

A Practical Preaching Method

tools for worshipping God
in crafting biblical sermons

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I - THE HEART OF PREPARING

...Building a sermon is like chasing a sunset.

I live near Seattle, where the sunsets are psychotically divine.

It doesn't matter where it sets, it's going to be beautiful. In fact, it's going to be beautiful whether you see it or not... But there are some places – some high spots and hidden beaches where the sun smashes into the sea in such a profound way that it will make you think deeply about life.

I really like taking friends from out of town to my favorite hidden-sunset-spots. We typically meet up well before sundown and take the drive north.

There are literally beaches less than a minute's drive from my house, but I know the most beautiful ones take time and planning to get to. It's 45 minutes to one of my favorite spots – up a mountain.

If I time it right, my car gets to the summit 5-minutes before the sky explodes with orange, red, purple, and pink over a view of the entire Puget Sound. Seattle off in the distance. British Columbia peeking out. And Mount Rainier looming – its glaciers all bathed in pigment.

Your attention is gripped by beauty and power.

Crafting a sermon is like a chasing an ocean sunset with friends from out of town. Whether we open it or not, God's Word is beautiful. And the journey to see that beauty starts well before the sunset of Sunday morning. Of course, a little experience and careful preparation will help you (and those with you) experience its beauty in ways that will steal your breath.

A good sermon can grip you with the beauty and power of God's Word.

What a lot of Sunday-service-attenders don't know, is that it takes a lot of *time* and *work* to craft a grounded and eloquent sermon.

Yes, we know our Bible references well. And yes, we probably *could* just get up there and wing it. But if Jesus spent 30+ years preparing to give us the substance of the Gospel, then we can certainly spend a few hours preparing to give others the message of the Gospel.

So... *Why* do we prepare?

We prepare our sermons because it's worshipful. *Just as worshipful as the preaching.* Our careful laboring, studying, pruning, investigating, writing, and re-writing are ways that we respond to what Christ has done for us.

Preparing is a delight to us. It says something like: "Father, I am still amazed that you sent Jesus to die to make me one of your children. I'm humbled that you've entrusted me with some of your sheep – and today I lay myself down again to carefully feed them with your Word."

We prepare because in our studying we get to enjoy more of God! We get to read and grapple with His Word! We get to enjoy talking and listening to Him speak to us!

Our prepping makes us so tremendously blessed in ways our churches will never know unless we tell them. I want to strike my church's heart with jealousy to spend time in The Word for themselves.

I want them to get thirsty when they see how deeply I've drunk from the well of God's Word.

// What's your goal in preaching?

Conversions, certain emotions, wailing, 'Attaboys,' generous tithes, etc. *are not the goals of preaching.*

While Christ was often rejected after preaching, many modern preachers crave acceptance, praise, and applause.

Our King embraced obscurity while we embrace popularity.

And not just us preachers. The search-committees at many attendance-slumping churches across America have their hopes set on finding a preacher with charisma rather than a pastor with a calling. After all, how will they reverse the bleed of attendance?

Jesus was not at all concerned with attendance-bleed... sometimes it almost seems like he intentionally ripped the band-aid off (read John 6:41-66).

However, he was deeply concerned with obediently relaying what his Father had commanded Him to speak.

“ *For I have not spoken on my own authority, but the Father who sent me has himself given me a commandment — what to say and what to speak.*

John 12:49

So what's your goal in preaching?

Obedience & Faithfulness –

If you've been obedient to preach God's Word in a way that is faithful to the text and from a Godward heart, *then you've succeeded.* Sure, there's more to preaching than obedience, but not less. Obedience and faithfulness is of first importance.

Revival –

Our goal in preaching should be to make the truth REAL for hearers, otherwise it's just a lecture. To make biblical knowledge *live*. The job of preaching is to go after the motives, that is the heart, and redesign it on the spot.¹

Edification –

Ephesians 4:11-13 says that one of God's goals for preaching (among other gifts) is to "edify" or "build up" His Bride (the Church). In our preaching we aim to build up and edify the body.

Our goal is to get God's Bride on the same page as God's heart.

This process does not exclude the *emotions*. Many preachers will try to develop their congregation's *heads* without engaging their *hearts*. The idea of an *emotional faith* scares many pastors because our emotions are not always reliable.

However, we're given as easily to faulty-thinking as we are to faulty-feeling. God created both thinking and feeling and both are fallen.

