has arrived. This kind of humility helps reduce my nervousness.

HOW TO USE YOUR NERVOUSNESS

You can use your nervousness as a way to gauge how focused you are on your own needs, such as your need for acceptance or applause. (Love)

- Nervousness helps raise the question, “who you are doing it for, anyway?”
- It is an indicator that you are relying on your own ability. (Power)
- It forces us to focus on the needs of others. (Love)
- Prepare well beforehand helps... it pays to know your stuff. (Sound Mind)
- It helps us to trust the Lord to enable us. (Power)

THE THREE STAGES OF NERVOUSNESS

We need to learn to deal with the three stages of nervousness:

Before we speak, as we anticipate the event, it can cause inner tension. This fear can usually be overcome by thanking the Lord for the opportunity, asking Him to be glorified through you, telling Him that you will rely on Him for the message and the grace to give it. You can also remind yourself of what He showed you to share and keep the expected fruit of your message before you by faith.

Then there is a degree of nervousness that comes **in the moment** you stand to deliver. This can be overcome by abandoning yourself to Him, keeping focused on the need and reminding yourself of what He told you to say in the first place.

There is also a degree of nervousness that comes **after you have spoken**, as you wonder how well it was received. At this point, you have to draw all of your approval from Him. It might surprise you to find that what most people say about your message is not an accurate gauge to measure from in the first place. You are often your best gauge. (Secondly, your spouse is the next best gauge.)

ASSIGNMENT

It would be good to consider the things that you have observed about your own nervousness. You might also enumerate the odd things you do when you are nervous. What are your ticks?

Here is my list:

- When we are nervous, we will miss-speak more often, which brings the added burden of being humiliated in front of people, which is one of our fears about public speaking in the first place.
- We will come to rely too much on gimmicks or humor, which can obscure our real message.

- It will cause us to freeze in one mode of speaking, which usually shows up in the fact that we stay with one pattern of speaking, like a monotone, or lack of expression.
- Some people try to overcome their nervousness by reading their entire sermon or trying to memorize large parts of it. You may feel that this will help you get through it, but it reduces people's receptivity to your message. It can also make you more nervous as you become focused on your paper, rather than feeling connected to people or a need.
- Your nervousness will cause you to stay with the safe and predictable content of sermons, rather than being open to a flow of revelation in the moment.
- It can also cause us to just mimic what others have done or what we have done before, because you feel it was acceptable, which can give our sermons that canned feeling.
- If you tend to enjoy yourself in the moment, other people are more likely too as well.

BEYOND WORDS

As preachers, we are always looking for the right word or trying to find memorable phrases. It is possible to get so focused on the mechanics of the message that we over-look the essential the part of preaching. What the congregation is often most impacted by and what they will tend to remember about our sermon is beyond words.

They will remember the feeling of being cared for.

They will sense that you are on their side of this great battle we are in.

They will pick up the fact that you are laboring in the sermon in order to help them understand something that is important or useful, which they should know or do.

They will know that you are concerned about the things they are most concerned about. They are most concerned about their kids, their marriages, managing their stress, and finding how to please the Lord.

They will know that you are also someone who struggles with what they struggle with but have just enough spiritual insight that you are sharing what you have learned in order to help them.

THE INCARNATION

Simply put, the incarnation was Jesus coming in the flesh to identify with people and to be with us. Jesus was God with us. In the same way, people can tell if the pastor or preacher is "with them" or on their level. As a preacher, it is important that people know that you struggle and overcome, and that your message is an attempt to show them how they can overcome, too.

"Therefore, in all things He had to be made like His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. 18For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted." (Hebrews 2:17-18)

“Since we, God’s children, are human beings—made of flesh and blood—he became flesh and blood too by being born in human form; for only as a human being could he die and in dying break the power of the devil who had the power of death. 15Only in that way could he deliver those who through fear of death have been living all their lives as slaves to constant dread.

