

The Pastor as Prophet

Friday–Saturday, February 26–27, 2010
Mars Hill Church, Ballard Campus
ReTrain

Instructor: John Piper
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Course Description

The aim of this class is to strengthen the student's confidence in the biblical centrality of preaching in the corporate life of the church, and to increase their ability to preach with biblical faithfulness, gospel-permeated exposition, Christ-exalting clarity, soul-converting power, culture-confronting courage, winsome humility, and love-producing effectiveness.

Schedule

Friday

1:00p 1st Lecture (90 minutes)
3:00p Q&A (30 minutes)
3:30p Break
3:45p 2nd Lecture (75 minutes)
5:00p Break
7:00p Worship Gathering / 3rd Lecture

Saturday

8:00a Worship
8:30a 4th Lecture (90 minutes)
10:00a Break
10:15a 5th Lecture (90 minutes)
11:45a Lunch and "Table Talk"
1:00p Dismiss

Outline

- I. A Definition of Preaching
- II. The Basis of Preaching
- III. The Ultimate Aim of All Christian Preaching
- IV. How Are People Changed into the Image of Christ?
- V. How a Pastor Fights for Joy
- VI. The Intellectual and Theological Condition of the Preacher
- VII. Choosing Texts for Sermons
- VIII. Preparing and Structuring the Sermon
- IX. Thoughts and Scriptures on Courage and Humility
- X. Miscellaneous Issues in Preaching

I. A Definition of Preaching

Based on Several New Testament Texts

Romans 10:14-15

“But how are they to 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 (κηρύσσοντος)?¹⁵ And how are they to preach (κηρύξωσιν) unless they are sent (ἀποσταλῶσιν)? As it is written, ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news (εὐαγγελιζομένων ἀγαθα)!’”

2 Timothy 4:2-3

Preach the word (κήρυξον τὸν λόγον); be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching.³ For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching (τῆς ὑγιαίνουσας διδασκαλίας).

Colossians 1:28

Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone (ὃν ἡμεῖς καταγγέλλομεν νουθετοῦντες πάντα ἄνθρωπον καὶ διδάσκοντες πάντα ἄνθρωπον) with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ.

Acts 5:42

And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ (διδάσκοντες καὶ εὐαγγελιζόμενοι τὸν χριστὸν Ἰησοῦν).

1 Timothy 2:7

For this I was appointed a preacher and an apostle (κήρυξ καὶ ἀπόστολος) (I am telling the truth, I am not lying), a teacher (διδάσκαλος) of the Gentiles in faith and truth.

Matthew 11:1

When Jesus had finished instructing his twelve disciples, he went on from there to teach and preach (διδάσκειν καὶ κηρύσσειν) in their cities.

A Definition

The heralding (κηρύσσοντος) of good news about God in Jesus Christ (εὐαγγελιζομένων ἀγαθα) based on the written word of God (κήρυξον τὸν λόγον) from a messenger sent by God (ἀποσταλῶσιν) including enough teaching (διδασκαλίας) to make the news plain and helpful.

II. The Basis of Preaching

From Ezra, to Jesus, to Synagogue, to Church

Old Testament Pattern of Exposition

Nehemiah 8:6-8

And Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God; and all the people answered, "Amen, Amen," lifting up their hands; and they bowed their heads and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground. 7 Also Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodiah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiah, the Levites, helped the people to understand the law, while the people remained in their places. 8 And they read from the book, from the law of God, clearly; and they gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading.

Synagogue Pattern of Exposition

Luke 4:16-21

And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up; and he went to the synagogue, as his custom was, on the sabbath day. And he stood up to read; 17 and there was given to him the book of the prophet Isaiah. He opened the book and found the place where it was written, 18 "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, 19 to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord." 20 And he closed the book, and gave it back to the attendant, and sat down; and the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. 21 And he began to say to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

Acts 15:21

"For Moses from ancient generations has in every city those who preach him (τοὺς κηρύσσοντας αὐτὸν), since he is read in the synagogues every Sabbath."

Acts 13:14-16

But going on from Perga, they arrived at Pisidian Antioch, and on the Sabbath day they went into the synagogue and sat down. 15 After the reading of the Law and the Prophets the synagogue officials sent to them, saying, "Brethren, if you have any word of exhortation for the people, say it." 16 Paul stood up, and motioning with his hand said, "Men of Israel, and you who fear God, listen:

Paul's pattern of proclamation-exposition

Colossians 1:28

We proclaim (καταγγέλλομεν) Him, admonishing every man and teaching (διδάσκοντες) every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ.

Romans 1:15

So, for my part, I am eager to preach the gospel (εὐαγγελίσασθαι) to you also who are in Rome.

2 Timothy 3:16–4:4

All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness,¹⁷ that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work.^{4:1} I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom:² preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching.³ For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions,⁴ and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths.

* * *

The Glorification of God by Knowing and Feeling Implications for the Nature of Preaching

Jonathan Edwards

God glorifies Himself toward the creatures also in two ways: 1. By appearing to . . . their understanding. 2. In communicating Himself to their hearts, and in their rejoicing and delighting in and enjoying the manifestations which He makes of Himself . . . *God is glorified not only by His glory's being seen, but by its being rejoiced in.* When those that see it delight in it, God is more glorified than if they only see it. His glory is then received by the whole soul, both by the understanding and by the heart.

Jonathan Edwards, The “*Miscellanies*,” ed. by Thomas Schafer, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, Vol. 13, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), p, 495, Miscellany #448; see also #87, pp. 251-252; #332, p. 410; #679 (not in the New Haven Volume). Emphasis added.

III. The Ultimate Aim of All Christian Preaching

Or: How Is All Preaching Gospel Preaching?

Or: How Is All Preaching the Proclamation of Christ Crucified?

Ten Theses

1. Whatever lasting good God ever does or ever did or ever will do for any individual person, he does and did and will do because of his free, utterly undeserved grace.

What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it? (1 Corinthians 4:7).

He says to Moses, “I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.”¹⁶ So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy (Romans 9:15–16).

We have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin,¹⁰ as it is written: “None is righteous, no, not one (Romans 3:9–10).

If you, O LORD, should mark iniquities,
O Lord, who could stand?

⁴ But with you there is forgiveness,
that you may be feared (Psalms 130:3–4).

But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us,⁵ even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved (Ephesians 2:4–5).

God saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began (2 Timothy 1:9).

When [Apollos] arrived, he greatly helped those who through grace had believed (Acts 18:27).

By the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me (1 Corinthians 15:10).

2. This free grace, that gives every lasting good to people, can benefit us justly only because of Jesus’ wrath-absorbing, righteousness-providing, sin-atoning, guilt-removing, substitutionary death for us.

For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life *in Christ Jesus our Lord* (Romans 6:23).

All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,²⁴ and are justified by his grace as a gift, *through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus*,²⁵ whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins.²⁶ It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus (Romans 3:23–26).

He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? (Romans 8:32).

All the promises of God find their Yes in him (2 Corinthians 1:20).

3. Without this kind of atoning death of Christ, God's grace would not save us, but only increase our condemnation because of the hardness of our hearts.

Do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?⁵ But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed (Romans 2:4–5).

4. But by the blood of Christ, God really purchased us for himself and secured not only every lasting good that we receive, but also the gift of repentance and faith through which we receive everything else.

Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body (1 Corinthians 6:19–20).

You were bought with a price; do not become slaves of men (1 Corinthians 7:23).

Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood (Acts 20:28).

It has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only *believe* in him but also suffer for his sake (Philippians 1:29).

By grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast (Ephesians 2:8–9).

And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil,²⁵ correcting his opponents with gentleness. God

may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth,²⁶ and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will (2 Timothy 2:24–26).

5. Therefore every sermon that holds out any lasting good to any person (as every Christian sermon must) should be based on, and interwoven with, the gospel of the living Christ’s substitutionary death.

I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified (1 Corinthians 2:2).

Far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world (Galatians 6:14).

I take Paul to mean not that he has joy in nothing but the cross, but that he has joy in anything only because of the cross, and he wants to make that clear.