In edifying, we should seek to engage and guide *both* the thinking and feeling of our audience – never one without or above the other.

We want to turn the affections and the actions of our hearers towards God. Preaching steers and stirs the affections of the entire congregation. Stirring the affections is like tilling the soil of the heart – an affectionate heart can begin to grow spiritual fruit.

Joy –

The only people who walked away sad or angry from the Good News in the Bible were people that didn't want to hear or follow Christ.

Sinners were delighted to encounter Christ, not disillusioned. If people are sad, either they didn't receive the Gospel or you did not preach it or preach it well.ⁱⁱ

Clarity –

Think about Ezra reading the law (Neh. 8:8), or the way Stephen preached in Acts 7. Of course, this doesn't mean people won't be confused or disagree with us.

It's okay if people are confused or disagree... but it shouldn't be us standing in the way (using big words, failing to prepare well, failing to produce cohesive thoughts, trying to tackle too much at once, etc.).

Jesus may have said some confusing things or shared some confusing stories – but He had a specific Messianic plan. If people stumble over Jesus then that's okay, if they stumble over us in their pursuit of Jesus that's not okay.

Fearlessness –

God's preachers aren't controlled by the fear of being misunderstood, mocked, disliked, or rejected (Acts 4:20; Jer. 20:9; Eph. 6:19-20). In fact, Jesus experienced all these things a lot.

There's a type of prophetic bent to any good preaching that says, "Whatever God commands, that must I say."

In order prepare our hearts to preach, we have to know what we're after. Obedience, faithfulness, revival, edification, joy, clarity, and fearlessness are a so much more important to God than how good your hair looked on Sunday or even how fast your church is growing.

// Verses that shape our preaching

Romans 10:14-15

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

Truth: *preaching is critical for God's plan of spreading His Kingdom.*

1 Corinthians 13:1

“If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.”

Truth: *You might preach a great sermon, but it means nothing if you don't deliver it and live it out with love.*

2 Corinthians 2:17

“For we are not, like so many, peddlers of God's word, but as men of sincerity, as commissioned by God, in the sight of God we speak in Christ.”

Truth: *Preaching isn't a game, a party trick, a campaign strategy, or an entertainment method. This is life or death, and we mean business. Even in our humor we treat preaching like the holy calling it is.*

Hebrews 4:12

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

Truth: *In context (vs. 11-13) this means that God's Word can be destructive for people who fall on it by disbelief or don't heed it. It also has a powerfully effective way of compelling us to obey it, to run behind its protection, and to find great joy in the security it provides.*

Galatians 1:9

“As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed.”

Truth: *It is vital that we preach the Gospel aright. It must be the Gospel of the Bible. If we're preaching the Gospel inaccurately then it is not the Gospel. And, well... yikes.*

Ephesians 4:11

“And [Christ] gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ...”

Truth: *Preaching is a Christ-given position and calling that is meant to build up and assist in the growth of His Church.*

1 Timothy 3:2

“Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach...”

Truth: *There should be no such thing as an Elder that is unable to teach.*

1 Timothy 3:16-17

“All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

Truth: *The Bible is God's Word and it's very beneficial. Paul was especially referring to the Old Testament!*

1 Peter 2:9

“But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.”

Truth: *This verse wasn't written to preachers; it was written to Christians. Our preaching should never relieve other Christians from their holy responsibility to proclaim Christ.*

“ “Don't let the pulpit drive you to the Word, let the Word drive you to the pulpit.”
– Edmond Clowney

// If you're called to preach, you're called to prepare.

First – Preparing a sermon should be worship.

Again, preparing a message is an opportunity to *worship*.

If you avoid preparing because it's not fun or because you don't feel you need to, this is indicative that you may have a worship problem.

We make time for the things we enjoy. If you enjoy preaching, but not prepping then perhaps it is because you like to be seen and heard more than you enjoy seeing and hearing God.

Second – 'Shooting from the hip' is not a spiritual gift.

There's no biblical encouragement to "shoot from the hip."

Not preparing a sermon but still "knocking it out of the park" on Sunday might impress a few people or stroke our ego, but intentionally choosing to *not* employ our hearts and minds in preparation of the task God has called us to is an active choice to not love the Lord with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength.

Shooting from the hip is just not a spiritual gift.

Preaching without prepping is just immaturity paired with an actual gift that God gave you and expects you to use reverently, not like a party trick. It will almost certainly catch up with you, you'll probably hurt someone with it, and you'll lose trust with people.

