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INTERNATIONAL
JOURNAL FOR PASTORS

PREACHING *in the* SPIRIT



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OUR FLOCKS ARE
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God's longing for His church

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“Jesus didn’t always teach in parables, then. Most of His teaching was deep, theological truth that startled His listeners.”

Spiritually rooted leadership

The lead article of the July 2019 issue, by Dan Towar, titled “Never Hang Alone,” is a soul-searching one to whom-ever reads it with the intent to put his or her leadership style right. After a thorough look into this article, my brain branded it, “An antidote against single-handed/high-handed leadership.” It helps all people at all levels to synergize the strategic, tactical, and operational functions of their sanctioned positions. How I wish each person accessing this article owned it 100 percent.

—Wanzalabana Misaki Maate,
Rwenzori Field, Uganda

Biblically based preaching

I deeply appreciated the September 2019 issue of *Ministry* magazine. I also have found the power of stories and have used them frequently in my preaching ministry. I thought that perhaps you might be interested in reading some of my sermons in story form and am sending you two

of my books, *Preach a Story* and *Preach Another Story*. I hope you enjoy them.

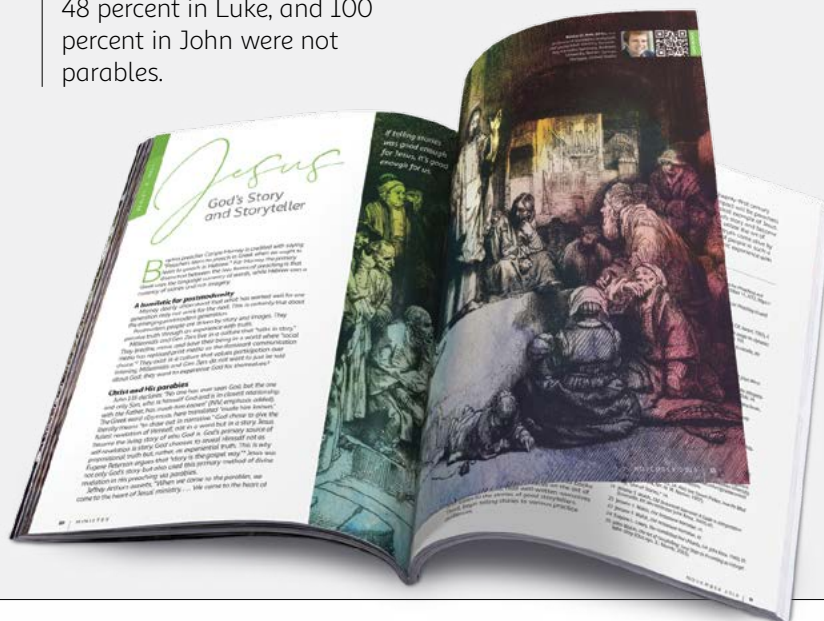
—John E. Huegel, New Braunfels,
Texas, United States

Theologically grounded teaching

The article, “Jesus—God’s Story and Storyteller” (Kenley Hall, November 2019) states the vital importance of preachers being storytellers, and records that 43 percent of Jesus’ words in Matthew, 16 percent in Mark, and 52 percent in Luke were parables. But looking at the converse of this statement—then 57 percent of Jesus’ words in Matthew, 84 percent in Mark, 48 percent in Luke, and 100 percent in John were not parables.

Jesus didn’t always teach in parables, then. Most of His teaching was deep, theological truth that startled His listeners. Just read the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5–7, Luke 14, the Upper Room Discourse in John 13–17, and Jesus’ words in John 6 for example. In my opinion, while stories might engage people’s emotions, they do not have the lasting impact that God’s Word, preached and taught under the anointing of the Holy Spirit, has. While stories have their place in sermons, they should just be a supplement to the powerful truths of the Bible. I wonder what the church would look like if preachers would spend as much time down on their knees before God seeking His face preparing theologically and biblically based sermons . . . as they do seeking for and downloading stories from the internet.

—Frank Nolton, Pastor, New Hope
Community Church, Lodi, California, United
States





God is love—know it

A family was in a serious traffic accident. The youngest son, Mike, was seriously injured and needed blood. His big brother, Danny, was only eight years old but had the same blood type. Danny's dad explained carefully how important it was for Mike to have blood and how great it would be if Danny could help out. There was silence for a while, then Danny said, "Daddy, I'll give my blood so Mike can get better." They put a needle in his vein and drew the blood they needed. Once the needle was retracted, Danny looked up at his dad and, with tears running down his cheeks, said, "Daddy, when do I die?" That was when his father realized that Danny didn't know he was just giving some blood. He thought he was giving his life.

When the Holy Spirit guides you into all truth, how should a preacher respond?

Truthful love

The central truth to all other truths is that God is love. All heaven—in fact, all of the universe—is based on one truth—God is love. If not based on this truth, items meant to be blessings often misrepresent God and even damage His work. The religious leaders in Jesus' time may have had wonderful doctrines; but they had lost the central point—God is love (see John 5:39). We need to make sure that what we believe, think, and how we act is centered on, depends on, and is tested by this main truth (see 1 Corinthians 13). Otherwise, it has no power (v. 1).