But for the Christian, all *other* boasting should also be a boasting in the cross. All exultation in anything else should be exultation in the cross. Because, for redeemed sinners, every good thing—indeed every bad thing that God turns for good—was obtained for us by the cross of Christ. Apart from the death of Christ, sinners get nothing but judgment. Apart from the cross of Christ, there is only condemnation. Therefore everything that you enjoy in Christ—as a Christian, as a person who trusts Christ—is owing to the death of Christ. And all your rejoicing in all things should therefore be a rejoicing in the cross where all your blessings were purchased for you at the cost of the death of the Son of God, Jesus Christ.

6. This gospel basis and gospel interweaving of our sermons should be clear enough so that gospel-deniers (like Muslims, Jews, Hindus, Buddhists, atheists, legalists, libertines, etc) will not approve of our sermons. There should be enough of Christ and of his cross that those who deny the gospel don’t approve the sermon.

7. This gospel basis and gospel interweaving of our sermons should be clear enough so that the living Jesus will be honored as the ground and goal of the message because of his grace-securing sacrifice for us.

8. This gospel basis and gospel interweaving of our sermons should be clear enough so that the imperative that flows from the message is, first and foremost, *faith* in the blood-bought reality that God is 100% for us in Christ (that is, faith in the justifying work of Christ), and then, secondly, the obedience that comes from this faith (that is, the fruit of the sanctifying work of the Spirit).

9. In this sense then every sermon proclaims Christ. His atoning work is the ground of all it offers. His glory is the ultimate goal of all it aims to achieve. And the written

revelation of Christ's unfolding ways in history (that is, Scripture) is the only authoritative source from which we bring this work and ground and this glory to light (expository exultation).

And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the *things concerning himself* (Luke 24:27).

To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to *preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ* (Ephesians 3:8).

Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ (Colossians 1:28).

10. Thus with Christ-crucified as the ground and goal and matter of every sermon (and all of life) the ultimate aim of God in creation is advanced: the praise of the glory of God's grace, through the joy of his people in him.

God chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love ⁵ he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, ⁶ *to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved* (Ephesians 1:4–6).

The god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the *gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God* (2 Corinthians 4:4).

IV. How Are People Changed into the Image of Christ?

And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit (2 Corinthians 3:18)

Therefore we must so *speak* and *pray* and *live* that people are helped to behold the glory of the Lord.

1. Exhortation: The Place of the Word in Changing People

The Truth of the Word awakens faith, the source of all obedience.

Romans 10:17 So faith *comes* from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.

The Truth of the Word frees from sin.

John 8:32 ...and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.

The Truth of the Word frees from Satan.

2 Timothy 2:24 The Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, 25 with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth, 26 and they may come to their senses *and escape* from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will.

The Truth of the Word sanctifies.

John 17:17 "Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth."

The Truth of the Word frees from corruption and empowers godliness.

2 Peter 1:3 seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence. 4 For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you may become partakers of *the* divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust.

The Truth of the Word serves love.

Philippians 1:9 And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment,

1 Timothy 1:5 But the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.

The Truth of the Word saves.

1 Timothy 4:16 Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching; persevere in these things, for as you do this you will ensure salvation both for yourself and for those who hear you.

Acts 20:26 Therefore, I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all men. 27 For I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God.

2 Thessalonians 2:10 and with all the deception of wickedness for those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved.

The Truth of the Word gives Joy

John 15:11 These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.

2. Supplication: The Place of Prayer in Changing People, Praying in Sync with the Way God Works

For the desire of my heart *to be toward God and his Word.*

Psalm 119:36 Incline my heart to Your testimonies and not to gain.

For *the eyes of my heart to be opened.*

Psalm 119:18 Open my eyes, that I may behold wonderful things from Your law.

For *my heart to be enlightened with these “wonders.”*

Ephesians 1:18 [I pray] that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened.

For *my heart to be united, not divided, for God.*

Psalm 86:11 O Lord, I will walk in Your truth; unite my heart to fear Your name.

For *my heart to be satisfied with God and not with the world.*

Psalm 90:14 O satisfy us in the morning with Your steadfast love, that we may rejoice and be glad all our days.

For *strength in this joy, and endurance during the dark seasons.*

Ephesians 3:16 [I pray that God] would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man.

For visible good deeds and works of love to others.

Colossians 1:10 [I pray that you] will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord . . . bearing fruit in every good work.

For God to be glorified.

Matthew 6:9 Hallowed be thy name.

In Jesus' name:

John 14:13 Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.

Romans 8:32 He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, will he not also give us all things with him?

3. Demonstration: The Place of and Exemplary Behavior in Changing People

Matthew 5:16

Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

2 Thessalonians 3:7-9

For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example, because we did not act in an undisciplined manner among you,⁸ nor did we eat anyone's bread without paying for it, but with labor and hardship we *kept* working night and day so that we would not be a burden to any of you;⁹ not because we do not have the right *to this*, but in order to offer ourselves as a model for you, so that you would follow our example.

Philippians 3:17

Brethren, join in following my example, and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us.

1 Thessalonians 1:5-6

Our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction; just as you know what kind of men we proved to

be among you for your sake. ⁶ You also became imitators of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much tribulation with the joy of the Holy Spirit

1 Corinthians 11:1

Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ.

Hebrews 6:11-12

And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence so as to realize the full assurance of hope until the end, ¹² so that you will not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

2 Timothy 2:24–26

And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, ²⁵ correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth, ²⁶ and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will.

2 Corinthians 4:5

For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake.

V. How a Pastor Fights for Joy

Maintaining Life and Passion in the Ministry

Spiritual life and passion are a gift of God. But that must not make us passive. It should make us hopeful. “Work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for God is the one who is at work in you to will and to work for his good pleasure” (Philippians 2:12f). God acts in and through means. Here are some of the means he has used in my life to sustain my joy and passion for him and his word and his work.

1. Realize That Authentic Joy in God Is a Gift

- The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness. (Galatians 5:22)
- Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit. (Psalm 51:12)
- No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day. (John 6:44)

2. Realize That Joy Must Be Fought for Relentlessly

- Not that we lord it over your faith, but we *work* with you for your joy. (2 Corinthians 1:24)
- I know that I will remain and continue with you all, for your progress and joy in the faith. (Philippians 1:25)
- *Faith* has joy at its heart: It is being satisfied with all that God is for us in Jesus (see above). Therefore, the “good fight of faith” is a fight for joy.
- I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. (2 Timothy 4:7)
- Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called. (1 Timothy 6:12)
- And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold. But the one who endures to the end will be saved. (Matthew 24:12–13)

3. Resolve to Attack All Known Sin in Your Life

- So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal bodies, to make you obey their passions. Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness. (Romans 8:12–13)
- If you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live. (Romans 6:11–13)

4. Learn the Secret of Gutsy Guilt—How to Fight like a Justified Sinner

- Rejoice not over me, O my enemy; when I fall, I shall rise; when I sit in darkness, the LORD will be a light to me. I will bear the indignation of the LORD because I have sinned against him, until he pleads my cause and executes judgment for me. He will bring me out to the light; I shall look upon his vindication. (Micah 7:8–9)

5. Realize That the Battle Is Primarily a Fight to See God for Who He Is

- Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good! Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him! (Psalm 34:8)
- In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. (2 Corinthians 4:4–6)
- And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit. (2 Corinthians 3:18)
- Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we will be like him, because we shall see him as he is. (1 John 3:2)
- And those who know your name put their trust in you, for you, O LORD, have not forsaken those who seek you. (Psalm 9:10)

6. Meditate on the Word of God Day and Night

God reveals himself in His Word. What we see of God in the Word is the kindling of the joy of faith.