16We all know he did not come as an angel but as a human being—yes, a Jew. 17And it was necessary for Jesus to be like us, his brothers, so that he could be our merciful and faithful High Priest before God, a Priest who would be both merciful to us and faithful to God in dealing with the sins of the people. 18For since he himself has now been through suffering and temptation, he knows what it is like when we suffer and are tempted, and he is wonderfully able to help us.” (Hebrews 2:14-18 Living Bible)

IDENTIFYING WITH THE PEOPLE

In Hebrews, we are told that what God was looking for in a priest (pastor) was someone who was in touch with their own weaknesses, struggles, and failures, rather than someone who could not relate to the people – or the people to them.

I was once part of a ministerial group who believed that it was wrong for the preacher to admit his mistakes or share any of their personal struggles in the pulpit. You never heard a sermon illustration about what the preacher was currently struggling with. Then I began to listen to sermons by Jack Hayford, who often sprinkled his sermons with insights and illustrations taken right out of his own life. He is surprisingly transparent and candid, which is where the power lies in most of his preaching. You can identify with him. He puts into words what you have not been able to say. He has the courage to say what we so often think and feel but cannot say. That’s what makes him seem like everyone’s pastor.

If shared properly, letting people see the struggles in your own life will help to establish your authority, not hurt it.

It is possible, however, to go too far in disclosure, and put people’s focus on the wrong things.

If we tend to use pat illustrations that we make fit into the sermon or stay safely in the area of theory or idealism, our sermons will not move people. They will not motivate anyone, no matter how much we raise our voice or sweat. They might stimulate them on some intellectual level, but they will not touch their hearts.

“For every high priest taken from among men is appointed for men in things pertaining to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins. 2He can have compassion on those who are ignorant and going astray, since he himself is also subject to weakness. 3Because of this he is required as for the people, so also for himself, to offer sacrifices for sins. 4And no man takes this honor to himself, but he who is called by God, just as Aaron was.” (Hebrews 5:1-4)

“The Jewish high priest is merely a man like anyone else, but he is chosen to speak for all other men in their dealings with God. He presents their gifts to God and offers to Him the blood of animals that are sacrificed to cover the sins of the people and his own sins too. And because he is a man, he can deal gently with other men, though they are foolish and ignorant, for he, too, is surrounded with the same temptations and understands their problems very well. 4Another thing to remember is that no one can be a high priest just because he wants to be. He has to be called by God for this work in the same way God chose Aaron.” (Hebrews 5:1-4 Living Bible)

PREACHING WITH AUTHORITY

“And they were astonished at His teaching, for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.” (Mark 1:22)

It is important to have authority with God and man Authority can be expressed in terms of favor or acceptance, like we see in Luke 2:52 where it states that Jesus had *“Favor with God and man”*. This means the both will listen to you.

Jesus said that the key having God hear you and respond to you, as though we had authority with His is our abiding in Him and His word. When God begins letting others know that you have authority with Him, He begins by answering your prayers in a powerful way.

“If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples.” (John 15:7-8)

Moral Authority It is important to have moral authority which people can sense. This comes both by sharing those things you have learned by experience and by telling others what you consistently do yourself. You should ask yourself, “Am I currently doing what I am about to preach?”

This same concept is true of worship leaders as well. People will follow in worship if you are really a worshipper. They will respond to the song you are leading, if it is something that currently moves your own heart in worship.

Credibility It is important to have credibility, which means people buy what you say and will they do what you do?

Balaam Lips This is when there is a discrepancy between what is coming out of your mouth and what is in your heart.

It was told that Abraham Lincoln liked to slip into the back pew of the Methodist church in Washington DC, even though this church was considered to be beneath the dignity of most Episcopalians. Lincoln admitted that he liked the preaching there better than the staid religious sermons in the Episcopal Church. He said, “I like to watch someone preach who looks like he is fighting bees.”

CONFIRMING YOUR MESSAGE

In Mark 16:20, we read, *“...the Lord working with them and confirming the word...”*

The part He confirms is His Word, which is the Greek word *logos*:

LOGOS GK 3056. *logos*; something said (including the thought); by implying a topic (subject of discourse), also reasoning (the mental faculty) or a motive; by extension a computation; specifically (with the article in John) the Divine Expression (i.e. Christ):-- account, cause, communication, concerning, doctrine, intent.