Everything we believe and know in order to function needs to be measured and supported by this one vital truth. A desire, a thirst for a deeper knowledge of God is absolutely crucial to our own spiritual growth and to the growth of the church (see 1 John 4:8). God is love—believe it.

Testing love

We may honestly think we love God, but how do we test that? The acidic test of

love for God is the love we show for those around us, both those we like or agree with and those we don't. In the Bible, love is manifested through sacrifice. "Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends" (John 15:13, NKJV; see also 1 Cor. 13:5; John 3:16; Eph. 5:1, 2). If you pastor a church or preach in the pulpit but are unwilling or have no time to serve the least of these, you may think you are a Christian, but you are not.

The greatest challenge to walking the talk is in our homes. Mike Mason states, "Love convinces a couple that they are the greatest romance that has ever been, that no two people have ever loved as they do, and that they will sacrifice absolutely anything in order to be together. Then marriage asks them to prove it."¹ God is love—show it.

Telling love

God's children are people of love and mercy. Only that can change the family, the church, and the world (see Zech. 7:9, 10; John 15:12, 13). Author Ellen G. White states, "In every true disciple this love, like sacred fire, burns on the altar of the heart. It was on the earth that the love of God was revealed through Christ. It is on the earth that His children are to reflect this love. Thus, sinners will be led to the cross to behold the Lamb of God."²

Preachers, there is no other way to tell God's story. To reflect upon this love, to make it the goal of your life, is the only way to real transformation, abundant life here, and eternal life there. This is the gospel, this is genuine Christianity, this is when Christ's character is manifested in His children, and this is when Jesus can come and take us home. God is love—and if you know it, tell it.



- 1 Mike Mason, *The Mystery of Marriage* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Books, 2005), 53, 54.
- 2 Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1911), 334.



GOD'S LONGING FOR HIS CHURCH



“But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth”

(John 16:13a, NIV).

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SCAN FOR AUDIO

I never tire of telling the story of the Seventh-day Adventist church in Murmansk, Russia, high above the arctic circle. The church was only 22 members strong, but due to attrition, it whittled down to 8: the pastor, his wife, and six men. They knew they were going to be extinct unless something radical took place.

The men decided to get together and pray. They knew that the Holy Spirit comes only in answer to fervent prayer. So they prayed for the Holy Spirit, for willingness to sacrifice for others, for opportunities to share the love of Christ with those in darkness. They gathered every morning at six o'clock. The men knelt around an ice-fishing hole, put their arms around each other, and prayed earnestly for the fire of the Spirit to melt their hearts. Then, they stripped to their shorts and submerged in the freezing waters as a testament of their willingness to baptize anyone who was ready *now*, without waiting for spring.

People might consider this behavior eccentric, if not fanatical. Yet, they believed. And they kept on praying. Within a year, the Holy Spirit had led 72 additional people to their fold. The church experienced a 1,000 percent growth rate! And in the succeeding years, they planted churches all over their neighboring communities.

The promise of the Spirit

Ever since sin defaced the image of God in Eden, it has been God's earnest desire to fill His children with His Spirit so that they can again reflect their Maker. In the Old Testament, God's Spirit is mentioned about 88 times. The Spirit filled individuals for specific tasks, such as in the cases of Bezalel (Exod. 31:2–5), Samson (Judg. 14:5, 6), or Saul (1 Sam. 10:10, 11). More often, the fullness of the Spirit was associated with a prophetic ministry, such as in the cases of Azariah (2 Chron. 15:1–8), Micah (Mic. 3:8), Daniel (Dan. 5:13, 14; 6:3), and Ezekiel (Ezek. 3:4–27). But God longed to see the day when His people would *all* be filled with the Spirit.

Instead of trying to obey God by their own will (Exod. 19:8; 24:3, 7), His people would obey because a new heart and a new spirit—His own—would be within them (Ezek. 36:26, 27). Instead of only a few being full of the Spirit, everyone would be filled with the Spirit (Joel 2:28, 29)!

The promise of the Comforter

This was also the burden of Jesus from the start. Yet only John the Baptist understood this at first (Matt. 3:11; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16; John 1:33; Acts 1:5; 11:16). Such emphasis is unequaled and unprecedented in the Bible: “‘As for me, I baptize you with water for repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, . . . He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire’ ” (Matt. 3:11, NASB). The Master told His disciples, “‘It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing.’ ” And how would they obtain this life? He answered, “‘The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life’ ” (John 6:63, NKJV).

From the very beginning, the key has been to listen to the words of God, to ponder on their meaning, to pray over them (Rom. 10:17). As faith becomes more real, so does the work and presence of God’s Spirit. “‘I will pray the Father,’ ” Jesus said, “‘and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever—the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you. I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you’ ” (John 14:16–18, NKJV).

Who is this Helper? The original Greek word used here is *parakletos*, meaning “one who comes alongside.” It is variously translated as Comforter, Counselor/Sponsor, or Advocate. The word has legal connotations, as in someone speaking on behalf of another.¹ Jesus personalized the ministry of the Holy Spirit. This Spirit is not an ethereal influence or an esoteric theological concept. He is God’s Other, to be by our side for all our needs! Jesus said He would be “another” Helper, one like Him. On the one hand, Jesus as fully human intercedes for us in heaven (Heb. 7:25), and on the other, the Holy Spirit—the *Parakletos*—as fully divine intercedes for us on earth (Rom. 8:26, 27)!