- He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. (Psalm 23:3)
- The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple. (Psalm 19:7)
- The precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart. (Psalm 19:8)
- Your words were found, and I ate them, and your words became to me a joy and the delight of my heart, for I am called by your name, O LORD, God of hosts. (Jeremiah 15:16)
- These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full. (John 15:11)
- His delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. (Psalm 1:1–3)
- May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope. (Romans 15:13)
- Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God. (Matthew 4:4)
- So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ. (Romans 10:17)
- These are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by *believing* you may have life in his name. (John 20:31)
- Does he who supplies the Spirit to you and...do so by works of law, or by *hearing* with faith? (Galatians 3:5)

- Whatever was written in former times was written for our instruction, that *through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures* we might have hope. (Romans 15:4)
- Sanctify them in the truth. (John 17:17)
- You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free. (John 8:32)
- The sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. (Ephesians 6:17)
- I write to you young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one. (1 John 2:14)

Hudson Taylor (*Illustrates Psalm 1:2*)

It was not easy for Mr. Taylor, in his changeful life, to make time for prayer and Bible study, but he knew that it was vital. Well do the writers remember traveling with him month after month in northern China, by cart and wheelbarrow with the poorest of inns at night. Often with only one large room for coolies and travelers alike, they would screen off a corner for their father and another for themselves, with curtains of some sort; and then, after sleep at last had brought a measure of quiet, they would hear a match struck and see the flicker of candlelight which told that Mr. Taylor, however weary, was pouring over the little Bible in two volumes always at hand. From two to four A. M. was the time he usually gave to prayer; the time he could be most sure of being undisturbed to wait upon God.

George Müller

The point is this: I saw more clearly than ever, that the first great and primary business to which I ought to attend every day was, to have my soul happy in the Lord. The first thing to be concerned about was not, how much I might serve the Lord, how I might glorify the Lord; but how I might get my soul into a happy state, and how my inner man might be nourished. For I might seek to set the truth before the unconverted, I might seek to benefit believers, I might seek to relieve the distressed, I might in other ways seek to behave myself as it becomes a child of God in this world; and yet, not being happy in the Lord, and not being nourished and strengthened in my inner man day by day, all this might not be attended to in a right spirit.

7. Pray Earnestly and Continually for Open Heart-Eyes and an Inclination for God

- Until now you have asked nothing in my name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full. (John 16:24)
- Satisfy us in the morning with your steadfast love, that we may rejoice and be glad all our days. (Psalm 90:14)
- Will you not revive us again, that your people may rejoice in you? (Psalm 85:6)
- Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit. (Psalm 51:12)
- Immediately the father of the child cried out and said, "I believe; help my unbelief!" (Mark 9:24)

- [I pray] that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints. (Ephesians 1:18)
- Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law. (Psalm 119:18)
- Incline my heart to your testimonies, and not to selfish gain! (Psalm 119:36)

8. Learn to Preach to Yourself Rather Than Listen to Yourself

Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my salvation. (Psalm 42:5)

Martyn Lloyd-Jones

Have you realized that most of your unhappiness in life is due to the fact that you are listening to yourself instead of talking to yourself? Take those thoughts that come to you the moment you wake up in the morning. You have not originated them but they are talking to you, they bring back the problems of yesterday, etc. Somebody is talking. Who is talking to you? Your self is talking to you. Now this man's treatment [in Psalm 42] was this: instead of allowing this self to talk to him, he starts talking to himself. "Why art thou cast down, O my soul?" he asks. His soul had been depressing him, crushing him. So he stands up and says: "Self, listen for moment, I will speak to you."

9. Spend Time with God-Saturated People Who Help You See God and Fight the Fight

- And Jonathan, Saul's son, rose and went to David at Horesh, and strengthened his hand in God. (1 Samuel 23:16)
- Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today," that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. (Hebrews 3:12-13)
- Whoever walks with the wise becomes wise, but the companion of fools will suffer harm. (Proverbs 13:20)

10. Be Patient in the Night of God's Seeming Absence

I waited patiently for the LORD; he inclined to me and heard my cry. He drew me up from the pit of destruction, out of the miry bog, and set my feet upon a rock, making my steps secure. He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God. Many will see and fear, and put their trust in the LORD. (Psalm 40:1-3)

William Cowper's hymn: "God Moves in a Mysterious Way"

*God moves in a mysterious way
his wonders to perform;
He plants his footsteps in the sea,
and rides upon the storm.*

*Deep in unfathomable mines
of never failing skill,
He treasures up his bright designs
and works his sovereign will.*

*You fearful saints, fresh courage take;
the clouds you so much dread
Are big with mercy and shall break
in blessings on your head.*

*His purposes will ripen fast,
unfolding every hour;
The bud may have a bitter taste,
but sweet will be the flower.*

*Blind unbelief is sure to err
and scan his work in vain:
God is his own interpreter,
and he will make it plain.*

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11. Get the Rest, Exercise, and Proper Diet That Your Body Was Designed by God to Have

I once struggled with the truth that “patience” is a fruit of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:22), because I knew from experience that it is also a “fruit” of a good night’s rest. In other words, I was crabbiest on little rest and less so on good rest. What brought light to this perplexity is that one of the ways the Spirit produces His fruit in our lives is by humbling us enough to believe we are not God and that that God can run the world without our staying up too late and getting up too early. There is a very close connection between what we eat and how we exercise and sleep, on the one hand, and our spiritual experience on the other hand. The command to “glorify God in your body” (1 Corinthians 6:20) is relevant to more than sexual abstinence.

Elijah’s emotional need for sleep and food

Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword. Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, “So may the gods do to me and more also, if I do not make your life as the life of one of them by this time tomorrow.” Then he was afraid, and he arose and ran for his life and came to Beersheba, which belongs to Judah, and left his servant there. But he himself went a day’s journey into the wilderness and came and sat down under a broom tree. And he asked that he might die, saying, “It is enough; now, O LORD, take away my life, for I am no better than my fathers.” And he lay down and slept under a broom tree. And behold, an angel touched him and said to him, “Arise and eat.” And he looked, and behold, there was at his head a cake baked on hot stones and a jar of water. And he ate and drank and lay down again. And the angel

of the LORD came again a second time and touched him and said, “Arise and eat, for the journey is too great for you.” And he arose and ate and drank, and went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights to Horeb, the mount of God. (1 Kings 19:1–8)

Jonathan Edwards on the use of food for God’s sake

Sereno Dwight tells us that Jonathan Edwards “carefully observed the effects of the different sorts of food, and selected those which best suited his constitution, and rendered him most fit for mental labor.”⁴ Thus he abstained from every quantity and kind of food that made him sick or sleepy. Edwards had set this pattern when he was twenty-one years old when he wrote in his diary, “By a sparingness in diet, and eating as much as may be what is light and easy of digestion, I shall doubtless be able to think more clearly, and shall gain time; 1. By lengthening out my life; 2. Shall need less time for digestion, after meals; 3. Shall be able to study more closely, without injury to my health; 4. Shall need less time for sleep; 5. Shall more seldom be troubled with the head-ache.”⁵ Hence he was “resolved, to maintain the strictest temperance in eating and drinking.”

12. Make a Proper Use of God’s Revelation in Nature

- The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork. (Psalm 19:1)
- Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? (Matthew 6:26)
- And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. (Matthew 6:28–29)

Charles Spurgeon

Sedentary habits have a tendency to create despondency . . . To sit long in one posture, poring over a book, or driving a quill, is in itself a taxing of nature; but add to this a badly ventilated chamber, a body which has long been without muscular exercise, and a heart burdened with many cares, and we have all the elements for preparing a seething cauldron of despair, especially in the months of fog. . . He who forgets the humming of the bees among the heather, the cooing of the wood-pigeons in the forest, the song of birds in the woods, the rippling of rills among the rushes, and the sighing of the wind among the pines, needs not wonder if his heart forgets to sing and his soul grows heavy. A day’s breathing of fresh air upon the hills, or a few hours’ ramble in the beech woods’ umbrageous calm, would sweep the cobwebs out of the brain of scores of our toiling ministers who are now but half alive. A mouthful of sea air, or a stiff walk in the wind’s face, would not give grace to the soul, but it would yield oxygen to the body, which is the next best. . . . The firs and the rabbits, the streams and the trouts, the fir trees and the squirrels, the primroses and the violets, the farm-yard, the new-mown hay,

and the fragrant hops—these are the best medicine for hypochondriacs, the surest tonics for the declining, the best refreshments for the weary. For lack of opportunity, or inclination, these great remedies are neglected, and the student becomes a self-immolated victim.

