

What Every Preacher Should Know...

# About Preaching

Dedicated to the Men of God, who have  
given of themselves to the greatest calling on earth:  
The ministry of Preaching.

**(1 Tim 1:12) "And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for  
that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry..."**

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## Chapter 1 - Introduction.

Someone once made the comment that "two things made him want to preach the most: real good preaching, and real bad preaching." By this he meant, that when he heard really good preaching, it inspired him to want to preach. And, when he heard really bad preaching, it provoked him to want to be the one preaching instead of the one currently on the platform. I am not sure how sound that philosophy is, but I am sure that anytime people assemble to hear preaching, they deserve to hear a good, strong, heartfelt, message from the Lord.

No one is forced to come to hear us preach. Whether at a regular church service or a revival meeting, people come voluntarily to listen to the preacher. Because of this, preachers should have the very best material and prayer filled message to offer them. Remember, we are competing with sporting events, movie theaters, and prime time television. Why would anyone give up a night of entertainment to hear some boring preacher drone on without saying anything of significance. God's people give up their time because they believe that when God's man stands behind the pulpit, he will deliver a message from God. We owe it to them to have such a message.

There are a lot of critics, who have said such things as "You can't carry fire on paper." What they mean by this is that having a structured outline (a message written on paper) takes away from the fire of God. I disagree completely. First of all, paper is often used to start a fire. And, secondly, some of the most powerfully used men of God, have been men who wrote their entire sermons out, word for word (i.e. Charles H. Spurgeon).

Jonathan Edwards' sermon, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God" is held today as one of the greatest sermons of all time. They say that when Edwards preached this message, men's knuckles turned white from gripping the back of the pews, which they did out of fear that they would plunge into hell that very moment.

What is not always told is that Jonathan Edwards wrote that sermon out word for word, and when he preached it, he read it word for word by the light of a lantern.

Another common saying among critics is, "You can't put God in a box." Meaning that a structured message limits the power of God to a boxed-in outline. Again, such a saying is not only untrue, but it is usually quoted by those too lazy to study a sermon out long enough to structure it properly.

Some preachers, get a textual idea, and then stand up and run with it, saying whatever comes to their head. God can, and often does, use this method; But this is the exception to the rule, not the rule. In other words, If I study to show myself approved unto God, and always have a structured, well studied message, there will be times when God changes my thoughts and I preach something from the hip, so to speak. Because I have proved myself "*a workman that needeth not be ashamed*," God will use a message that He impresses upon me on the spot. But, that does not mean I should always just preach impromptu messages without ever having a period of deep Biblical study.

The idea that preaching is merely opening your Bible to a text and just saying what you feel, seems impressive when done by great men. But, what the young preacher must realize is that the great man of God has spent his entire ministry in deep Bible study, so that he bears in his mind and heart the ability to preach in this manner. If you will ask him, he will be the first to tell you that it comes from years of sitting in his office studying the word of God.

I have personally sat under men who have spent over an hour preaching, and when they were through I couldn't tell you one important thing they said. Every sermon should convey a message. Every time the preacher stands to deliver a word from the Lord, his audience ought to walk away with something they heard and learned. If you stand to say something, then you owe it to your listeners to have something to say.

Some preacher's think that people come to hear them because they like the sound of their voice. And, some preacher's preach because they themselves like the sound of their own voice. A nice sounding preacher may be able to get away with that for a few months, but after a while, people tire of hearing a nice sounding voice, and actually start wanting to hear a real message.

Eloquence is great, so long as it is mixed with substance. Having a great ability to speak is no substitute for having something of importance to say. In fact, people would rather hear a poor speaker who is saying something, than an eloquent orator who isn't saying anything at all. I can't stand mundane droning, and I am not advocating being a bore with a message. I'm just saying, being able to preach does not automatically mean you have something worth listening to.