The early apostles preached *logos*, which is not just the subject of Jesus or His words, but also His heart and the motives behind His words. Some people have all the right words, but the wrong motives. Even Paul noted that some preached the Gospel out of pretense and insincerity. They were doing it, but for their own gain. We must not only say what He would have us say but say it in the way He would have us. He is under no obligation to confirm the message we preach unless

we say it the way He would say it. He will, however, confirm what is said when we attempt to do it His way. This is the key to richer preaching and having a greater response to our preaching. Mark wrote that they preached and ministered in His name. When we do anything in *His name* it means doing it as He Himself would do it. The term *name* is not merely a person's title or "authority", but it is also the person's "character". The Lord's character is love, so ours must be also. He is meek and lowly, so must we be in relation to Him and others. He is a giver not a taker, so we must be the most generous people on the planet. He is dependable and faithful, so we must be also, in order to be in His name. I want Jesus working with me, otherwise, it is all just mere words and we know that the Kingdom is not about mere words, but also miraculous power. That is the part we cannot supply ourselves. We cannot supply ourselves - miraculous results.

DOING IT THE WAY HE WOULD DO IT

When Jesus was co-laboring with the twelve, signs followed. *"And these signs shall follow those who believe; In My Name they shall cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; they shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover."*

We have become far removed from this part of the ministry of Jesus. Not just in our theology, but also in our expectation. I was surprised one time as I walked into a nursing home where I was going to minister to those who were oppressed with sickness and despair. The Lord said to my heart, "I will do whatever you do here today". I thought about it and told Him that I wanted them to be encouraged and healed. So, I went around doing what I thought Jesus would do. As I laid hands on those dear people, I became aware that He slipped His hands in mine. When I lifted up their heads and looked into their faces to tell them that Jesus loved them, His compassion nearly burst my heart. We were laboring together! Jesus was sent into this sphere to accomplish what the Father wanted Him to do. Miraculous tools were given to Him by the Father. How can we get by with less? What has changed? He hasn't, that's for sure.

EXPECT RESULTS

One time a young pastor was lamenting to an older pastor that his preaching did not seem to have any results. The old preachers asked him, "You don't expect people to get saved every meeting, do you? The young man replied with an incredulous tone, "No?" The old preacher wryly smiled, "That's your problem right there."

PUTTING YOURSELF IN THE SERMON

I knew a preacher once whose sermons were filled with raucous humor and bizarre behavior. He would do almost anything for a laugh, in an effort to connect with people. One day, he sought my approval for a sermon he had just done, complete with prat falls and lots of funny faces, which the class had laughed at heartily. I asked him what he hoped to be remembered for. Did he want them to remember him as the guy who pretended to saw his arm off in front of the class, or did he want them to remember the point he was trying to make about cutting yourself off from the Body of Christ? His humor was getting in the way of his message.

The same thing can happen with your anger or attitude. These things will come through and eclipse your message.

It is possible to preach sermons that are filled with illustrations taken from other people's lives, or from books, and not have any authority in the sermon because there is nothing mentioned about your life or experience. I heard a sermon like this recently, that stayed in the area of idealism and theory, but had not power because the brother had nothing to share from his own experience.

We can talk about ourselves too much and too little. Both will reduce our effectiveness. Paul seemed to strike the balance in his letters, giving personal weight to what he was communicating by referring to what Jesus had done in him.

THE DIVINE FLOW

"The Divine Flow" is a term John Osteen used in his powerful little booklet by the same title.

He describes the Divine Flow in terms of the love of God coming through you to meet people's needs. Are you connecting with people while you minister? You can tell whether or not people are with you. You should be able to feel it. This should be evident in how they are going along with your sermon and responding to it after it is over.

I have been in meetings where this was established between the speaker and the audience within a few minutes into the sermon.