13. Read Great Books about God and Biographies of Great Saints

Hebrews 11 is a divine mandate to read Christian biography. The unmistakable implication of the chapter is that if we hear about the faith of our forefathers (and mothers), we will “lay aside every weight and sin” and “run with perseverance the race that is set before us” (Hebrews 12:1). If we asked the author, “How shall we stir one another up to love and good works?” (10:24), his answer would be: “Through encouragement from the living (10:25) and *the dead* (11:1–40).” Christian biography is the means by which the “body life” of the church cuts across the centuries.

Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith. (Hebrews 13:7)

For the good of your soul, I encourage you to read great books about God and about His people. Books by the Puritans are among the richest ever written, and the church stands in the debt of The Banner of Truth Trust and Soli Deo Gloria Publishers for reprinting so many of them.

14. Do the Hard and Loving Thing for the Sake of Others—Witness and Mercy

If you pour yourself out for the hungry and satisfy the desire of the afflicted, then shall your light rise in the darkness and your gloom be as the noonday. And the LORD will guide you continually and satisfy your desire in scorched places and make your bones strong; and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters do not fail. (Isaiah 58:10–11)

15. Get a Global Vision for the Cause of Christ and Pour Yourself out for the Unreached

May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face to shine upon us...that your way may be known on earth, your saving power among all nations.... The earth has yielded its increase; God, our God, shall bless us. God shall bless us; let all the ends of the earth fear him! (Psalm 67:1–2, 6–7)

J. Campbell White

Most men are not satisfied with the permanent output of their lives. Nothing can wholly satisfy the life of Christ within his followers except the adoption of Christ’s purpose toward the world he came to redeem. Fame, pleasure and riches are but husks and ashes in contrast with the boundless and abiding joy of working with God for the fulfillment of his eternal plans. The men who are putting everything into Christ’s undertaking are getting out of life its sweetest and most priceless rewards.

VI. The Intellectual and Theological Condition of the Preacher

The Bible calls on us to think over what the apostles taught.

2 Timothy 2:7, “Think over what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in everything.

The Bible calls us to be mature in our thinking not babes.

1 Corinthians 14:20, “Brethren, do not be children in your thinking; yet in evil be infants, but in your thinking be mature.”

The Bible assumes and encourages a proper analysis of nature and times and moral matters.

Luke 12:54-57, “And He was also saying to the crowds, ‘When you see a cloud rising in the west, immediately you say, “A shower is coming,” and so it turns out. 55 And when you see a south wind blowing, you say, “It will be a hot day,” and it turns out that way. 56 You hypocrites! You know how to analyze the appearance of the earth and the sky, but why do you not analyze this present time? 57 And why do you not even on your own initiative judge what is right?’”

The Bible calls for a wakeful, sober preparedness of the mind for right use in the cause of Christ-exalting hope.

1 Peter 1:13 “Therefore, prepare your minds for action, keep sober *in spirit*, fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.”

The Bible calls us to work hard and accurately at handling the word of God.

2 Timothy 2:15, “Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling “the word of truth.

The Bible calls us to have a thorough and deep knowledge of Scripture as a protection from harmful error.

Matthew 22:29, “But Jesus answered and said to them, “You are *mistaken*, not understanding the Scriptures nor the power of God.”

The Bible commends thoughtful musing on the Word of God day and night as way to fruitful ministry.

Psalms 1:2-3, “But his delight is in the law of the LORD, And in His law he meditates day and night. 3 He will be like a tree firmly planted by streams of

water, Which yields its fruit in its season And its leaf does not wither; And in whatever he does, he prospers.”

The Bible calls us to understand the ground of our faith well enough to give good answers to those who ask.

1 Peter 3:15, “Sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always *being* ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence.”

The Bible shows that not understanding truth about God and the way he works has destructive effects.

1 Corinthians 6:19-20, “Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? 20 For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body.” (See the phrase “do you not know” in Rom. 6:3,16; 7:1; 11:2; 1Cor. 3:16; 5:6; 6:2,3,9,15,16; 9:13,24; Jam. 4:4. See also 1 Thessalonians 4:5.)

The Bible endorses the existence of the office of teachers in the church who should be “apt to teach” and lead others into greater understanding of God’s truth.

Ephesians 4:11, “And He gave some *as* apostles, and some *as* prophets, and some *as* evangelists, and some *as* pastors and teachers.”

1 Timothy 3:2, “An overseer, then, must be . . . able to teach.”

The Bible commands us to preserve “sound” or “healthy” doctrine and to maintain a “pattern of sound words” and to be able to refute those who contradict it.

2 Timothy 1:13, “Retain the *standard of sound words* which you have heard from me, in the faith and love which are in Christ Jesus.”

2 Timothy 4:3, “For the time will come when they will not endure *sound doctrine*; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires.”

Titus 1:9, “Hold fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, so that [you] will be able both to exhort in *sound doctrine* and to refute those who contradict.”

The Bible calls elders to teach “the whole counsel of God” implying a coherence in all God’s revelation which it would be valuable to see.

Acts 20:27, “I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God.”

The Bible calls us to test all things and hold fast to what is true.

1 Thessalonians 5:19-21, “Do not quench the Spirit; 20 do not despise prophetic utterances. 21 But examine everything *carefully*; hold fast to that which is good.”

1 John 4:1-2 “Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. 2 By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God.”

The Bible acknowledges that some of its parts are hard to understand and are easily distorted and misused, and calls for us not to be “untaught or unstable” in handling the word.

2 Peter 3:15-16, “Regard the patience of our Lord *as* salvation; just as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given him, wrote to you, 16 as also in all *his* letters, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which the untaught and unstable distort, as *they do* also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction.”

The Bible gives Paul as an example of how there is a place for careful argument on behalf of the truth of Christ.

Acts 17:2, “And Paul went in, as was his custom, and for three weeks he **argued** with them from the scriptures.” (See Acts 17:17; 18:4,19; 19:9; 24:25. See also the involved and careful argumentation in Romans)

The Bible gives Stephen and Paul as examples of those who in the service of the Gospel knew their redemptive history well enough to synthesize it.

See their sermons in Acts 7:2ff and 13:16ff.

The Bible shows Jesus and Paul as ones who carefully observed nature and culture and language.

See Jesus’ use of nature in his parables and sayings. See Paul in his quotation of pagan poetry in Acts 17:28. And notice how both make powerful use of the language of the people they are speaking to, both evocative and argumentative.

The Bible calls us to read as a means of understanding Paul’s understanding of the mystery of Christ. And reading demands the disciplined use of the mind.

Ephesians 3:4, “When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ.

The Bible itself is such a remarkable diversity of writings and languages that the call to know the scriptures is a call to hard work and serious thought.

VII. Choosing Texts for Sermons

Preaching as *expository exultation* should be the exposition and application of a text or cluster of texts from the Bible. Keep on reminding yourself of the unfathomable implications that this is the very word of God.

It is very important to keep in mind that, in all the guidelines that follow below, flexibility and responsiveness to change in circumstances in the church and in your own soul is a good thing. Any plan for preaching in the future should usually be seen as changeable when church circumstances or social crises or personal convictions call for it.

1. How many texts should a sermon have?

1.1 It seems to me that having one text which you attempt to make plain and apply to the people is normal, but having more than one in order to make a unified point that comes from the cluster is legitimate.

1.2 Having one text that you deal with more deeply and from which you move out to other texts for elucidation and support gives a firm foundation to the sermon and helps people feel they have their feet solidly on Biblical ground in at least one place.

1.3 But using other Scriptures to elucidate and support the main text has the great virtue of overcoming the sense in the listener that you are being lopsided in your interpretation. That is, it increases the sense that this really is a Biblical teaching and not an idiosyncratic belief of the preacher.