The premise of the Cross

It was not until the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost that they fully realized His words. But there was a problem. Actually, two.

The fullness of the Spirit of God upon the New Testament church could not come until the victory of the Cross could be realized, until the sacrifice of Christ on the cross could be processed and understood. The apostle John wrote that “the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified” (John 7:37–39, NKJV). The Holy Spirit not yet given? Clearly, the Old Testament has a number of references about the giving of the Holy Spirit to different individuals, but there is a sense in which the Spirit was not *fully* given to the church. And that had to do with the Cross.

John linked the giving of the Spirit to the glorification of Jesus. When was Jesus glorified? Peter tells us when: “‘The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified His Servant Jesus, whom you delivered up and denied in the presence of Pilate. . . . But you . . . killed the Prince of life, whom God raised from the dead, of which we are witnesses’ ” (Acts 3:13–15, NKJV). The glorification of Jesus took place as a result of His sacrifice on the cross. On the day of Pentecost, 50 days after Passover—the day when Christ died—Christ was glorified by the Father in heaven.

In ancient times, when kings returned from war victorious, they entered their city marching in a procession. The king first, on a white steed; then his generals; followed by his soldiers; and, finally, a string of enemy captives followed in tow. The people gave gifts to the conquerors, praising them for their victory. This was a day of great rejoicing. Something similar happened in heaven 10 days after Christ’s ascension. Ephesians 4 alludes to this: “But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ’s gift. Therefore He says: ‘When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive, and gave gifts to men’ ” (vv. 7, 8). Paul here quotes from Psalm 68:18, alluding to Moses ascending Mount Sinai to receive God’s great gift of His law. The rabbis called Pentecost “The Season of the Giving of Our Law” or “Feast of the Revelation,” for this marked the earliest national convocation held



after the Exodus at which Jehovah presented the decalogue to Israel on Mount Sinai.²

But how could Paul take the liberty to change Psalm 68:18, to say, “He gave gifts” (see v. 11) instead of “received gifts”? Because he applies this to Christ. Christ as conqueror over death received His gifts in the lives of people raised from death! Matthew tells us “many” resurrected at Christ’s resurrection (Matt. 27:52, 53), constituting the firstfruits of Jesus’ victory over sin and death! These were the “captives” Jesus took to heaven with Him. These, as well as the heavenly hosts, glorified the Lord Jesus in heaven on the day of Pentecost. But instead of just receiving gifts, Jesus gave them as well. We call them the gifts of the Spirit.

church. That’s what happened in Acts 1, which paved the way for the power of the Spirit seen in Acts 2 and beyond.

The purpose of the church

What about the church today? Are we focused on the Cross and willing to love one another? Do we have personal communion with the God who gave all for us and have corporate communion with one another?

The early church loved each other in tangible, practical, and transformative ways (Acts 4:32–35). We can anticipate a demonstration of Christ’s love toward one another today that reflects what happened then. The early believers preached the Word of God with great power, despite their lack

TO UNDERSTAND THE CROSS AND TO BE ONE IN COMMUNITY ARE THE TWO NECESSARY PREMISES FOR THE RECEPTION OF THE FULLNESS OF THE SPIRIT IN THE CHURCH.

The premise of community

But there is a second premise that needed to be met before the fullness of the Spirit could be realized. When you think about the 10 days between Christ’s ascension and His glorification, you can imagine those 120 disciples huddled in the upper room going over the events of the last few days. Little had they understood Jesus’ numerous references to the Cross. But the more they prayed and thought about it, the more they got it. They saw the immensity of God’s sacrifice and love for human beings, and all that was left for them to do was simply surrender all. This is what brought an otherwise-unruly group of people into “one accord” (Acts 1:14). After all, it is “the goodness of God” that “leads you to repentance” (Rom. 2:4, NKJV). This focus on the Cross is what made them one.

To understand the Cross and to be one in community are the two necessary premises for the reception of the fullness of the Spirit in the

of formal education and social pedigree, with signs and wonders accompanying their ministry (Acts 4:5–13; 5:12–16; 6:7; 8:5–8). And why should we not expect the same today?

Jesus Himself gave His church the infallible formula: “ ‘Wait [together] for the Promise of the Father . . . [and] you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit. . . . But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me’ ” (Acts 1:4, 5, 8, NKJV).

The Holy Spirit at work—this is the longing of God for His church. Will you allow Him to accomplish it?



1 See notes in J. Ramsey Michaels, *The Gospel of John*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010), 783, 784.

2 See *Midrash Rabbah on the Song of Songs* 182n5; 234n3, referenced in Leslie Hardinge, *With Jesus in His Sanctuary* (Harrisburg, PA: American Cassette Ministries Book Division, 1991), 443. See also Merrill C. Tenney, *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1976), 5:775–777.

The **INSEPARABLE DUO:** The Holy Spirit and preaching

The power of the Holy Spirit is indispensable when crafting and delivering effective sermons. To downplay His role in preaching creates a false dichotomy between the discipline of homiletics and the doctrine of pneumatology. The Holy Spirit plays seven important roles in the life of the preacher, the preparation of a sermon, the preaching moment, and the lives of listeners.