Third – Even if you're called upon to preach on a moment's notice, you're still called to "be prepared."

Of course, we're called to "always be prepared to anyone who asks you..." (1 Pet. 3:15) – and we're assured by Jesus that the Holy Spirit will help us in those times (Luke 12:11-12).

But the words in that verse are important – "*be prepared.*"

Know God and His Word well enough to preach when called upon. Of course, this means studying.

Preparing well for the unexpected happens when you have prepared well for all of the expected moments in ministry.

Preaching the Gospel when called upon unexpectedly during a missions trip, or explaining a relevant Bible passage to someone that asks you to explain something only happens when you have prepared well for all of the expected moments and when you have studied God's word – stuffing it and hiding it away in your heart for moments like the one that now faces you.

II - PREPARING THE HEART [& HEAD] OF THE MESSENGER

“It is more important to prepare the preacher than it is to prepare the sermon.” – David Martin Lloyd Jones

We prepare to preach by feeding our hearts and heads regularly.

If you approach preaching like independent research assignments, jumping into a unique project every time you need to prepare a sermon, you will be utterly exhausted with how much time it takes to prepare – and your heart will develop unevenly.

Here are some ways to feed your heart and head regularly, beyond (or beneath) your normal spiritual rhythms of prayer, worship, and devotions:

- **Reading Through The Bible Quicklyⁱⁱⁱ** – Read through the Bible at least once a year. This should be baseline for pastors and preachers.
- **Read & Listen to Dead People’s Sermons^{iv}** – Old sermons feed your soul and are so old you probably won’t be tempted to steal from them. Read and listen to lots of them. Just let them preach to you.
- **Read Church History & Biographies^v** – If you only read stuff that prepares you for your next sermon you will never read Church History or biographies. But if you read Church History and Biographies, they will feed your soul and make their way into your preaching, breathing color and new dimension into your sermons.

- **Read Books, Magazines, and Newspapers^{vi}** – Read several perspectives other than your own, across the political spectrum. Reading Book Reviews may actually be more effective than reading actual books.
- **Read Books on your topic** – If you know the preaching schedule, select and read relevant books months out.
- **Movies, Plays, Novels, Music^{vii}** – Evangelistic preaching is more simple than you might think – it happens when you are able to so inhabit another person's worldview, but still be a Christian, that you give them a glimpse of what it would be like to be a Christian.
- **Mentoring/ Counselling** – Find a mentor or Christian Counsellor and provide mentorship and counselling for others. Be careful not to make sermon illustrations of recent counselees.

// Preparing the Heart of the Messenger starts with **A CONVERSATION WITH GOD**

Our hearts need to be prepared to prepare a message. If we're going to preach God's Word, then we need to talk with God.

Of course, you want God to be a part of the process from start to finish – but that can be easily missed if you rush right into prepping.

Maybe you're low on time or maybe you've got a lot to do. God can do more with 20 minutes of prayer than you can with 20 hours of prepping!

Your initial time spent in prayer should really just be a commitment to involving and speaking with Him through this entire process (and beyond). Beginning your prep-time with a distinct time in prayer will help you keep in step with the Spirit throughout the entire process.

Here are some ideas for your initial pre-prep conversation with God:

- Confess sin.
- Thank God for sending Jesus. Sit in the Gospel.
- Pray for the ability to obey God in the message He is calling you to preach.
- Pray for the Spirit's guidance and presence while both preparing and preaching.
- Pray for your sermon - that it would be His.
- Pray that those who hear will hear from God.
- Pray for hearers to be saved.
- Pray that this message would impact not only the mind and emotions of your hearers, but their heart.

- Ask God to reveal the interpretation of the passage to you through your preparation.
- Ask God to keep you from distractions.
- Pray that He would be near you the entire time you prepare – that this prayer would not have an ending.

// “Locate” Yourself.

I have found it deeply helpful before preparing a message to transparently explore how I am doing in a holistic sense... thoughts, emotions, health, relationships, and desires. And then to present the answers to God (no matter how messy) ask for His help, and then choose to rest in His presence.

I personally do this using a “Self-Location Exercise.”

A location exercise answers the question: “*Where am I right now?*”

- Where are my **THOUGHTS** at?
- Where are my **EMOTIONS** at?
- Where is my **BODY** at (health-wise)?
- Where are my **RELATIONSHIPS** at?
- Where are my **DESIRES** at?