2. How long should a sermon text be?

2.1 The length of the text will vary with the goal of the message or series of messages. I have preached six messages on Romans 1:16-17 and I have preached 12 messages, one on each of the Minor Prophets. The goal in the first instance was to unpack the theologically laden phrases of these all important verses that give the thesis of the book of Romans; and the goal in the second instance was to give an overview of the Minor Prophets to the church and introduce them to parts of the Bible that few actually read.

2.2 The length of the text will vary with how much time you have for your message.

2.3 The length of the text will vary with how dense the text is with theological terminology that needs explanation and application. The more rich words and phrases that need explaining and applying, the shorter the text.

2.4 The length of the text will vary with what kind of literature the text comes from. Thus narrative literature like the gospels or Genesis will tend to offer longer texts for preaching because the point of the author is not generally made in a single verse or two but by weaving events together in a story. You need a fairly large part of the story before you in order to make a legitimate point.

2.5 The length of the text will vary on how quickly you believe you should move through a larger unit. Thus, if you believe you should spend from New Years to Easter on 1 Peter that will govern the size of your texts for each week. This is a legitimate goal, just as other criteria are also legitimate.

3. Where should a sermon text come from in the Bible?

3.1 First of all, it should come from the Bible because the Bible is God's word and our job is to proclaim God's word not our own. We are expositors of God's inspired text, not just sharers of our own ideas.

3.2 The text will vary with the audience and setting. An evangelistic setting, for example, may call for a different text than an ordinary Sunday morning exposition for your own people. A funeral message will call for a different text from a wedding.

3.3 Special events will call for special texts. For example, Christmas and Easter and 125th Anniversaries of the church and openings of new buildings will call for appropriate texts.

3.4 Crises in society may call for a break in any other plan because the upheaval all around demands a word from God for the good of the people's stability and guidance, as well as a word of witness to the watching world. For example, the Oakland earthquake, October 17, 1989 was so captivating that I interrupted my series and preached from Hebrews 12:28 ("We have a kingdom that cannot be shaken."). On September 16, 2001 five days after the World Trade Center attack I preached a message from Romans 8:35-39 titled, A Service of Sorrow, Self-humbling, and Steady Hope In Our Savior and King Jesus Christ: A Response to the Attack on the World Trade Center."

3.5 Generally, texts will be chosen by a coming together of several factors in the mind and heart of the preacher: 1) what burns in our own hearts to say that we love and has made or is making a great difference to us? 2) what are the needs of the congregation spiritually, morally, theologically, relationally? 3) What parts of the Bible have been neglected or overemphasized in the congregation? Etc.

3.6 Earnest prayer to God for special guidance in thinking through all the relevant factors is essential. Cry out to God for help and he will give it.

3.7 Consult elders and staff if you have spiritually mature partners in ministry and get their input in assessing the past and making suggestions about future series.

3.8 Think about whether there are large parts of the Bible that you have neglected over time or that the people may be especially ignorant of and give some attention to them.

3.9 Consider the weakness in church's understanding of certain doctrines or ways of love or devotion, and address what the real needs are in the church.

3.10 Take into account the timely challenges to the faith in society that are shaping the way your people think and act, and address these through relevant texts.

3.11 Mingle series on books with series on crucial topics with occasional sermons on single themes.

3.12 Series on books have the great advantages of 1) helping you know where you are going from week to week and avoiding the sense of hit and miss that often accompanies a random selection for each week; 2) forcing you to deal with issues and doctrines that you might otherwise skip, but are valuable for the people; 3) giving the message to the people that “all scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching” (2 Timothy 3:16); 4) overcoming the suspicion that you only preach on your favorite texts and topics; 5) building a truly Biblical framework into the thinking of the people; 6) modeling for the people how to study the Bible systematically, and showing them the connectedness of the larger units of thought and how they shed light on each other.

3.13 It is legitimate to preach on the same text several times back to back going over the same ground for several weeks but drawing out more and more insight. The Puritans were masters at this, sometimes preaching so many sermons on one verse that they made up a whole book of sermons.

3.14 Utterly crucial, as in all aspects of ministry is the spiritual condition of the preacher. You must be passionate for God and pure in heart and full of the Spirit and zealous for the good of your people and longing for the salvation of souls and yearning for the unreached peoples of the earth, if you hope to be in a frame of mind and heart to choose texts that are fitted for maximum impact.

3.15 Planning for several months by writing down the texts and a possible titles and a sentence or two about where you might go with the texts is a good discipline and very helpful for your own study and peace of mind. One way to do this is to plan from September through Christmas, then from New Years through Easter, then from Easter to some point of breaking in the summer, and then perhaps a summer series.

3.16 A personal retreat for a day or even longer may be advisable for these planning efforts. On these retreats you would want to fast and pray and read and meditate and worship and study until the series came together. This plan need not be published for all the people in detail. But it also might help them, provided they know you will very likely change it as God leads in the actual preparation of the sermons.

VIII. Preparing and Structuring the Sermon

1. All of life is preparation for preaching.

Every experience of the preacher is the laboratory for the application of Biblical texts. If he is alert he will learn in the laboratory of life how to apply Biblical teaching to the real life of his people.

Do not begrudge the seminary of suffering.

It opens you to the depth of the Word as little else can: Psalm 119:71,
“Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I keep Your word. . . . It is good for me that I was afflicted, That I may learn Your statutes.”

It makes of you a sharer in the suffering of your people which makes you wiser and more empathetic and more patient and more tender and more authentic in rugged interpretations of God’s providence. 2 Corinthians 1:6 *“If we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation; or if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which is effective in the patient enduring of the same sufferings which we also suffer.”*

It purifies your heart from vain pursuits and makes you serious about life which is essential to real preaching.

It fixes your attention more fully on things that are above where Christ is seated at the right hand of God, so that you bring a divine perspective to bear on all things, which is what the preacher should mainly do. 2 Corinthians 1:8-9, *“For we do not want you to be unaware, brethren, of our affliction which came to us in Asia, that we were burdened excessively, beyond our strength, so that we despaired even of life; indeed, we had the sentence of death within ourselves so that we would not trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead.”*

Illustrations that come from life rather than books will have a greater ring of authenticity – though good books can capture much of life.

There is a way of looking at the world that, as a virtual reflex, relates discoveries and observations to God, and converts them into messages of truth to others. If you find this “reflex” in you, accept it and employ it for your people.

Everything you read, from the newspaper to the assembly instructions for a new bike, from a novel to a recipe, from a biography to map, is grist for mill of fresh language and concrete imagery and striking analogy, not to mention instances of the providence of God in action and of the vagaries of human nature.

Everyday life is where you learn about your own heart and the nature of man. Self-knowledge is essential to powerful and true preaching. A preacher out of

touch with his own sinfulness and weakness and characteristic temptations will be felt as a phony very quickly. This is learned in the rhythm of daily affection, action, introspection, repentance and perseverance.

Good introspection means thinking about what you feel and think and do, and bringing Biblical categories and insight to bear in the interpretation of yourself. This is the main school of human nature, and you cannot preach well without deep insight into human nature. The next best school is to think about what others feel and think and do in relation to the teaching of the Bible.

2. All Bible study and devotional reading of the Bible is preparation for preaching.

No, do not always think “sermon preparation” when reading devotionally, but savor the glory of God and his ways. Yet, a preacher is wired to delight in how this precious promise or that shocking rebuke may become powerful for his people. Read the Bible continually and memorize it steadily so that you are permeated with the Bible and your sermons will drip with the honey of God’s own words. Psalm 19:10, *“More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb.”*

3. The actual time of preparation.

In the actual hours of preparing the sermon to be preached next Sunday have a piece of paper by you for jotting any question or insight that might prove fruitful in the message. Often in the jotting of a question or a problem an insight will come and then another and then another, so that this sheet suddenly has an outline or a flow of thought that will illumine the text for your people. John Stott refers to this as “scribbling down, though haphazardly, the thoughts which clarify in our minds” (Stott, *Two Worlds*, p. 223).