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SCAN FOR AUDIO

Role 1: Without the Holy Spirit, there would be no . . . Bible

In discussing the Spirit's role in preaching, the first thing to underscore is that without the Holy Spirit, we would have no Bible to preach from. The Bible declares that all Scripture originated through "inspiration of God" (2 Tim. 3:16, NKJV) and that the biblical prophets were "moved by the Holy Spirit" (2 Pet. 1:21, NKJV). The words of Scripture are "not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit" (1 Cor. 2:13, ESV). This indicates that, through the influence of the Holy Spirit, God revealed His thoughts to the biblical authors, who, in turn, utilized the best words in their own vocabulary to convey the divine messages. So, "it is not the words of the Bible that are inspired, but the men that were inspired. Inspiration acts not on the man's words or his expressions but on the man himself, who, under the influence of the Holy Ghost, is imbued with thoughts. But the words receive the impress of the individual mind. The divine mind is diffused. The divine mind and will is combined with the human mind and will; thus the utterances of the man are the word of God."¹

In addition to inspiring the Scriptures, it is also the Holy Spirit, as James Forbes says, "who has shepherded the word through compilation, translation, canonization, and transmission to the present time."²

Role 2: Without the Holy Spirit, there would be no . . . preaching

Even beyond the Bible, the Holy Spirit also bestows the spiritual gift of preaching from Scripture. While the Pauline epistles do not directly refer to preaching as a spiritual gift, we can infer that it is, based on Paul's description of the gift of prophecy. Sam Chan posits that "Paul primarily uses the term 'prophets' and 'prophecy' to describe persons who proclaim—*forthtell*—the word of God. . . . It is upon such Spirit-revealed proclamation (Eph 3:5) that the church is founded (Eph 2:20). . . .

"If so, then it is hard to see how preaching can be essentially different from Paul's primary understanding of prophecy. . . . *Although 'prophecy' is not restricted to 'preaching,' it primarily denotes 'preaching.'*"³

Preaching, then, is a spiritual gift that the Holy Spirit gives for the purpose of proclaiming and celebrating the good news of Jesus Christ.⁴

Role 3: Without the Holy Spirit, there would be no . . . preacher

In bestowing the spiritual gift of preaching, the Holy Spirit determines who receives the call to be a preacher. Greg Heisler affirms this notion when he states: "Spirit-led preaching can only be undertaken by a Spirit-called preacher. First there must be a divine call to preach that is firmly grounded in God's sovereign initiative, and that comes through the Spirit's inward prompting."⁵ It was indeed the Holy Spirit's prompting in Jeremiah's and Paul's lives that resulted in their declaring, "His word is in my heart like a fire, a fire shut up in my bones. I am weary of holding it in; indeed, I cannot" (Jer. 20:9, NIV), and, "I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!" (1 Cor. 9:16, NIV).

In addition to being "called to preach," those whom the Spirit selects are also "sent" to publicly represent God (see Rom. 10:14, 15, NRSV). For Paul, the preacher is a spokesman for another—and not as someone with his own message authorized by himself.⁶ Hence, it is "impossible to truly preach the gospel and not be called, commissioned, empowered, gifted and sent" by the Holy Spirit.⁷ Like Jesus, every preacher should declare with confidence that " 'the Spirit of the LORD is upon me, because He has anointed me to preach' " (Luke 4:18, NKJV).

Role 4: Without the Holy Spirit, there would be no . . . understanding

Since the Bible is the product of God's mind revealed through the Spirit (1 Cor. 2:12, 13), we can comprehend both the original meaning and its

present application only through the assistance of the Spirit of God (vv. 13, 14; 2 Cor. 3:14–18; cf. John 6:45; 16:13).⁸ Recognizing the need of the Holy Spirit in gaining a proper understanding of Scripture, Luther declares: “Nobody who has not the Spirit of God sees a jot of what is in the Scriptures. All men have their hearts darkened, so that, even when they can discuss and quote all that is in Scripture, they do not understand or really know any of it. . . . The spirit is needed for the understanding of all Scripture and every part of Scripture.”⁹

The Holy Spirit also reveals to the preacher what the congregation needs to hear. It is through prayer that preachers invite the Holy Spirit to touch their hearts and to “impress the mind with ideas calculated to meet the cases of those who need help.”¹⁰ Thomas also suggests that if the Holy Spirit is going to transform the lives of people, “the Spirit must be involved at the point where we commence sermon preparation.”¹¹

On the other hand, the preacher should never use the Holy Spirit as an excuse for not spending quality time in crafting a sermon. Such neglect clearly ignores Paul’s counsel to “be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:15, NKJV).

Underscoring the point that laziness vexes the Holy Spirit, Spurgeon states: “I cannot imagine the Spirit waiting at the door

of a sluggard, and supplying the deficiencies created by indolence.”¹²

Preachers are to rely on the Holy Spirit as they employ the principles of hermeneutics and homiletics. They must seek the Holy Spirit’s leading in selecting and studying the passage, discovering the exegetical concept, formulating the homiletical idea, determining the sermon’s purpose, choosing an illustration, and outlining and writing the sermon itself.