Additionally, it can be powerful to articulate where you might be in relation to God using a word picture. For example I feel like I'm: “*in a boat, in the middle of a storm*” etc...

This kind of exercise is not required. But how many times have you begun to prepare a message and just felt “lost” as a person? “Locating” yourself in the middle of feeling “lost” gives you the footing to be transparent and dependent upon the Lord.

Here's an example of a location exercise – fill out the blank spaces with where you feel you're at in each category.

Thoughts	Emotions	Body	Relationships	Desires

III - PREPARING THE MESSAGE

Don't forget. It Should Be Worship.

AGAIN, this should be **worship**. A lot of young people pursue careers in ministry because they feel like gifted public speakers – not because they're passionate about ministry!

Think about it, if preaching weren't a part of modern ministry, how many young people would still pursue it?

When we preach well but worship poorly then we're just *good public speakers*.

The difference between a Public Speaker and a Preacher is the both content and heart.

So, how is your heart?
Do you even know?

Are you jumping into this preparation because you're excited to "do your thing" or because you are genuinely humbled and excited that God is calling you to proclaim Christ's death and resurrection?

The "P's" of Preaching.^{viii}

You might be thinking "*Oh great, another kitschy mnemonic device...*" But here are a handful of common traits in good preaching that you might actually remember because, even though it's a little kitschy, it's memorable! Imagine a sermon that lacks one or more of the following traits:

Prepared - *well thought out, humbly built with God's help.*

Passionate - *delivered as if it were relevant and important to you.*

Personal – *flows out of the impact the Gospel has had on you.*

Positive - *speaks life and encouragement.*

Practical - *has application to the lives of hearers.*

Purposeful - *moves the audience intentionally, towards Christ.*

// A Practical Preaching Method

This is the part where we actually talk about how to *craft a sermon*. I hope you've recognized how important the practices in chapters 1 and 2 are.

If we write eloquent speeches, but miss God, then we've really missed the point, haven't we?

How much time will this take?

You should expect this model of preparation to take between 15 and 20 hours – sometimes more and sometimes less. It will depend partially on how familiar you are with the passage/ content, how quickly God is moving you through each step, and how distracted you get. You shouldn't try to craft an entire sermon in one day, regardless of the method you use.

Practical Steps for Crafting a Sermon.

- (1) **Clear Common Distractions** – It may seem small but there are 4 things that will interrupt your rhythm just as you're starting to find it: **Food, Drinks, Bathroom, and Social Media**. Make sure you've eaten an hour or 2 before studying. Grab some snacks, a water bottle or a Thermus of coffee, and use the restroom in order to avoid distractions that could cost you hours. However, the most insidious distraction may be *social media* – unlike food, drinks, or the need to go to the bathroom, this distraction lurks within the very thing you're probably using to write your message: a computer. Resist the urge to open a browser or app even when you feel stuck. Instead – take a breath, lean back at your chair, spend a silent moment composing your thoughts or re-read your passage, and then get back into your work. Clearing distractions is good stewardship.
- (2) **Gather Resources** - Bible(s), uninterrupted space, commentaries/ book holder, print out relevant articles (The Gospel Coalition is a great and searchable article database), whiteboard, notepad, pens, pencils, highlighters, access to your past sermons, laptop, headphones, etc. Also, remember that people are the most valuable resource. While you can't gather them with your pens and notepad, hopefully you have spent years wisely gathering a network of trustworthy mentors and ministry friends that you can call.

- (3) **If your message is topical, then carefully pick a passage to preach from.** This is tricky because it's easy to find a passage that can be interpreted to say what you'd prefer it to say. For example: if the topic you're given is "*God and Money*," you'll easily find passages in the Bible about money, but you need to be careful to preach what the Bible actually says about money. Many preachers on this topic will isolate a Bible verse that appears to say God wants you to be monetarily rich (something I may personally prefer!) and then proceed to preach an entire sermon with that message. It is clear they are more interested in preaching their own preferences by manipulatively using Bible verses to their advantage rather than preaching what the Bible actually says about money. So take your time picking a passage. Maybe you'll need to pick more than one (or two). Take the context into account in order to make sure the passage is actually addressing the topic and isn't actually focused on something else. Don't use the Bible to preach what your mouth is saying, use your mouth to preach what the Bible is saying.
- (4) **Hand-write the passage** you're teaching on, or type it if it's really long. Memorize it over the course of your prepping and studying if you can. Having the passage or verse memorized will allow you to reference it easily throughout your message. Many people notice when a Preacher reads the passage at the beginning of a message and then never references it again – this gives the very clear impression that the preacher finds their own words more important than the message of God.