This book is as much about WHAT we preach and WHY we preach, as it is about HOW to preach. Because all of these are equally important. How to preach is certainly of vast importance, but only because we have such an important message. Why we preach is because God has command us to reveal His word, through preaching (Titus 1:3). We have the most important message on earth. The doctor can give you news that can help you physically, but the preacher's words will help you spiritually. The lawyer can give you advice that helps you temporarily, but the preacher's advice will help you eternally. It is because our message is so important, that we owe it to our audience to deliver it concisely, and in a manner easy to be understood and received.

The ministry of the preacher is to bring news from heaven to men on earth. We are to study the Bible and pray, so that we are in tune with the Holy Spirit. Then, as God speaks to our hearts and gives us thoughts, we develop them into a structured message. Not just standing and rambling, but having a prepared message that God has impressed on our hearts to be delivered to His people. Such a structured message is easy to be understood and capable of making a difference in the hearts of our hearers.

## Chapter 2 - Scripture, Subject, Structure.

As well as being filled with the Spirit of God, and walking with God, the three most important aspects in sermon preparation are: Scripture, Subject, and Structure.

I have sat and listened to men who began by reading a passage of Scripture, and then preached for forty-five minutes, without making a single reference to the text. Why they even read from the text eluded me. If fact, why they even brought their Bible eluded me. Every message should be Biblically based, Biblically sound, and Biblically followed. If your message is not founded on Scripture, then do not call it a sermon or message. You can be a public speaker and speak on anything you want, but don't call yourself a preacher unless your message is based on the word of God.

There are two basic forms of preaching: Expository and Topical. Expository preaching, also known as, Textual preaching, means to preach on a particular text of Scripture. It means to "expose" or bring to light a Scriptural text. Topical preaching is using several texts to bring a particular topic to light.

Whether your message is expository or topical, what you say must be based on Scripture. Jesus accused the Pharisee's of "*Teaching for doctrine the commandments of men.*" Unless you can prove what you are saying by Scripture, then you are doing the very same thing.

The second, and equally important word in sermon preparation is the word "Subject." Your subject matter is the message or point you are trying to get your audience to see. Someone suggested that preaching is like a boxing match, you get three to five punches, so you better make them count. This means that you get to make three to five points to prove your subject, you can't waste any time chasing an errant point that doesn't help your message. Each point must pack a punch that drives the subject home.

Too often preachers stray from their subject so much that they lose their audience's attention, not to mention comprehension. When a preacher's message takes so many different routes, it's easy for his listeners to get lost. If you are preaching on a particular text or topic, make every point about that text or topic. You have to take into consideration, that your hearers may not be nearly adept at the Bible as you are. It will be hard enough for them to keep up with a structured message, so much less one that goes all over the place. Pick a subject or text and stick to it. Stay on the mark, do not stray very far from it.

Then, the last word, in sermon preparation, is "Structure." This means having a message in an outlined format. The reason this is of such importance is that it forces you to stay on target. The purpose of a structure, is to keep you within your subject. There is still ample room for spontaneity and straying as desired. But an outline will get you back and keep you to your subject.

Remember, the object is not to prove how clever you are. The object is to relay God's message to His people. To declare and manifest the word of God by preaching. Having a structure insures that you stay within the boundary of your subject. An unstructured message leaves your listeners wondering what the message was about, and therefore does little to help them in their walk with God.

It is essential that the man of God have a message that is Scriptural and Structural, and that stays within the boundaries of his Subject. God calls His people sheep, that must be led by a shepherd. A preacher cannot assume that his hearers know the Bible and have studied as much as he has. He must assume that at least some of his audience are young or new in the faith. And, even those that have long known God have need of constant reminding. Therefore, messages should be simple in concept, simple in structure and simple in delivery. It is great to have the ability to preach, but what good is it if your hearers do not have the capacity to understand and receive it? A "*Bishop*" must be "*Apt to teach*;" That means, able to teach and instruct his audience.