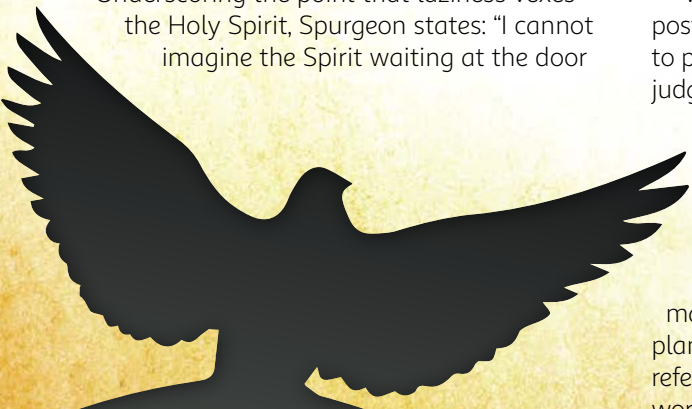
Role 5: Without the Holy Spirit, there would be no . . . power

Having received a proper interpretation of the passage and the message to proclaim, the preacher, during the delivery of the sermon, must also demonstrate a “strong reliance on the presence and power of the Holy Spirit.”¹³ Spurgeon states that “it were better to speak six words in the power of the Holy Ghost . . . than to preach seventy years worth of sermons without the Spirit.”¹⁴

Ultimately, the Holy Spirit empowers preaching by working within and alongside the individual’s words to bear witness to Jesus Christ—and not by the preacher’s persona or rhetorical skill.¹⁵ Preaching devoid of the Holy Spirit’s power will never result in transformed lives.

We especially need the Holy Spirit’s power in a postmodern world in which it is often intimidating to preach truth to those cynical, skeptical, and judgmental of anything that confronts sin, calls for repentance, and challenges the status quo. Preaching with power necessitates openness to the moving of the Holy Spirit. During the presentation of the sermon, the Holy Spirit can bring new insights to the preacher’s mind. At other times, the Spirit may guide the speaker to replace or even omit a planned sermon illustration, to quote a scriptural reference not originally included, or to change a word or phrase to express a thought more clearly. Spurgeon suggests preachers should not get so tied to their manuscripts that they quench the Spirit’s leading during their sermons:

“I do not see where the opportunity is given to the Spirit of God to help us in preaching, if every jot and tittle is settled beforehand. Do let your trust in God be free to move hand and foot. While you are preaching, believe that God the Holy Spirit can give you, in the self-same hour, what you shall speak; and can make you say what



*It is through prayer
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with ideas calculated to meet the
cases of those who need help.”*

you had not previously thought of; yes, and make this newly-given utterance to be the very arrow-head of the discourse, which shall strike deeper into the heart than anything you had prepared.”¹⁶

Role 6: Without the Holy Spirit, there would be no . . . proclamation of Christ

The Holy Spirit also reveals the personal Word of God, Jesus (John 1:1, 14; 15:26; 16:14). For Vessel Kerr, “it is the Spirit, the Great Communicator, who takes the risen Christ out of the realm of mere ideas and history, and makes Him a present reality to the consciousness of the believer.”¹⁷ Fully convinced that the Holy Spirit has and continues to fulfill Jesus’ prediction, H. M. S. Richards writes: “The Holy Spirit said more about Jesus than about Himself. The Holy Spirit doesn’t say much about Himself. . . . He talks about Jesus.”¹⁸

Role 7: Without the Holy Spirit, there would be no . . . conviction and conversion

Irrespective of how well researched a sermon is or how eloquent the speaker, no one will be converted unless the Holy Spirit works on the hearts of the listeners. As Ellen White so aptly states: “While we are to preach the word, we can not impart the power that will quicken the soul, and cause righteousness and praise to spring forth. In the preaching of the word there must be the working of an agency beyond any human power. Only through the divine Spirit will the word be living and powerful to renew the soul unto eternal life. This is what Christ tried to impress upon His disciples. He taught that it was nothing they possessed in themselves which would give success to their labors, but that it is the miracle-working power of God which gives efficiency to His own word.”¹⁹

Many preachers employ guilt and fear to coerce people into committing their lives to Jesus. But that places human manipulation above the working of the Holy Spirit, reducing preaching to little more than a theatrical performance. We can overcome such homiletic powerlessness when we recognize that “only the Spirit can birth our hearers again into seeing the kingdom (John 3:3), and only by the Spirit can our hearers mature (Gal. 3:3).”²⁰

Indispensable

The Holy Spirit is indispensable to effective preaching. Preachers must regain and maintain the conviction that “if greatly improved quality

of preaching is to be experienced in our time, it will stem from the renewing power and presence of the Holy Spirit.”²¹ Recognizing the necessity of constant reliance on the Holy Spirit during the sermon preparation and delivery process, and for the response of the hearers to the message, the prayer of every preacher ought to be, “Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me. Melt me, mold me, fill me, use me.”²²