This ever-present piece of paper is essential to hold the random thoughts and questions that come to our mind at every stage in the preparation process. Otherwise we lose, behind the clouds of distraction and forgetting, the glimmer of insight that might prove to be the first ray of brilliant sunshine just coming over the horizon.

On this scribbling sheet draw arrows from one word in one sentence to another word in another sentence to show the connection in your mind. Circle a word here and a word there and jot a possible meaning in the margin at a 90 degree angle if you must. Look up a phrase in the concordance to track down its Biblical usage and then note that on the sheet and then notice, amazingly, that this usage, when you take time to write it sheds light on a thought noted in the upper left hand corner of the paper. Quickly draw an arrow lest you lose it. Then you will notice another connection with this new insight as you continue to ponder the text. And on and on it goes with more and more ideas pouring to your mind and more and more ways of digging out the gold in this text.

Very often the repetitions and arrows and circles on these scribbling sheets will offer the outline for the sermon. You will put a “1” by this idea in the bottom right hand corner and then you will put a “2” at the end of the arrow that connects it with an argument or inference in the middle of the page (written almost upside down, because you had to make it fit when it all clicked after several hours of pondering), and so on.

Soon in the preparation process read the text in the original language if you can. As you read you will be doing word and phrase searches continually with your concordance (book or computer) to make sure you let the author’s, or the Bible’s, use of a word or phrase determine its meaning, not your first impression from modern life. As you make those searches, light is shed remarkably on the text because of the Biblical connections that you begin to see with this word or phrase. Do not assume that every usage is the same. But neither be afraid of meeting with wonderful and profound glimpses into one text from another that may be at some distance. Scientists may find a rare chemical in a crustacean at the bottom of the Pacific Ocean that heals a thyroid condition of a child in New Jersey.

Ask questions of the text as you read it. The best way to do this is to “arc” the passage. Arcing is a way of forcing us to ask the relational questions that govern the structure and meaning of a text. Even if you don’t have time to draw out the arcs, or if the text is a long narrative portion, at least “think arcing” and ask about how the clauses and units relate to each other. Nothing is a more reliable portal to the accurate meaning of words and phrases and clauses than the way the author has arranged and used them. This is more important than the way he used them elsewhere or the way some other writer used them – though, of course, those wider uses are important too. And always be scribbling as you ask the questions.

Ask especially what the main point of the text is.

That is, what is the one thing being said that everything else explains or supports. That one thing does NOT have to be the point of the sermon. In fact very often the support may be more important than the main point. For example, Romans 1:15-16 says, “For my part, I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome. (16) For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes.” The most important reality in this text is the divine power of the gospel, NOT the state of Paul’s mind in not being ashamed or his eagerness to preach in Rome. YET the divine power of the gospel is logically subordinate to those states of mind and supports them. A good sermon MAY make “eagerness to preach” the main point. But another good sermon could make the power of the gospel the main point (not of the text, but of the sermon). Simply make all this plain to your people so they can see such things and assess the judgment you are making on the basis of the text.

Ask how the text is structured.

Let the way the writer structures his argument or his narrative, influence the way you structure your sermon. Don't be artificial and think that a sermon must have three points or only one point. There should be unity and coherence to the sermon, and in that sense it should have one point. But some texts beg to be fleshed out in two or three or four stages of equal importance, any one of which may be too little for one sermon. What is important is that the message not leave incoherent dangling pieces that cause people to wonder what you were getting at when you said such and such. How did that fit. Show them how everything you say fits with the other things you say to make your unified point or points.

Ask about what your people need.

What are the social crises in the world or the community? What is the mood of the nation? What are the feelings in the church itself? Is there conflict? Is there discouragement? Is there too much excitement based on circumstances and not on God's promises and grace? What are the challenges the church is facing, for example, building, budget pressures, death of children, leader's failure, unemployment?

You can address many of the needs of the people not by preaching topical messages on every new pressure they feel, but by steadfastly applying the truth of God with analogies and illustrations to the kind of thing they are dealing with. Sometimes one sentence can turn a whole message into a powerful healing or converting word because it alerted the person that you had their kind of situation in mind.

To write the sermon or not to write the sermon

I write out all my sermons. I do not think that everyone must do this to be a faithful and powerful pastor. Much will depend on the way your mind works. I find that I cannot be clear in my own mind on things until I work to write them down. Often in the writing I see things I did not see before. Not only that, the writing helps me see the structural needs for order and clarity. So writing helps me clarify my own convictions, discover new truth, and order things in a more understandable way.

On the other hand some pastors are lamed in their delivery by the way they are bound to a manuscript. If you are going to write, you almost surely must NOT read. It will almost always seem contrived and impersonal to your people.

IX. Thoughts and Scriptures on Courage and Humility

“For I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God.”

Acts 20:27

What kinds of threats and temptations might cause a preacher to shrink back from declaring the whole counsel of God?

Fear of death
Fear of pain
Fear of criticism
Fear of slander
Fear of conflict
Fear of being shamed
Fear of making a mistake
Fear of losing a livelihood

Desire for safety
Desire for comfort
Desire for man’s approval
Desire for political advancement in the denomination
Desire for money
Desire for no conflict

Texts Relating To Courage

Satan hates the truth and can kill you, if God permits.

Revelation 2:10 'Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to cast some of you into prison, so that you will be tested, and you will have tribulation for ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.

Suffering will come if you do and speak the truth.

1 Peter 3:13 Who is there to harm you if you prove zealous for what is good? 14 But even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, *you* are blessed. AND DO NOT FEAR THEIR INTIMIDATION, AND DO NOT BE TROUBLED, 15 but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always *being* ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence;

2 Timothy 3:12 Indeed, all who desire to live **godly** in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.

Our mission is dangerous.

Matthew 10:16 "Behold, I send you out as **sheep** in the midst of **wolves**; so be shrewd as serpents and innocent as doves.

We are not greater than Jesus and cannot expect better treatment.

John 15:20 Remember the word that I said to you, "A slave is not greater than his master." If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you; if they kept My word, they will keep yours also.

Fear not, you can only be killed.

Luke 12:1-9 Under these circumstances, after so many thousands of people had gathered together that they were stepping on one another, He began saying to His disciples first *of all*, "Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy. 2 "But there is nothing covered up that will not be revealed, and hidden that will not be known. 3 "Accordingly, whatever you have said in the dark will be heard in the light, and what you have whispered in the inner rooms will be proclaimed upon the housetops. 4 "I say to you, My friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that have no more that they can do. 5 "But I will warn you whom to fear: fear the One who, after He has killed, has authority to cast into hell; yes, I tell you, fear Him! 6 "Are not five sparrows sold for two cents? *Yet* not one of them is forgotten before God. 7 "Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Do not fear; you are more valuable than many sparrows. 8 "And I say to you, everyone who confesses Me before men, the Son of Man will confess him also before the angels of God; 9 but he who denies Me before men will be denied before the angels of God.

Courage comes from a divine commission and pure motives

1 Thessalonians 2:1-6 For you yourselves know, brethren, that our coming to you was not in vain, 2 but after we had already suffered and been mistreated in Philippi, as you know, we had the boldness in our God to speak to you the gospel of God amid much opposition. 3 For our exhortation does not *come* from error or impurity or by way of deceit; 4 but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God who examines our hearts. 5 For we never came with flattering speech, as you know, nor with a pretext for greed -- God is witness -- 6 nor did we seek glory from men, either from you or from others, even though as apostles of Christ we might have asserted our authority.

God is greater than all opponents.

2 Chronicles 32:7 "Be strong and courageous, do not fear or be dismayed because of the king of Assyria nor because of all the horde that is with him; for the one with us is greater than the one with him.

God will be with you till the end.

1 Chronicles 28:20 Then David said to his son Solomon, "Be strong and courageous, and act; do not fear nor be dismayed, for the LORD God, my God, is with you. He will not fail you nor forsake you until all the work for the service of the house of the LORD is finished.

Deuteronomy 31:23 Then He commissioned Joshua the son of Nun, and said, "Be strong and courageous, for you shall bring the sons of Israel into the land which I swore to them, and I will be with you."