I will sometimes tell our people that a guest speaker has liberty. This is done to help they can open up and become more receptive to the voice of another more quickly. I am using my credibility to help establish theirs. Sometimes the speaker ruins this themselves.

One guest speaker, a prophetic minister, became incensed in one of our meetings because he could feel people "putting the brakes on" him so that there was no connection. He had no idea that he had done this himself by repeating the same sermon, shtick, and prophecies as he did on the last visit. People could see how canned it was and withdrew their end of the connection.

We should not continue to use people when we do not sense any divine flow. We had a musician come to our church who was an excellent musician, but we noticed that after several visits that there was no connection with our people. They never mentioned him throughout the year or referred to anything that had impacted them. We stopped having him back. He was upset by this, but there was no connection.

I see it as an umbilical cord, which is attached from my heart to the hearts of others, through which life flows, which feeds them and helps them develop. This attachment may only be there for a time. Sometimes things happen that causes it to be cut prematurely.

WATCH WHAT IS HAPPENING

You can read a connection with people, like you can read anything else. You can tell when they are with you and when they are not. You can learn to discern a number of other useful things as well:

Time to Quit You can tell when it is time to quit. You can tell when people have stopped receiving. You have to learn to honor this.

Conviction – you can learn to identify it upon people. Sometimes you can feel it.

You must learn to identify the Holy Spirit coming upon people.

You must look for the signs of His working in people's hearts. You can see what's in people's hearts by what is on their faces.

You can also see it on individuals and on audiences. Dr. Strong describes this kind of "grace", in the word *charis* as "*the divine influence upon the heart, and its reflection in the life*".

GRACE GK 5485 *charis*; graciousness (as gratifying), of manner or act (abstract or concrete; literal, figuratively or spiritually; especially the divine influence upon the heart, and its reflection in the life; including gratitude):-- acceptable, benefit, favor, gift, Grace (-ious), joy, liberality, pleasure

Grace can be perceived. The early apostles perceived the grace Paul had for the Gentiles.

GUEST SPEAKING GUIDELINES

Part of being a good preacher involves avoiding things that take up precious time or distract the listener from your message. Here are some things that will help you achieve these goals:

Stay within the time limit you are allotted.

Don't take your liberty. You will be given more liberty if you stay within the guidelines.

Do not draw attention to how little time you have been given or how much time you have had to prepare.

Do not preface your sharing with any excuses. Just start right in.

Don't use false humility such as "I just want to hide behind the cross" or use personal put-downs such as, "If God can speak through a donkey, He can speak through me."

Do not use this opportunity to correct the church. This is not what we are asking you to do. Leave that to those who are in authority.

Don't just define a problem without giving a real solution for it. Provide practical, proven steps that people can actually act upon right away.

OTHER THINGS TO CONSIDER

Moral authority comes from practicing what you preach. Earned authority comes from either having a relationship, shared history, or the trust of another. Stay within the limits of your authority.

Share what the Lord has been dealing with you about. You will likely find that others are struggling with the same thing and any insights you share may be a real source of encouragement to them.

You will find many more verses pertaining to your subject than you can possibly use. Just select a couple of verses that really express your point. Don't read verse after verse.

It is a real challenge to connect with the wide range of ages in the congregation. Referring to lots of Greek may impress the other Bible students, but not the ten-year olds.

Starting with an illustration can put both you and the audience more at ease. Don't start with a joke just for the sake of telling a joke. When you do use humor, make sure it pertains to what you are talking about.

Find a good illustration that does just that; it must illustrate your point.

Don't use someone in the church in your illustration without first asking their permission. Don't ask for it during your message.

It is best not to allude to some person "whom you would rather not name" because people will spend the rest of your sermon time trying to figure out who you were referring to.

Preach to gain God's approval, not the pastors', or anyone else.

A sermon is like a good stew. Start early in the week, letting it simmer in on the back burner of your mind. Stir it from time to time, adding a few "carrots" and seasoning, as needed. If you find it to be delicious, perhaps others will too.