- 1 Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1 (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1958), 21.
- 2 James Forbes, *The Holy Spirit and Preaching* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1989), 19.
- 3 Sam Chan, *Preaching as the Word of God: Answering an Old Question With Speech-Act Theory* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2016), 240, 241; emphasis in the original.
- 4 Chan, *Preaching as the Word*, 47.
- 5 Greg Heisler, *Spirit-Led Preaching: The Holy Spirit's Role in Sermon Preparation and Delivery* (Nashville, TN: B&H Pub. Group, 2007), 71.
- 6 J. A. Fitzmyer, *Romans: A New Translation With Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Bible, vol. 33 (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008), 596.
- 7 Frank A. Thomas, *They Like to Never Quit Praisin' God* (Cleveland, OH: The Pilgrim Press, 2013), 46.
- 8 Richard M. Davidson, “Biblical Interpretation,” *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, vol. 12 of the Commentary Reference Series (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 2001), 67.
- 9 M. X. Seaman, *Illumination and Interpretation: The Holy Spirit's Role in Hermeneutics* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2013), 26.
- 10 Mervyn A. Warren, *Ellen White on Preaching* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 2010), 34.
- 11 Thomas, *They Like to Never Quit*, 86.
- 12 Charles Haddon Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students: The 28 Lectures, Complete and Unabridged—A Spiritual Classic of Christian Wisdom, Prayer, and Preaching in the Ministry* (Scotts Valley, CA: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2018), 156.
- 13 Leonora Tubbs Tisdale, *Prophetic Preaching: A Pastoral Approach* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2010), 10.
- 14 John Stott, *Between Two Worlds* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2017), 263.
- 15 Patrick W. T. Johnson and David J. Lose, *The Mission of Preaching: Equipping the Community for Faithful Witness* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 2015) 220.
- 16 C. H. Spurgeon, *Select Writings of C. H. Spurgeon*, vol. 4 (n.p.: Irving Risch, n.d.), n.p.
- 17 Vassel Kerr, *The Power of Biblical Preaching* (Oshawa, ON: Miracle Press, 2001), 27.
- 18 H. M. S. Richards, *Feed My Sheep* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 2005), 128.
- 19 Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons* (Battle Creek, MI: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1900), 64.
- 20 Zack Eswine, *Preaching to a Post-Everything World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2008), 200.
- 21 Forbes, *Holy Spirit and Preaching*, 11.
- 22 Daniel Iverson, “Spirit of the Living God,” 1926.

NARRATIVE PREACHING:

Engaging young listeners

STEPHEN REASOR

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SCAN FOR AUDIO

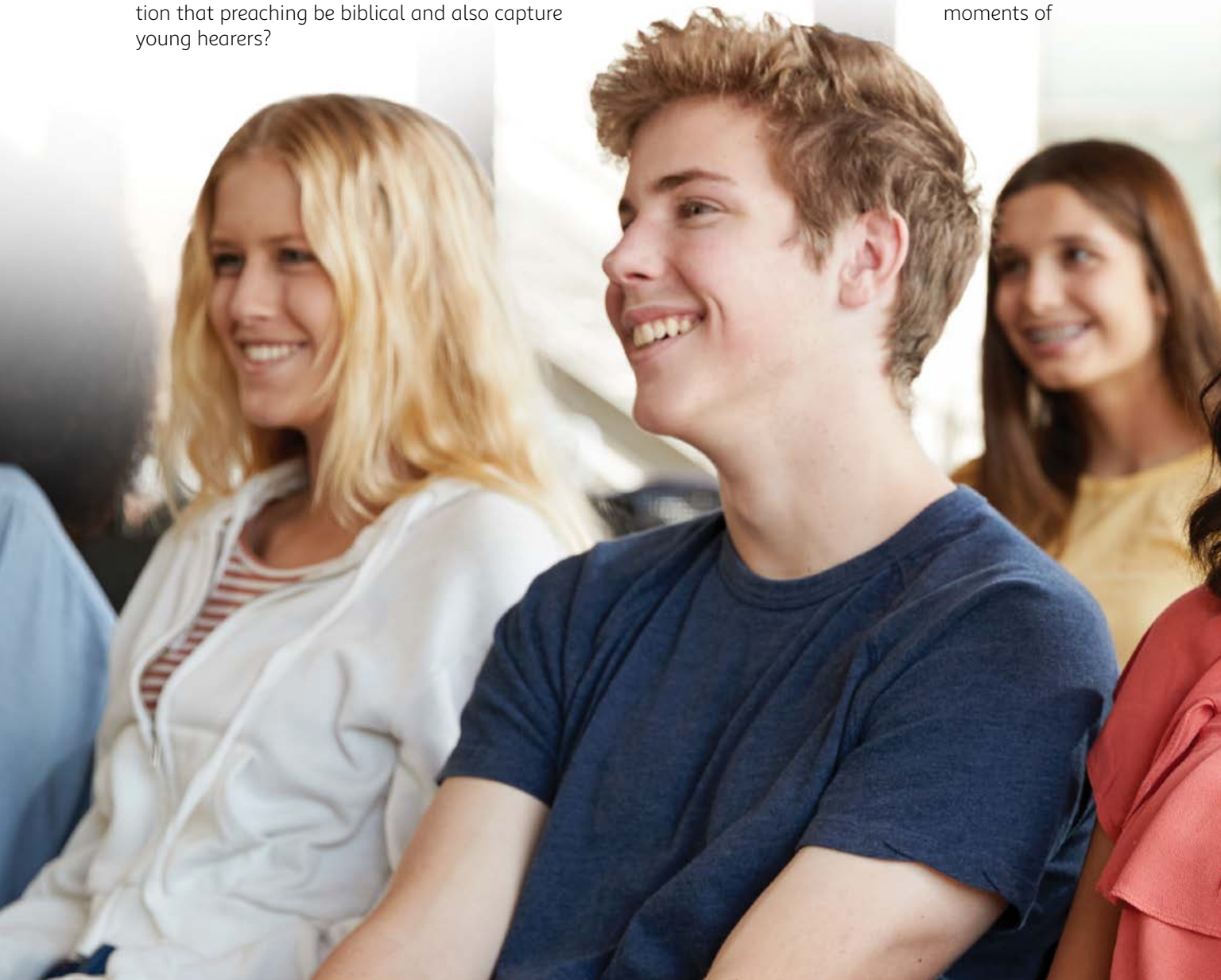
In general, because young people do not generally love preaching, there are two competing demands on the preacher. The first, from the church at large, is the expectation that preaching be biblical.¹ The second, from the young people, is, "Don't make it boring!" Young people are quick to tune out a sermon if they get lost or sense it is not relevant.