### **Chapter 3 - Message, Manners, Movement.**

When delivering a message there are three areas where the preacher must take notice. These are, his message, his manners, and his movements. All of these preach a message, because a speaker's body language often overrides what he is saying. People tend to stop listening to a person who is not looking at them. This is where the term "eye-contact" comes into play. The mannerisms of a preacher may turn his audience off, even when he is saying things of great importance.

Of course, no amount of mannerisms or movement can compensate for not having a good, well structured message. No one can listen to someone who rambles on for forty-five minutes, about nothing in particular. What you give the people must be given in an easy to be received manner. Your listeners should be able to tell others what you spoke about, in one or two sentences. Your text should remind them of the message they heard, because you tied it so well to your message, and because you spoke about the text often in your sermon.

Your mannerisms will either add life to the sermon, or take life from it. A person who moves a lot during his preaching calls more attention to his movement than to his message. Your body language should be used very reservedly. That is, don't be too stiff, but don't be too animated either. While some movement is necessary for emphasis, too much movement takes away from what you are saying. Some use body language to compensate for a poor message. Because they have little to say, they subconsciously try to make the message more interesting by body movement. You will find that the more the message has to say, the less the body has to say. Study, prepare, work hard at it; Have something to say, and you will find the need for animation lessens greatly.

Most importantly, mannerisms should always come natural or not at all. The only thing worse than overt movement and mannerisms, is copied or acted mannerisms.

A preacher should never fake his pulpit manners. It is okay to develop a mannerism as long as it is a natural and unfeigned motion. I have seen men use practiced animations that were copied exactly from their mentors. Once it is recognized, you will lose credibility with your hearers. If you develop a mannerism that is distracting to your audience, then UNLEARN it! Do everything you can to avoid and stop doing it. Preaching is not about you looking good, nor you sounding good. Its about getting God's message out to God's people. If your mannerism is a deterrent to that goal, I don't care how good you think it makes you look; STOP DOING IT!

When I speak about a preacher's movement as opposed to his mannerisms, I speak of two things: eye contact and leaving the pulpit area.

As far as eye contact, you are not preaching to the floor; You are not preaching to your hand; You are not preaching to the pulpit; You are preaching to the people. Look at them!

It is far better to look at the people with no confidence, than to look at the floor with all confidence. People will respect a man that looks them in the eye, even if they don't like what he is saying. If you stop looking at the people, they will lose interest in you! If you cease to make eye contact, they will subconsciously assume you are not talking to them.

Then, I address the issue of walking away from the pulpit! This is a mannerism that some preachers pick up and often it is a good way to attract your audience to a certain point. However, sometimes it distracts more than it attracts. There is only one reason to come out from behind the pulpit: To express a point to someone directly, or to get the attention of your hearers. If your message is structured and well studied you will already have the attention of your hearers. I am not against these mannerisms. But, often they are copied and practiced and are used to compensate for a poor study time or poor prayer life.

The final thing I will address on this subject is finding your own voice. Young preachers, probably not intentionally, tend to take on the voice of someone they admire. This is only natural because great preaching inspires us to mimic those we look up to. But a preacher should find and develop his own voice and delivery method as soon as possible. It is okay to mimic your mentor for awhile, but after a period of time, a preacher should no longer be copying someone else's techniques and should develop his own.

Above all, learn to be yourself. You will find that those who like you, will like you, no matter how bad you do; And those that don't like you will like you less when you do your best. So study well; Pray for God's help and direction; and be yourself. Don't worry about how you look, just preach the Bible, and let God get all the glory.