(5) **Understand the Context** – use good study tools like commentaries and study Bibles to understand the context of this particular:

- Verse, in the context of the
- Passage, in the context of the
- Book, in the context of the
- Whole Bible

The goal is to eventually be able to answer:

1. *“What did the author mean when they wrote this?”*
2. *“What was the original audience thinking when they read this?”*

You need to care about the author, culture, time period, relevant events, language, etc... without which you cannot truly understand (or be sure you understand) the author's intentions or interpret the scripture correctly.

We tend to read scripture with our own culture/worldview lenses and those need to be traded in for the Author's as much as possible.

(6) **Read the passage 10 times**^{ix} (Aloud can be helpful). The first couple times, read the passages on either side of the passage you're preaching on if the content is connected in content or storyline.

(7) While reading, **write down quick observations** (impressions, stories, thoughts, illustrations, cross references, questions, etc...). Nothing is too weird.

- (8) **What is God saying to me personally?** Write it down. Don't miss this prep as an opportunity for you to be personally ministered to by the Lord.
- (9) **How would you summarize the passage?** Summarize your text in a few simple sentences.
- (10) **What's the main point(s) or idea(s) of this passage?** Is the passage trying to persuade the reader of anything? Write each main point in one clear and memorable sentence or phrase. If each sentence can have the same flow, that will help engage your audience.
- (11) **Why are these points/ ideas important?** Why do we need this passage and its main points? Write it down.
- (12) **What is the application for each point?** What is the natural response of a person who REALLY believes each of these points? Write these down.
- (13) **What does this passage have to do with the Good News about Jesus?** Every verse in the entire Bible is a part of one big story – a story about a loving God wanting so badly to be with His rebellious people that He sends his own Son, Jesus, to suffer the death-sentence for their rebellion so that they could become a part of His family again. Jesus is the only one who can enable hearts to actually do the applications you'll be presenting.
- (14) **Know your audience** - this is a good moment, before crafting the flow and verbiage of your sermon, to remind yourself of who you'll be speaking to.
- (15) **Format** – Now that you've got a lot of content, decide where these elements below should be (rearrange, duplicate, remove or add other elements. Put the

blank elements into an editable document and then start typing your content beneath them.

- Introduction (*grab your audience within 30 seconds*)
- Prayer
- Scripture Reading
- Personal Stories or Illustrations
- Outline
- Main Points & supporting content
- Applications
- Jesus/ Gospel/ Kingdom (*don't remove*)
- Re-Iteration/ Conclusion
- Closing Prayer/ Benediction

REMEMBER - A good sermon tells its own story. It has a plot-line.

Here's a good flow:

(1) *Text*

(2) *Context*

(3) *Main Points and Applications*

(4) *Jesus – The catalyst for and goal of our applications*

*This plot line helps people end with **worship** rather than a feeling of "I have to be better."*

(16) **Approaches to Preaching Notes**

"Manuscripting" – An approach to public speaking in which the speaker reads a pre-written speech word by word.

“Outlining” – An approach to public speaking in which the speaker has an outline with speaking points that help guide their speech.

“Non-Scripting” – An approach to public speaking in which the speaker uses no written prompts.

Since non-scripting is an approach used mostly by non-preaching professionals who have already done such comprehensive work on their topic that they need no notes, I will not discuss it any further. You are only this person if you know you are, and chances are you used to use notes but they're now so engrained that using them would make very little sense.

The “manuscript-or-outline” conversation is not a matter of right-or-wrong, but almost purely a matter of practicality, preference, and personality. The key in any case is to remain natural sounding, to stay on topic, and to stay within the allotted time.

Reasons to Manuscript:

- You welcome The Spirit in the process of your prepping.
- Few-to-no surprises for you or your team.
- You will stay on time, assuming you have practiced and aren't cramming. *If you can't stay on time with an outline, then manuscript.*
- You won't forget anything major or have to worry about backtracking to slip in key thoughts you forgot.
- You can refer back to your sermon years later and know exactly what your thoughts were.

Reasons to Outline:

- You won't sound like you're reading.