So how can preachers both meet the expectation that preaching be biblical and also capture young hearers?

Ambiguity and interest

In 1980, Eugene Lowry, in *The Homiletical Plot*, gave the basic elements of a narrative form that, he proposes, can make a biblical sermon interesting.² He describes the following five stages:

1. Upsetting the equilibrium. In this first stage, the preacher injects an unanswered question, problem, or sense of ambiguity into the initial moments of



the sermon. Lowry claims that initial ambiguity is “a motivator both to attention and to action. One cannot breathe easily until some solution occurs. And when resolution comes, the result is both a knowing and a feeling.”³ There are two important benefits of initial ambiguity: heightened interest and attention, ideally leading to a sense of presence; and audience identification with certain characters or positions before the plot twist.

2. *Analyzing the discrepancy.* The preacher then considers possible answers to the solution, answers that, at some point, fail to resolve the problem satisfactorily. This helps build a sense of mounting tension, which allows the audience to experience the sermon in a way analogous to reading a good novel, watching a movie, or playing a video game. We are “caught up in it.”

3. *Disclosing the clue to resolution.* The preacher then presents a shift in perspective that allows resolution of the problem. As Lowry describes it, “Against such an analytical wall, often there comes a resolution, a clue which feels revelatory. . . . Until found, the matter seems irresolute; after being found, the matter seems self-evident!”⁴

If the audience has

seen themselves in a certain position or character in the initial stages of the sermon, then the plot twist lets them see themselves in a new light as well. “It is often the case that the clue making understandable the issue at stake comes as a surprise. It is not quite what one had expected, and ‘arrives’ from where you were not looking. And *it turns things upside down*.”⁵ This new perspective becomes an internal shift in perspective, a shift that the hearers have realized themselves.

4. *Experiencing the gospel.* The preacher then explores the claims of the gospel from this new perspective, which allows for a new understanding of foundational attitudes and beliefs.

5. *Anticipating the consequences.* The preacher concludes by inviting the audience to consider the potential implications of this new perspective and new understanding of the gospel.

“Presence”

In one study, young people listening to a sermon given in this form said that they had



experienced a sense of being within the sermon plot.⁶ In other words, they experienced “presence.” In group interviews afterward, they described this sense of presence without prompting from the interviewer.⁷ One young person claimed, “It was more like a conversation with us, more, to say, than, just like, telling us. He wasn’t just telling us; he was talking to us about it.” Another replied, “And if you had a question, he didn’t just directly say, or give you a list, he made you think about your question [general agreement from the other students], and you kinda had to answer it for yourself. And it was better than him just telling you.” The introduction of ambiguity and building tension facilitated a shift in experience, from observer to actor.

Although the participants described a sense of “presence” when discussing both nonnarrative and narrative content, they were more likely to describe “presence” in the sermon during the narrative aspects of the sermons. However, this enhanced interest in the sermon experience is beneficial only if it results in positive change in doctrinal knowledge and attitude. The enhanced sense of “presence” during narrative portions of

a sermon correlates
with findings
related to
doctrinal

attitudes. Positive response to the doctrines presented in the various sermon groups was proportional to the narrative content of each group.

What the study showed, basically, was that sermons, even doctrinal sermons, that had the more narrative content and form, enabled students to have more sense of “presence,” and they were more positive about those than any other ones. Although other factors were involved, higher narrative content and form may lead to an increase both in the understanding of and positive attitudes toward doctrine when preaching to young people.

Tell a good story

Thus, telling a story well is the responsibility of the faithful speaker. Stories must be taken seriously when preaching. As Friedrich Schleiermacher noted a century and a half ago, “One distinguishes the instructive speech from the one that moves. We cannot accept this absolute distinction as appropriate, for instructing and convincing, considered entirely separately, are both the vocation of the preacher.”⁸ This becomes especially true when speaking to young people. Young people sometimes feel that there are already too many voices telling them what to do. Instruction without meaningful context simply

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sounds like one more authority-claiming voice. On the other hand, a good story can help young people act as their own moral agents.

The young people noted two narrative elements that they viewed as instrumental in their sense of being in the story and its power to change their perspectives:

First, the stories did not have the positive ending often associated with Bible stories. As one student noted, “it was so harsh.” Disturbing stories captivate young people.⁹ Biblical stories that would be inappropriate to tell in some venues fascinate teenagers. I believe this stems from the idea, especially among church-raised youth, that the Bible is a collection of pleasant stories about nice people and that everything works out well in the end. While there certainly are pleasant stories in the Bible, Scripture deals with the realities of a sinful world. Teenagers, who have deep questions about life, may mistakenly think that the Bible has little to say about the ugly world they face. They are surprised, perhaps, to find stories of danger, death, love lost, and failure in the Bible.