## **Chapter 4 - Structured Sermons.**

I know that many preachers will either skip this chapter, or close this book at this point. Mostly because they think they already know everything about preaching. Well, I've heard some of you preach, and I can tell you that you need to read this chapter. The only excuse for a poorly structured message is laziness. No one knows it all. The great Apostle Paul near the end of his ministry wrote, "*Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus.*" (Phil. 3:12)

I have heard preachers who rambled on for almost an hour and never said anything of substance. I have heard some that preached as long, who could have said the very same thing in ten minutes. Either preach forty-five minutes of material, or preach your ten minutes of material in ten minutes. But, don't stretch ten minutes of material into a forty-five minute message. Preachers who do not spend enough time studying will ramble on for an hour with ten minutes of material. This is unfair to your hearers.

So the following is a lesson on structure. Even if you already know it all, why don't you look it over and see if God will show you a thing or two.

The main elements of a structured sermon are: Theme, Introduction, Main points, Sub-points and Closing. A real structured message will always contain these elements. There is no excuse for poor structure.

**Theme: Your Main Message or Subject.**

**Introduction: A few sentences describing your theme.**

**I. Main Point One.**

- A. Sub-point 1.**
- B. Sub-point 2.**

**II. Main Point Two.**

- A. Sub-point 1.**
- B. Sub-point 2.**

**III. Main Point Three.**

- A. Sub-point 1.**
- B. Sub-point 2.**

**Conclusion: A few sentences, recapping and summing up all of your message.**

Your theme is the overall subject matter. This is the main point you are trying to get across. You may change your theme several times before you finish your study. This is because as you study, different ideas come to mind. But, once you are sure of your theme, stay with it. The very purpose of a structured outline is to keep you within your theme. If you want to change your theme after a time of study, then do it. But, make all of your future study about your new theme, and stick with it. The worst mistake is to preach without having a specific message.

Your text should be directly related to your theme. In fact your text should describe and prove your theme. Your theme and your text should go hand in hand. Remember, Scripture - Subject - Structure. Your Scripture and Subject (theme) should be directly related. This will lend Structure to your message.

The next major task in preparing a structured sermon is an introduction. An introduction is a small series of sentences or paragraphs that describe your theme. It tells your audience what to expect. This makes it easier for them to grasp what you're trying to prove. An introduction should be no more than two or three paragraphs. Less if possible. The few sentences of an introduction prepares your audience for the things you intend to show them. This allows your hearers to better comprehend what you are trying to get across. The introduction does not have to be prepared first. You may complete your whole outline, and then come back and write your introduction.

Once you have settled on a theme, you should develop a few Main Points. A sermon usually has three to five Main Points, depending on the length of your sermon, or the time allotted you. A Main Point should have enough material to be preached in five to ten minutes. Therefore, a five point outline should take about forty-five minutes, and a three point outline should take about thirty minutes. Once you have studied and preached for a while, you will get a feel for the amount of time you take per point, and you will be able to prepare a sermon for almost the exact time you are given or want to take.

The material for each Main Point is prepared in Sub-Points. While each Main Point is directly related to your theme, each Sub-Point is directly related to the Main Point it is under. This is the most important part of STRUCTURE. Main Points relate to your text, theme or subject. Sub-points relate to your Main Points. By this structure you continue to expound on your text and bring a strong argument for what you are trying to bring to your listeners, without straying too far from your message.

Sometimes you cannot properly fit a Main Points or Sub-point into the message. Don't sacrifice the integrity of your message to make it fit an outline, but do try to be as structured as possible. After some time you will learn to put all of your message into a structured format.

The last part of a structured sermon is the Conclusion. The conclusion is a few sentences that sum up what you have just preached. This brings your hearers to the place of decision. Your message had a point to make, and now you want to bring that point home. Your closing statements remind your audience of all you have said, summing up each point and bringing your hearers to a decision. This also allows you to give a concise invitation to accept the message and make life changing decisions about what they have just heard.

