

# EFFECTIVE PREACHING

N. Sebastian Desent, Ph.D., Th.D., D.D.; Pastor, Historic Baptist Church.

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There is a lot of writing on scriptural methods for preaching. We have written a number of papers on the subject ourselves. But with any important subject we can always elaborate and add comment.

Accordingly, on this subject I should like to add yet another short paper on preaching effectively. I expect it will be a help to all preachers. Preaching is art and science empowered by God. It is one of the greatest responsibilities a man can bear. We should be willing always to learn and improve our craft.

Be mindful of these things when preaching:

1. Always preach the ***Truth*** – that is first and foremost. Preach the pure word of God is the preacher’s duty. Whatever else is said should also be the truth – whether an illustration, a particular account, or personal comment. The Bible says a man refines his praise, so be watchful not to exaggerate or embellish beyond what is true. The pulpit is no place for lies of any sort. *In the multitude of words there wanteth not sin*, but be not guilty of this when preaching.

Whether preaching is in season or not, the people who hear it should be given the truth, without guile or compromise.

2. Speak the truth in ***Love***. No one enjoys angry preaching. “The wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God,” said James. Preach as one who cares and loves the people to whom he is speaking.

People are more likely to receive the hard preaching if they know the preacher operates in love.

As a pastor I understand how easy it is to fear for the people when you see what they are doing in their lives. You see the poor choices and you know the damage the actions will cause. A pastor also can easily be frustrated when he sees good people disregard his reaching. However, a preacher should *never* preach out of anger or retaliation or contempt for the people. People will know. Few will respond.

3. Preach with ***Zeal*** – that is, with energy, sincerity, passion, confidence. As one man said, “If people are falling asleep, wake up the preacher!” Another man said, “If the preacher is not excited about what he is saying, why should the hearers be?”

Excitement is contagious. If the preacher believes he has a message from God, what greater thing is there?

There is nothing in this world more worthy of our zeal, passion, and excitement than the gospel of Jesus Christ. It is the power of God. Preaching God’s word has genuine life-changing effect. It is serious business. Preaching the word of God has more value than any presidential address or military morale-boosting message.

In seminary my pastor taught a simple thing that has helped me numerous times: He said to *always* have a spring in your step when walking to the pulpit. Hop, run, leap, have energy, when placing yourself behind that sacred desk.

Even in his old age with a variety of physical difficulties, J. G. Tharpe always had a spring in his step, a joy in his heart, and a noticeable energy to preach, when he got behind the pulpit. You knew he was ready to “take off,” as he said. Somehow, this small piece of advice sets the temperament, not only for the preacher, but for the congregation.

Sincerely, God forbid if a “preacher” drags himself to the pulpit, or gives the impression preaching is a burden, or that he is too tired or too unprepared to preach. Shame on that! God and his people deserve way more than this.

We preachers ought to never forget the immense privilege and blessing it is to be used of God.

4. Speak Clearly, so people understand. All things said should be easily understood, at the right sound level, using voice moderation, understandable words, good diction, enunciation, pronunciation, and emphasis. Read the word of God slowly and clearly. Use illustrations as needed. They are the “windows of light” to help people understand.

Jeremiah said to “lift up thy voice as a trumpet...” A trumpet gives that discernable sound like no other instrument.

One man advised young preachers to “stand up, speak up, and shut up.” I would modify this and say, “Jump up, speak up, and shut up.”

Be careful not to over complicate or give too much information. Make the message memorable for the main points, repeating the main thoughts over and over. *Repetition* is the mother of learning.

Especially with verse references, if you want the congregation to go to that place, give the reference at least three times. If not, people will ask where to go. For some reason when a verse is given, half the people don’t hear it the first time.

Read the word of God – not monotone – but with life, clarity, and emphasis on the point to be made.

5. Preach how the word is Applicable to the hearers today. The application of God’s word is most important and more needed than any other use of the word. What profit is the word if people are not provoked to ask, what shall we do?

The subject at hand should be directly applicable to the audience. “Geared” to the audience is the word I use. This is where the commandments of the Lord Jesus Christ are made plain.

When speaking to a particular group the preacher should pray for direction as to what God thinks is most needful for the group. Messages should be appropriate for the audience.

There are times a preacher can speak of certain subjects and use certain words; and there are times he has to refrain from such. The preacher needs that wisdom.

For me, the best messages I remember in my Christian life are those that made very clear one thought, and that was the thing I needed to hear. Only God can give this wisdom.

6. Have a spirit of ***Longsuffering*** when dealing with people. Most people change slowly. But with constant reminding there is a good change over time. *Repetition is the mother of learning*, it is said. And very few people understand deep thoughts or high concepts the first time they hear them.

Any discipline – whether mathematics or doctrine – is learned by understanding the basics first. Then built upon these foundational laws are the greater and more complicated concepts. Accordingly, the preacher should expect people of different maturity levels to not all understand. Paul fed with milk as few could receive meat.

It takes time and many messages to bring along a congregation to where they ought to be. It is unreasonable to think any message preached will fix anything once and for all. We all have to be reminded. This is where most of this preacher's messages are directed.

7. The preacher should have good ***Doctrine*** – or be such that his preaching aligns with his life. God does not want his preachers to be ***lords*** over his heritage, but rather be ***ensamples*** – patterns to follow. So often preachers want to force, manage, push, threaten, leverage, berate, bully, rebuke, vent, shame, or insult God's people into obedience. This ought not to be the case. God knows his word is powerful enough and the Spirit of God will lead those who are seeking to do right by God. The preacher should know this also. A man's free will is to be respected.

It is not the preacher's place to play parent, drill sergeant, or jailor – but be one who preaches what God says, leaving the word of God to work in the hearts of God's people.