Deuteronomy 31:8 "The LORD is the one who goes ahead of you; He will be with you. He will not fail you or forsake you. Do not fear or be dismayed."

Haggai 2:4 'But now take courage, Zerubbabel,' declares the LORD, 'take courage also, Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and all you people of the land take courage,' declares the LORD, 'and work; for I am with you,' declares the LORD of hosts.

Acts 18:9 And the Lord said to Paul in the night by a vision, "Do not be afraid *any longer*, but go on speaking and do not be silent; 10 for I am with you, and no man will attack you in order to harm you, for I have many people in this city."

Matthew 28:18-20 And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. 19 "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

The superior hope of the new covenant inspires boldness.

2 Corinthians 3:12 Therefore having such a hope [= vv. 7-9, the superiority of the ministry of the Spirit over the ministry of the letter], we use great boldness in *our* speech.

Wait for the Lord who will vindicate you.

Psalms 27:12-14 Do not deliver me over to the desire of my adversaries, For false witnesses have risen against me, And such as breathe out violence. 13 *I would have despaired* unless I had believed that I would see the goodness of the LORD In the land of the living. 14 Wait for the LORD; Be strong and let your heart take courage; Yes, wait for the LORD.

Psalm 62:4 They have counseled only to thrust him down from his high position; They delight in falsehood; They bless with their mouth, But inwardly they curse. 5 My soul, wait in silence for God only, For my hope is from Him. 6 He only is my rock and my salvation, My stronghold; I shall not be shaken. 7 On God my salvation and my glory *rest*; The rock of my strength, my refuge is in God. 8 Trust in Him at all times, O people; Pour out your heart before Him; God is a refuge for us.

Christ has overcome the troubling world.

John 16:33 "These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world."

Examples of Courage

Esther 4:16 "Go, assemble all the Jews who are found in Susa, and fast for me; do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my maidens also will fast in the same way. And thus I will go in to the king, which is not according to the law; and if I perish, I perish."

Acts 4:18 And when they had summoned them, they commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. 19 But Peter and John answered and said to them, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to give heed to you rather than to God, you be the judge; 20 for we cannot stop speaking about what we have seen and heard."

Acts 4:31 And when they had prayed, the place where they had gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and *began* to speak the word of God with boldness.

Acts 20:24 "But I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself, so that I may finish my course and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify solemnly of the gospel of the grace of God.

Daniel 3:16 Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego replied to the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to give you an answer concerning this matter. 17 "If it be *so*, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the furnace of blazing fire; and He will deliver us out of your hand, O king. 18 "But *even* if *He* does not, let it be known to you, O king, that we are not going to serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up."

Proverbs 28:1 The wicked flee when no one is pursuing, But the righteous are bold as a lion.

Philippians 1:14 and that most of the brethren, trusting in the Lord because of my imprisonment, have far more courage to speak the word of God without fear.

Philippians 1:20 according to my earnest expectation and hope, that I will not be put to shame in anything, but *that* with all boldness, Christ will even now, as always, be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death.

Philippians 1:27 Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or remain absent, I will hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel; 28 in no way alarmed by *your* opponents -- which is a sign of destruction for them, but of salvation for you, and that *too*, from God.

Timothy seemed to struggle with timidity

2 Timothy 1:6 For this reason I remind you to kindle afresh the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands. 7 For God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but of power and love and discipline. 8 Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord or of me His prisoner, but join with *me* in suffering for the gospel according to the power of God,

2 Timothy 1:12 and therefore I suffer as I do. But I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed, and I am sure that he is able to guard until that Day what has been entrusted to me.

2 Timothy 2:3 Suffer hardship with *me*, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus.

2 Timothy 4:5 But you, be sober in all things, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.

Pray for boldness

Ephesians 6:19 and *pray* on my behalf, that utterance may be given to me in the opening of my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel, 20 for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in *proclaiming* it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.

Thoughts and Texts Relating To Humility

One of the connections between courage and humility is that to be consistently bold in the service of truth one must be humble, because one knows that there is the risk of making a mistake and having to apologize and correct oneself. That takes humility. If you are so proud that you don't want to risk being criticized for your mistakes, you may well seek to avoid many issues where you might be more vulnerable to making mistakes or

being criticized. This may look like humility, but will be the concealment of pride that does not want to risk correction.

Another thought about humility and boldness in the truth: sometimes relativism is put forward as the way of humility and conviction about what is true is seen as arrogant. But it may be just the opposite, given how deceitful our hearts are: one may be so proud and eager not to do one's own thing and believe what one wills, that he constructs an epistemology that protects his private fortress of self-created belief rather than making himself vulnerable to correction by submitting to the reality of Truth outside himself. It may sound humble to say, "Your view is likely as good as mine if it works for you," but in reality it may be a way of saying: Stay out of my life and let me believe what I want to believe. This is why Paul said, "The mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able *to do so*, 8 and those who are in the flesh cannot please God."

The main meaning of humility is not the opposite of confidence and conviction but the opposite of self-reliance and self-determination and a refusal to believe and trust in God's free, gracious enabling of all thought and all speaking and all obedience (see James 4:15). Pride is the exaltation of self, not the exaltation of Truth. And it is not arrogant to claim to know the Truth provided one is willing to be corrected by the Truth and does not turn the Truth into a weapon against love.

Toward a definition of humility

In 1908 the British writer G. K. Chesterton described the embryo of today's full-grown adolescent culture called post-modernism. It's already a worn-out phrase. I promise not to use it much. One mark of its "vulgar relativism" (as Michael Novak calls it) is the highjacking of the word "arrogance" to refer to *conviction* and "humility" to refer to *doubt*. Chesterton saw it coming:

What we suffer from today is humility in the wrong place. Modesty has moved from the organ of ambition. Modesty has settled upon the organ of conviction; where it was never meant to be. A man was meant to be doubtful about himself, but undoubting about the truth; this has been exactly reversed. Nowadays the part of a man that a man does assert is exactly the part he ought not to assert – himself. The part he doubts is exactly the part he ought not to doubt – the Divine Reason. . . . The new skeptic is so humble that he doubts if he can even learn. . . . There is a real humility typical of our time; but it so happens that it's practically a more poisonous humility than the wildest prostrations of the ascetic. . . . The old humility made a man doubtful about his efforts, which might make him work harder. But the new humility makes a man doubtful about his aims, which make him stop working altogether. . . . We are on the road to producing a race of man too mentally modest to believe in the multiplication table. (*Orthodoxy* [Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Co., 1957], pp. 31-32)

We have seen it in the resentment over Christians expressing the conviction that Jewish people (like everyone else) need to believe on Jesus to be saved. The most common response to this conviction is that Christians are arrogant. Modern-day humility would never cry, "Fire!" since the smoke might be vapor from the clothes drier.

If humility is not compliance with the relativism, and is not sophomoric skepticism, what is it? This is important, since the Bible says, "God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble" (1 Peter 5:5), and "Everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted" (Luke 14:11). God has told us at least six things about humility.

1. *Humility begins with a sense of subordination to God in Christ.* "A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a slave above his master" (Matthew 10:24). "Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God" (1 Peter 5:6).

2. *Humility does not feel a right to better treatment than Jesus got.* "If they have called the head of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign the members of his household!" (Matthew 10:25). Therefore humility does not return evil for evil. It is not life based on its perceived rights. "Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps; . . . while suffering, He uttered no threats, but handed [his cause] over to Him who judges righteously" (1 Peter 2:21-23).

3. *Humility asserts truth not to bolster ego with control or with triumphs in debate, but as service to Christ and love to the adversary.* "Love rejoices in the truth" (1 Corinthians 13:6). "What I [Jesus] tell you in the darkness, speak in the light. . . . Do not fear" (Matthew 10:27-28). "We do not preach ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your bond-servants for Jesus' sake" (2 Corinthians 4:5)

4. *Humility knows it is dependent on grace for all knowing and believing.* "What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?" (1 Corinthians 4:7). "In humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls" (James 1:21).