Another way to enhance your outlines is to place Main Points in a structure that can be easily remembered. For example, many preachers use "alliterated" outlines. These are Main Points that all start with the same letter, or all have a similar sound. Here is an example of an alliterated outline that uses the same letter:

- I. The People of Prayer.*
- II. The Path of Prayer.*
- III. The Purpose of Prayer.*
- IV. The Power of Prayer.*

The other form of alliteration is points that sound the same, as in this example:

- I. The Christian's Salvation*
- II. The Christian's Dedication*
- III. The Christian's Meditation*
- IV. The Christian's Moderation*

Still another form of patterned outlines is Repetition; Where a similar phrase is used repetitively. The following outline is an example of a patterned outline:

### ***Theme: Roadblocks That Keep You From Hell***

- I. The Roadblock of the Word of God*
- II. The Roadblock of the Man of God*
- III. The Roadblock of the Church of God*
- IV. The Roadblock of the Spirit of God*

Psalms 119 is the longest chapter in the Bible. But, the Psalmist separated this Psalm into sections, each with the chronological letters of the Jewish alphabet. This keeps the reader from being overwhelmed with the length of the Psalm. In the same manner, structured sermons keep your listeners from being overwhelmed with the amount of information in your sermon.

Psalm 119 has 176 verses divided into 22 sections. Each of these 22 sections has eight verses, and each corresponded to a letter of the Hebrew alphabet. This is a good illustration of the well-written structure of the Scriptures and a good precedence for preachers to put good organization into their sermons.

Psalms 107 repeatedly uses the phrase "*Oh that men would praise the LORD for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men!*" This is done both to drive home the point, but also to remind the reader over and over of the intent of the passage.

Repetitive Phrases, Alliterated Outlines, and Sermon Structure help your hearers to remember what is being said, why it's being said, and what you want your hearers to do about what they've heard. Jeremiah repeats sections of his message in Lamentations chapter three. Notice the repetition of the words: "*He hath...*"

- 2 He hath led me...*
- 4 He hath broken my bones.*
- 5 He hath builded against me...*
- 6 He hath set me in dark places...*
- 7 He hath hedged me about...*
- And on and on...*

Also in Lamentations three, Jeremiah uses repetition in another form:

27 *It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth.*  
28 *He sitteth...*  
29 *He putteth...*  
30 *He giveth...*

These are but a few of the many texts where the Bible uses alliteration and repetition to structure its message. If God uses patterns and structure to teach His word, we should do the same.

Another form of alliteration is the use of similar prefixes. The prefix "Un" works well. Your outline could include such words as: "unwanted, unable, unfaithful, etc." Or you could have points with the same ending, or suffix. A good example is the suffix "tion" as in "information, obligation, regulation, compensation, adoration." Another good example is the suffix "ing" with lots of words available, such as "assisting, consenting, destroying, intruding, dragging, imprisoning." Other suffixes such as "ly" (directly, suddenly, weakly) or "fully" (mercifully, respectfully, faithfully).

The point is that you have ample and wonderful words to work with. God has blessed us with the ministry of words. Our goal is to "*Preach the word...*" Therefore we should use words to our advantage and for the instruction of our hearers.

A Thesaurus is a word dictionary that lists synonyms of words. It gives you multiple words that mean the same thing. If you need a word that starts with a particular letter, a Thesaurus will give you several alternatives to choose from. We have the tools, there is no excuse for poor structure.

One of the ways to accomplish these structural concepts is to first complete your sermon without concern with form. Then go back over your notes, and try to organize them into similar thoughts and ideas. When possible, try to make all of your Main Points begin with the same letter, or sound the same.

With a little effort, you can turn a simple sermon into a well defined and structured message. The extra effort will give your hearers a better understanding of your message, and help them associate it with their own lives. It is always worth the time to do a better job. Preaching is one of the highest callings on earth. No task is greater than speaking to men on the behalf of God. And, being called to preach is in itself a sign that God wishes to use you to speak to men for Him. The Apostle Paul wrote, "*Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God.*" (2 Co 5:20) We stand "*in Christ's stead.*" We stand in the place of Jesus Christ, as His ambassador to men on earth. The Apostle wrote that "*God is beseeching men through us.*"

For this reason we cannot be slack in our calling. We must "*give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine.*" We must study to show ourselves approved unto God. We have the very word of God in our hands. We have no excuse for not having the very best material, in the very best format, to deliver the very best message. We stand in God's place, not to show ourselves clever, nor to look good, nor sound good. But, to bring God's message to God's people. We dare not do anything but our very best.