PRACTICAL STUFF

Pre-read out loud the scriptures that you are going to use; it will be easier to read in the pulpit.

If your mouth gets dry, simply scrape your tongue across the teeth at the back of your mouth. It will create a ready flow of moisture.

Leave your body alone. Hold on to the pulpit if you have trouble with your hands.

I suggest that you actually write out your sermon beforehand, at least in skeleton form. If you have really prepared, you will find the freedom to leave your notes completely, which is the best way to teach.

You can reduce your nervousness by focusing on the need you want to address or on someone you hope will be helped by what you are saying. If you focus on how well you will be accepted or your own needs, you will be nervous.

ASSIGNMENTS

JOHN WESLEY'S RULES FOR PREACHING

John Wesley had rules for everything. This is his list of rules that he expected his young preachers to follow:

1. Be sure never to disappoint a congregation.
2. Begin precisely at the time appointed.
3. Let your whole deportment be serious, weighty, and solemn.
4. Always suit your subject to your audience.
5. Choose the plainest text you can.
6. Take care not to ramble, but keep to your text, and make out what you take in hand.
7. Take care of anything awkward or affected, either in your gesture, phrase, or pronunciation.
8. Do not usually pray extempore above eight or ten minutes (at most) without intermission
9. Frequently read and enlarge upon a portion of Scripture; and let young preachers often exhort without taking a text.
10. Always avail yourself of the great festivals by preaching on the occasion.

YOUR ASSIGNMENT

I would like you to write your own list personal rules for when you preach. They should be in your own words.

Please bring them to the class next week

ASSIGNMENTS

Write a couple of illustrations from your own life that would fit into a sermon or make a point.

FIVE MINUTE SERMONS

When I was in Bible School, one class assignment that I thought was highly effective involved writing and delivering "Five Minute Sermons". Everyone had to prepare a couple to share in front of the class. We were also told that these were going to be critiqued by the teacher. The goal was to say something meaningful in five minutes. We were told we could not be under five minutes or we would get a lower grade, and if we went over, we would be cut off in mid-sentence. The reasoning behind this was that it is actually harder to prepare a five-minute sermon than it is a thirty-minute one. It takes a lot more preparation and discipline.

Since then I have learned that short sermons can be really powerful, if done properly. I often been asked to share a few words and have learned you can say something meaningful in a short time. When I go to the Ukraine, I might be one of eight speakers in a single meeting. I call them

“perogis” sermons. Perogis are a Ukrainian delicacy made from two pieces of dough pinched together around a dab of potato or cheese and then boiled in hot water. There is a similar dish made with a small piece of spicy meat in the middle. They are delicious! When it comes to teaching, I tell people to prepare a good introduction and a good ending, with a meaty little truth in the middle.

Your assignment is to prepare a five-minute sermon that will be delivered in our last class this month. It will be critiqued by those who have taken the class. This meeting will also be open to the rest of the church, who may want to come and hear you share. There are rewards beyond this for those who do really well with this.

My first five-minute sermon cost me greatly. I tried to think of something to share with the class that would be useful. As I became more aware of my own nervousness, I realized that most of the class would be feeling the same. I decided to do a sermon on nervousness. This seemed like a good idea until I thought it through. In order for the others to benefit from what I shared I would have to be one of the first students to speak. The prospect of volunteering to go first made me even more nervous than before. When the time came, I put up my hand, was called upon and rose up to speak. I could not have been more nervous. Apparently, I turned white as a ghost and had the shakes pretty bad, but I got through it. My friends said they had never seen me more nervous. Oddly enough others thought it was all part of the sermon. It seemed to help some, but the message was lost on me.

EXTRA NOTES

Reproof
Conviction
Correction

“Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.” (2 Timothy 2:15)

SOME SOURCES FOR ILLUSTRATIONS

Sermons about sermons from [Christianity Today](#)

[Sermon Workshops](#)

What The Best Preachers are [Preaching Today](#)

Sign up for Rick Warren's [Pastor's Tool Box](#) - It's great and it's free!