- Your eyes will be on your audience more.
- You'll appear more engaged with your audience.
- Your emotions can be communicated naturally.
- You have the freedom to change order or content slightly based on how your audience is responding.
- You'll be challenged to really know what you're talking about.

It's okay to try both out or come up with a system that involves both outlining and manuscripting.

** At this point in your preparation it could be good to **take a break** (or even sleep on it). Let your mind chew on the content and consider whether you're really taking the sermon the direction God desires.

(17) **“Kill Your Darlings”** – William Faulkner (a Pulitzer and Nobel Prize-winning author) said, *“In writing, you must kill all your darlings.”* The same is true of preaching. “Darlings” in preaching are those ideas, paragraphs, or words that we have become so fond of that we no longer care whether they are helpful or understandable to our audience. We love them and want to keep them. They must be killed.

So take the scalpel out and decide what stays and what goes. Keep only what propels the message forward. Often the “Darlings” that need “killing” are the things that you like most – the things that make you look smart or funny.

- (18) **Polishing and Practicing** is the critical work of taking content and making it as **clear and compelling** as possible. Scour your notes for concepts that aren't being transmitted as clearly as they could be. Exchange drab words for more profound synonyms, take data and weave it into a compelling story, smooth out a rough transition between two elements, and trade out phrases or ideas that are unintentionally hurtful or offensive.

Ask good questions: “Is this clear and simple enough?” “Do I really need this part?” “Is this serving my end goal?”

Practicing. You may have thought your ideas were compelling and clear... but when you say them out loud you may realize that they're not. Work on your wording, inflection, emphasis, and maybe do a little more “darling killing.” You may even have to admit that you've taken things the wrong direction altogether.

Practice doesn't guarantee a “homerun” but it'll familiarize you with the content and help curb nerves and surprises. It will fine-tune your verbal and non-verbal delivery, and enable you to look at your notes less often.

Tips for Practicing:

- **Pray.** Invite God into this part of the process.
- **Print** your manuscript or outline.
- **Resources:** highlighter, pen, timer, lectern, water.
- **Create space** that is quiet and undisturbed.
- **Practice out loud**, pausing as needed to scribble edits onto your manuscript or outline.
- **Experiment with tone** by changing inflection, volume, rhythm, and by leaning into pauses.
- **Experiment with gestures.** How you stand, walk, make use of your hands, eyebrows, etc... Practice in front of a mirror.
- **Time yourself.** Use a timer or timer app.
- **Talk about your sermon.** Summarizing your sermon casually gives your words an edge.
- **Ask a trusted friend to listen** to you preach your sermon. Ask for feedback.

(19) **Media** – Does the venue want you to use Media? If you want to use media, is the venue media capable? Is someone relying on you finishing your preparation on time so that they can do their job on time (think of the people who manage bulletins, slides, sound, etc...)

Go through your slides at least once alone to catch possible misfires or typos. Then go over them again day of with the person who will be running them – testing the projector and all audio elements.

Keep slides few and professional. Be ready to throw them out on the fly if the tech isn't functioning properly.

(20) **Pray, Sleep on It, talk to people you trust about it.**

IV - PREACHING TIPS

DAY OF:

- **Wake Up Early** – Eat well. Shower. Etc...
- **Print Notes** – Do this well in advance of the service. At least 2 copies – one for the podium and one for you to look at before the message.
- **Prepare Your Heart** – Pray. Remember the Gospel.
- **Review** – Read your notes and the whole passage.
- **Run Sheet** – Make sure you understand the run sheet. Is someone introducing you? Which song do you come up after? Should you end in prayer?
- **Test the equipment** – Mic, podium, stairs, lights, etc...
- **Check in with the team** – Quickly run through slides with the person running power point.
- **Use the bathroom** – A precautionary potty is to be preferred over a panicked preacher.
- **Drink Water** – Bring something to drink with you.
- **Check your zipper** – Twice for good measure.
- **Check Your Attitude** – Be humble. Not entitled. You should be honored to share - whether you're a guest speaker or the usual speaker. And this should make its way into your preaching.

DURING DELIVERY:

- **Be Yourself But Preach the Word** – Don't preach like someone else. Especially with humor! Nothing is more painful than a forced joke that doesn't land the way one hopes.

If you're a storyteller then tell stories, if you're a comedian then joke tastefully, and if you're a teacher then teach.

You'll win credibility by being yourself. But don't miss the temperament of the Scripture you're preaching just because of your default temperament.