Lastly, a structured outline does not tie you down, but rather keeps you within your listeners attention. You do not structure to limit yourself, but to help your hearers. Remember, you spent hours studying your message, they are hearing it for the first time. You are very familiar with what you are saying, they are just now learning about it. You may know what you mean, but they must be told what you mean. You must introduce and instruct them about the message God has given you. "*For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little...*" (Isa 28:10)

Your outline will not be written out word for word. Your message must still be preached. An outline is simply there to remind you of the precepts you want to get across to your hearers.



## Chapter 5 - The Man of the Message.

The story is told of a young preacher who, newly out of college, was called to preach his first sermon at his home Church. He was excited. He had studied long and was well prepared. He jumped up to the platform with finesse and style. He was polished and primed and happy to be in his position. He took the pulpit happily and excitedly. He then proceeded to falter, flail, and fumble. He stepped all over his words and couldn't remember his text. He walked off of the platform sad, discouraged and depressed. An older lady seeing his distress stopped him as he walked down the aisle. "Young man," she said, "If you would have walked up to the platform the way you walked down, you would have walked down the way you walked up."

The man went to the platform confident with himself, and came down totally unsure of himself. But if he would have walked up to the platform unsure of himself, trusting God to bless and use him, he would have walked down with joy, when God did.

No matter how long we study, nor how good of a message we prepare. God's work can never be done in the flesh. God will bless hard work and study. But, we must never believe that we can do anything for God in our own wisdom and strength. We must always be diligent in prayer and in our personal walk with God.

There are some preachers who preach every week without any power. To just perform services or speak sermons does not require any special endowment. There are preachers whose sermons are so routine and lifeless that you could record one message and play it every Sunday. This kind of preaching KILLS churches. This kind of preaching actually hurts the work of God. It lulls the listener into a deep slumber that will only be awaked when they are cast into hell. Yet many of God's men are too lazy to change. And, some, will never admit that they need help. They preach boring, lifeless sermons week after week and their churches never grow. But they think they are great preachers. When you try to instruct

them about good, structured messages, they get offended. They think they know it all. They assume everyone thinks they are great preachers. But, I have heard them, and they are dull. Their messages do not make sense. Their sermons consist of talking about whatever comes into their minds. And, people soon tire of messages without life.

Whether its dull monotony, or yelling and screaming, "*except ye utter by the tongue words easy to be understood, how shall it be known what is spoken? for ye shall speak into the air.*" (1 Cor 14:9)

Some churches have members who should be given a medal for patience, because they practice it every Sunday with their dull pastor. Some of these men are endured because they are good men, not because they are good preachers. They could become good preachers if they would receive instruction, but they refuse it. They think themselves to be too accomplished to stoop so low as to learn anything new. I would avoid hearing them if I could, but often they are in the company of men I want to hear. Often we are on the same platform. I say this not to hurt anyone's feelings, but to call attention to the fact that by good study, and hard work, they could actually become great preachers. They have the desire, and they walk with God, but they do not give themselves to good study habits.

Putting a few words on paper and then saying whatever comes to mind is not a good method of preaching. Many of your hearers know the Bible well enough that they will be easily bored with an unstructured sermon. Having a good outline means that you have prepared something to say, instead of just saying something.

Having the power of God comes by prayer and Bible study. The Apostle Peter said he would GIVE himself to "*prayer and the ministry of the word.*" This is how to become a great preacher. Pray often, study much. Seek God for guidance. And work hard to prepare something worthy of those who have come to hear you.