5. *Humility knows it is fallible, and so considers criticism and learns from it; but also knows that God has made provision for human conviction and that he calls us to persuade others.* "We see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I will know fully just as I also have been fully known" (1 Corinthians 13:12). "A wise man is he who listens to counsel" (Proverbs 12:15). "Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade men" (2 Corinthians 5:11).

6. *Humility is to believe in the heart and confess with the lips that our life is like a vapor, and that God decides when we die, and that God governs all our accomplishments.* "Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage **in** business and make a profit." 14 Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are *just* a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away. 15 Instead, *you ought* to say, "If the Lord wills, we will live and

also do this or that." 16 But as it is, you boast **in** your arrogance; all such boasting is evil" (James 4:13-16).

Texts relating to humility

All is a free gift

1 Corinthians 4:7 For who regards you as superior? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?

All our labor is a work of grace

1 Corinthians 15:10 But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me did not prove vain; but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me.

Philippians 2:12-13 So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling; 13 for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for *His* good pleasure.

All our successes are owing to Christ in us.

Romans 15:18 For I will not presume to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me, resulting in the obedience of the Gentiles by word and deed,

Christ is exalted in our weaknesses.

2 Corinthians 12:7-10 Because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, for this reason, to keep me from exalting myself, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me -- to keep me from exalting myself! 8 Concerning this I implored the Lord three times that it might leave me. 9 And He has said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness." Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. 10 Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong

Humility gladly acknowledges the great might of God over us.

1 Peter 5:6-7 Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time, casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you.

Greatness is to be a servant

Luke 22:24 And there arose also a dispute among them *as to* which one of them was regarded to be greatest. 25 And He said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who have authority over them are called 'Benefactors.' 26 "But *it is* not this way with you, but the one who is the greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like the servant. 27 "For who is greater, the one who reclines *at the table* or the one who serves? Is it not the one who reclines *at the table*? But I am among you as the one who serves.

Matthew 20:26-28 "It is not this way among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant, 27 and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave; 28 just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."

Philippians 2:3-6 Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; 4 do not *merely* look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. 5 Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, 6 who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped.

A humble willingness to be corrected and to change in view of finite sight

1 Corinthians 13:12 For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I will know fully just as I also have been fully known.

X. Miscellaneous Issues in Preaching

1. The sweet and tender effect of speech that exalts the greatness of God. And the severe power of God's word of judgment.

Deuteronomy 32:1, "Give ear, O heavens, and I will speak; and let the earth hear the words of my mouth. 2 May my teaching drop as the rain, my speech distil as the dew, as the gentle rain upon the tender grass, and as the showers upon the herb. 3 For I will proclaim the name of the LORD. Ascribe greatness to our God!

Jeremiah 23:29, "Is not my word like fire, declares the LORD, and like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces?"

2. How to be a fountain of life for your people

Note the sequence of these verses and see if you can explain how all these are true and interrelated.

Psalms 36:9 For with You is the fountain of life; In Your light we see light.

Proverbs 14:27 The fear of the LORD is a fountain of life, That one may avoid the snares of death.

Proverbs 10:11 The mouth of the righteous is a fountain of life, But the mouth of the wicked conceals violence.

Proverbs 13:14 The teaching of the wise is a fountain of life, To turn aside from the snares of death.

Proverbs 16:22 Understanding is a fountain of life to one who has it, But the discipline of fools is folly.

3. Preaching on issues that might hurt and discourage people

The danger of not addressing an issue of sin because those who have committed it in their past or recently and have repented and will be made to feel uncomfortable hearing it denounced. For example, divorce, missionary drop-out owing to worldliness or discouragement or loss of direction, lack of discipline in prayer and Bible reading, failures in parental discipline and spiritual leadership. In all of church life we must be aware of the reality of emotional blackmail from the easily wounded.

Similarly the danger of not addressing an issue of defect that hurts people but which some can't help and thus discouraging them by making them more aware of the hurtfulness of the condition they are in and cannot change. For example, single moms and the hurtfulness in our culture of fatherlessness.

4. C. S. Lewis advice to children in writing is good advice to preachers in speaking.

(*Letters to Children*, p. 64, letter from June 26, 1956, quoted in Wayne Martindale and Jerry Root, *The Quotable Lewis*, [Wheaton IL: Tyndale House Pub., 1989],p. 623).

1. Always try to use the language so as to make quite clear what you mean and make sure your sentence couldn't mean anything else.
2. Always prefer the clean direct word to the long, vague one. Don't *implement* promises, but *keep* them.
3. Never use abstract nouns when concrete ones will do. If you mean "More people died" don't say "Mortality rose."
4. In writing, don't use adjectives which merely tell us how you want us to feel about the things you are describing. I mean, instead of telling us the thing is "terrible," describe it so that we'll be terrified. Don't say it was "delightful"; make us say "delightful" when we've read the description. You see, all those words (horrifying, wonderful, hideous, exquisite) are only like saying to your readers "Please, will you do my job for me."
5. Don't use words too big for the subject. Don't say "infinitely" when you mean "very"; otherwise you'll have no word left when you want to talk about something *really* infinite.

5. Preaching not only translates and contextualizes the Bible's meaning for the audience, it also seeks to construct conceptual categories that may be missing from the world view or mental framework of the listeners.

1. All persons are accountable for their choices though their choices are ultimately ordained by God.
2. It is not sin in God to will that there be sin.
3. God's will of decree is not always the same as his will of command, and may indeed contradict it.
4. God's ultimate goal is the display and exaltation of his own glory.
5. Sin is not primarily what hurts man but what belittles God through expressing unbelief or indifference to his superior worth.
6. The key to the Christian life is learning the secret of acting such that our acts are done as the acts of Another.

7. Those who belong to Christ have crucified the flesh.

8. Working for God (in the sense of Acts 17:25) is an assault on his deity and the nullification of grace.

6. Related thoughts (to #5) from William Willimon

"This Culture is Overrated," by William Willimon in *Christianity Today*, May 19, 1997, p. 27

The Bible doesn't want to speak to the modern world; the Bible wants to convert the modern world.

We who may have lived through the most violent century in history of the world—based on body counts alone—ought not to give too much credence to the modern world. The modern world is not only the realm of the telephone and allegedly "critical thinking," but also the habitat of Auschwitz, two of the bloodiest wars of history, and assorted totalitarian schemes. Why would our preaching want to be comprehensible to that world?

Unfortunately, too often Christians have treated the modern world as if it were a fact, a reality to which we were obligated to adjust, rather than a point of view from which we might argue.

When they speak of reaching out to our culture through the gospel, we must be reminded that the gospel is also culture. In the attempt to "translate" the gospel into the language of the culture, something is lost. We are learning that you have not said "salvation" when you say "self-esteem." "The American Way" is not equivalent to "the kingdom of God."

You cannot learn to speak French by reading a French novel in English translation -- you must sit for the grammar, the syntax, and the vocabulary and learn it. So you cannot know Christianity by having it translated into some other medium like Marxism, feminism, or the language of self-esteem. Christianity is a distinct culture with its own vocabulary, grammar, and practices. Too often, when we try to speak to our culture we merely adopt the culture of the moment rather than present the gospel to the culture.

Our time as preachers is better spent inculturating modern, late-20th-century Americans into that culture called church. When I walk into a class on introductory physics, I expect not to understand immediately most of the vocabulary, terminology, and concepts. Why should it be any different for modern Americans walking into a church?

This is why the concept of "user-friendly churches" often leads to churches getting used.

It is a strange assumption for Americans to feel they already have the equipment necessary to comprehend the gospel without any modification of lifestyle, without any struggle -- in short, without being born-again.

7. Intensity

Quoting from the *Spirit of Revival* in Volume 25, No. 1 published by Life Action Ministries, no date, by Byron Paulus, writing about Leonard Ravenhill. He, says, "He carried a special burden for ministers of the gospel: missing from our pulpits: intensity, intensity, eternity." (p. 2)

8. On the compelling value of zeal

2 Corinthians 9:2, "I know your readiness, of which I boast about you to the people of Macedonia, saying that Achaia has been ready since last year. And *your zeal has stirred up most of them.*"