Loud truths should be loud, hard truths should be hard, sweet truths should be sweet.

- **Avoid humor that depreciates others and yourself** – While this works for others, God has called you higher - everyone is made in His image.
- **Use stories** – But don't turn a 30-minute sermon into a 25-minute story about you with 5-minutes of Jesus at the end.

Try to keep your stories under 3 minutes. Be sensitive. Stories should always be connected to the topic – not just to make people laugh.

There's really no good reason to ever share a “poop-story” – even at youth camp. Be more creative than that.

- **Project Confidence** – Whatever your personality or style, if you project confidence then you will feel more confident

and people will listen to you.

- **“Ummm...”** – Instead of *umms* learn to use pauses or reiterate the idea. Slow down enough to speak without saying “umm.”
- **Exhorting** – Depending on your age, be mindful of how you exhort. “You” can be replaced with “We.”
- **Be passionate** – This is not the same as being loud. Practice your tone and projection.

Loud can be good... at the right time. If your volume is at “10” the whole time, then it's useless and will likely annoy some people. Never scream in anger.

- **Use your hands** – Non-verbal communication carries the most message. God gave you hands, so use them.
- **Raise your eyes** – Look at your notes as little as possible. Use your eyes to connect your words to your whole congregation.
- **Invite People to Respond to what you're saying** – Saying things like “How many of you know...” “You know...” “Will someone please tell me...” “Are you following me?” – these are rhetorical but they engage minds.
- **Speak to your audience** – Mind your audience. Be careful about how you refer to specific people in the audience. Be personal and tasteful.

Be mindful of the power of general criticism, even if it's a joke. If you criticize politicians, police officers, lawyers, government employees, etc... then you probably won't have any in your church (or not for long anyway).

- **Don't talk above or below your audience** – Nothing is more frustrating than a smart preacher who makes you feel stupid. And nothing is more disappointing than a smart person who bores you to death because you can't understand them.

Don't be shy about stretching people, but don't do it just to flex either.

- **STAY ON TIME** – Going more than a minute or two over your allotted is not appropriate in almost any preaching venue. And as a guest-speaker, going over time is a sure way to not be invited back.

Use a preaching clock, timer, watch or whatever you need. Asking your host in front of everyone “*how much time do I have left?*” is irresponsible and rude – do not put your host on the spot with such an irresponsible question.

Use the time you're allotted well. Don't steal unallotted time by being underprepared or because you “feel like God is doing something.” God is fully capable of doing something in the amount of time He laid on the coordinator's mind to assign to your message.

V - AFTER THE MESSAGE

- **When people thank you** – accept it humbly. Let them know their words are encouraging and try to catch up/ get to know them if possible.
- **When people criticize you** – thank them for it. Consider it for a moment. If it should be employed immediately (like in the next service) then do so, but if it can't or if it is unnecessarily harsh or useless criticism then forget about it.
- **Celebrate** – Celebrate appropriately, no matter what. If you were obedient, then God used you. Celebrate that WITH God and others. You might go out to eat, take a nap, have a conversation with a spouse or friend, or do something fun. If you take a nap try not to nap the day away. But, whatever you do, don't allow yourself to feel defeated or too proud. Don't take a break from being with God after a sermon.
- **Ask for feedback** – If you care about growing (or at least remaining self-aware) then ask for feedback. It doesn't need to be the same day, but it does need to be from someone you trust. If you want positive and negative feedback, then you need to ask for both very clearly.
- **Another thing about Feedback** – If you could get both Christian and Non-Christian feedback on your sermons (which might be difficult) it will change your preaching.
- **Sabbath well** – Guard a sabbath day. If you preach/work on Sunday, then guard a day of peace and celebration (not laziness) with your family on another day.

ⁱ Preaching to the Heart, Timothy Keller.

ⁱⁱ Credit to: Francis Chan.

ⁱⁱⁱ Preaching to the Heart, Session 4, Timothy Keller

^{iv} Preaching to the Heart, Session 4, Timothy Keller

^v Preaching to the Heart, Session 4, Timothy Keller

^{vi} Preaching to the Heart, Session 4, Timothy Keller

^{vii} Preaching to the Heart, Session 4, Timothy Keller

^{viii} Credit to: Tim Cedarland.

^{ix} Points 6-13 of "Preaching the Message" are from Rob Steinbach's 2016 Preaching Lab.