Our Saviour, when being crucified, did not rail against those who had no regard, but was forgiving in spirit. This is God's way – to lovingly draw men to himself, not to push and threaten them. People are to be warned, taught, encouraged, and invited; but beware of a controlling, bullying, or mean spirit. This is not of God.

There are few who find the way of life, and few of these are faithful to come and hear God's word. And God is pleased when these children put forth the effort to be in the house of God. He is blessed to have them come apart for the fellowship, worship, and instruction in the word of God. No preacher ought to make this special time a grief to God's children. They ought to be blessed of God.

Pastor Tharpe used to illustrate that in some churches, the gently little sheep who attend are given grief all week at work, they get grief with normal life problems, some get grief at home, some get grief in the normal day-to-day issues that have to be accomplished, some get grief from family members, friends, neighbor, and strangers – then they finally come to church to hear from God... and they get grief from the pastor. What doctrine is this? The wisdom that is from above is first peaceable.

There may be rare occasions when we ought to rebuke and judge, but this should be the steady diet of God's people. They will respond to the Lord at a much higher level.

8. Preaching should be the *Overflow* of study. This means, as a preacher studies and meditates on a subject, he should have so much to say it is nearly impossible to communicate it rightly. His heart is full of the magnificence and wonder of Jesus Christ. So, he distills his message to the vital points, to the best thoughts, to the weightiest matters.

There is a particularly wonderful thing about the word of God in that any part of it can be diligently studied without fully exhausting all that God put there. Even a two word verse – Jesus wept (John 11:35) – can be preached by an hundred men and never even scratch the surface of the wisdom of God in this verse.

One could study that verse and preach on a variety of ideas: the humanity of Christ, the empathy of God, the severity of death, the love of Saviour, the gentleness of Christ, the blessings of friendship, the hope of mankind, the judgment of God, the sovereignty of God, the foreknowledge of God, the compassion of Jesus, etc., etc.

Simply put, a preacher is able to take any passage of scripture and by diligent study, meditation, and prayer have so much to say, that he will have to limit himself when preaching. It is at this point that the message comes from God.

9. Speak *Sufficiently* for the time. At our church we practice “popcorn preaching,” where men have three minute to preach on a verse with just a few minutes of preparation. It amazes me how much can be gleaned and preached in this fashion. I am convinced we preachers can give the whole of our messages in just a few minutes if we had to – I have done it numerous times. And, in contrast, we preachers can likewise stretch out a message to ten times what was right for it.

A message is not a blessing, a help, a victory, or memorable because is it long. Some preachers think long messages are needful all the time. There is a place for long messages – but also for short ones. “Learn to discern.” I do not want the reputation of being a long-winded preacher. I want to be known for messages that affect in a good way the heart and lives of people.

And truthfully, any great message can be sufficiently preached in twenty minutes if it had to. And twenty minutes of fully engaged zeal and passion is more than enough for the preacher.

When preaching as a guest, be respectful of the time allotted. If not informed, a preacher should ask how long he should go, and be true to that time. And, if a preacher can finish early, it is even more of a blessing. I have said many times that it is better to leave the audience wanting more than have them regretting too much. A preacher that cannot discern when he is going too long has a lot to learn about a lot of things – one of them being pride.

10. The message should be *Driven* by the working of God in the preacher’s life. God is working in every one of his child’s life. He has a purpose to accomplish, and has the means to accomplish this purpose. It is here where the preacher experiences the nexus of God’s word, his work, and his will in his life. By prayer and meditation the preacher will easily know what God would have him preach. And this “hot” message is the one for the people to hear.

As a side note, I want to say it is better to have a message from God than a sermon from a book. There are many “good” sermons, brilliant outlines, clever points, and wonderful illustrations that a preacher can find. But better than all these is a message God has laid on the preacher’s heart –

something he understands, something he experienced, something in which he has seen God's power, something that burns in his heart, something real. Herein one finds the best of all messages.

As one man said, unless the message "was preached" to the preacher first, he has no business preaching it to others. That is not saying he had to hear it somewhere else, but that it spoke to his heart in such a way as he knows the message is from God. *Holy men of old spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.*

11. Give an ***Invitation*** for the hearers to respond. Good preaching requires a response. God uses preaching to touch the hearts of his children. The time allowed for God's people to respond in prayer, surrender, testimony – or whatever – is valuable time, and a service should allow for this.

What a contradiction it is for a preacher to work to prepare and deliver a message from God, and then pass over the opportunity for the hearers to respond to that message. It is like asking a question and not allowing an answer. It is like throwing a ball and not expecting it to be caught.

Imagine the amount of work accomplished for the Lord over the last 2,000 years that was done because it was settled in an invitation. Imagine how much of that would never had happened had the invitation been passed over? How many sins confessed at the altar would have gone unconfessed?

We all know how quickly a message flees from the mind once the issues of life beset us. How long does one have after a message is preached to sincerely respond to that message? For the preaching to be effective (the subject of this paper), this preacher contends a time of invitation and prayer is need for people to settle in their hearts whatever business they have with God.

12. Most importantly, the preacher needs to preach ***Jesus*** in every message. Jesus is in every chapter, every verse, and every word. Jesus is to be magnified above all things – *for we preach not ourselves, but Jesus Christ...* (2 Corinthians 4). In all things, Jesus is to have the preeminence.

As one man said, it is *not* about you, it was *never* was about you, and it will *never* be about you – it is *always* about Jesus!

Jesus, the wisdom of God, is the subject of all Bible preaching. He is center in all messages. He is preeminent in all that we say or hope to do.

A message without Christ is no message. Preaching without the Gospel is powerless preaching. He is all in all.

The End.