Second, in the end, study participants saw themselves in a character they had already judged. The narrative allowed them to make an objective decision about the story before they saw themselves in any of the characters. One of the sermons included an allegorical retelling of Israel’s relationship with God from the perspective of Hosea. One character in the allegory stood out as rejecting multiple offers of grace and love. They wanted the main character of the story to stop offering grace and love to this character because they identified with the pain and loss of rejection. I believe most of the students already understood on a logical level that God offers grace every time we sin, but this story connected the logic with an emotional and relational realization of God’s grace in the context of their own failures. The moral of a story means nothing until a young person can see it worked out in the details of his or her own life.

Narrative power

This connection between biblical content, relationships, and emotions is what gives narrative power. In response to various questions by the facilitator, of which none used story or narrative language, the students continued to discuss the stories they remembered, and they were able to recount the stories in significant detail. More important, they sensed that the stories meant something to them.

One student claimed the sermons put him “back on track.” This same student struggled to identify how the sermons had affected him and why, but he sensed that these sermons were different. “It meant more because, I don’t know, just because the stories were . . . so powerful.” Stories create complex logical, emotional, and relational matrices that language has difficulty defining. Preaching with narratives allows for self-examination and judgment, which leads to self-volition at the end of the sermon. The natural response to being judged by someone else is self-defense.

Both narrative form and content allow young people to enter into the world of the sermon and feel as if they have come to their own conclusions on the matter. To the degree that they view themselves as present in the sermon and actors within the narrative event, they are able to navigate change and growth in relation to various doctrinal points.

There is no pat answer to the question, “So how can preachers meet both the expectation that preaching be biblical and also capture young hearers?” However, telling relevant stories is about as close as one can get to an answer.



- 1 Many churches and denominations share this concern for biblical preaching. Tom Long calls biblical preaching normative both in that “it is what is usually done” and “it is the standard (the norm, the rule) by which all other ways of doing the practice are measured.” Thomas G. Long, *The Witness of Preaching* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2016), 59.
- 2 Eugene L. Lowry, *The Homiletical Plot: The Sermon as Narrative Art Form* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 26. Research was completed in partial fulfillment of Stephen Reasor, *Practical Application of Seventh-day Adventist Theology Through Narrative Preaching at Parkview Adventist Academy* (dissertation, Andrews University, 2012).
- 3 Lowry, *The Homiletical Plot*, 29.
- 4 Lowry, *The Homiletical Plot*, 54.
- 5 Lowry, *The Homiletical Plot*, 54; emphasis in the original.
- 6 The study consisted of a series of sermons preached in 2010 during a Week of Prayer event at Parkview Adventist Academy in Lacombe, Alberta, Canada. The results demonstrated that narrative content, the sermonic time that was devoted to the telling of actual narratives, correlates with positive student response.
- 7 The interviewer was not coached by the researcher to initiate a discussion relating to presence, as this was not one of the initial hypotheses of the study.
- 8 Friedrich Schleiermacher, “Religious Discourse,” in Richard Lischer, ed., *The Company of Preachers: Wisdom on Preaching, Augustine to the Present* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2002), 12.
- 9 At a recent student Week of Prayer, the speakers chose to preach on the Levite’s concubine in Judges 19, the lion that killed the man of God in 1 Kings 13, and when God told Isaiah to walk naked for three years in Isaiah 20, to name a few of the topics. These topics captivated their classmates—and made more than one faculty member extremely nervous.

***“For the Son
of Man came
to seek and to
save the lost”***

(Luke 19:10, NIV).

On average, across the United States, more than 50 percent of those believers who should be in church are not. They are those who profess Christian beliefs but have willfully disconnected themselves from any meaningful relationship to the body of Christ.¹ The Barna Group, which tracks church trends, conducted a survey that presented startling statistics: for every 10 adult Americans, 7 professed a Christian belief. But of those 7, only 3 were active in a church.²

*Over half
of our flocks are*
DROPOUTS

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SCAN FOR AUDIO

Think of what that means: 4 out of 7 professed believers are no longer active in the church. That is almost 55 percent of professed Christians that are dropouts. This statistic should be alarming and disturbing to every active believer and church pastor. This is a wake-up call about the present-day condition of the Western church.

Picture Christ's whole church

Can you imagine what it would be like if all dropouts were in church? Based on these figures, we are saying that your church would essentially double in size, on the average.

Restored dropouts are not pew sitters. They are filled with gratitude for God's redeeming grace to them and show it. They give generously. They get involved in serving. They actively look for others who were like themselves and reach out to them.

It's not just America

I can confidently say that almost every active believer and certainly every pastor knows some dropouts. They may be friends, family members, neighbors, and work associates. Although this trend is tracked closely in America, the stats are even more alarming for Europe, and Central and South America are also experiencing this trend.

The Western church has not yet figured out how to successfully pursue these wandering sheep. Yes, we sometimes think of them and offer prayers, which is good and vital,

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DROPOUT

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but it is not enough. We need to actively pray for them, plan for them, and reach out to them. God loves them, and they need to be in the church.

The traditional means of evangelism, which include things like invitations to church, events, concerts, and other activities at the church, are generally not well received by dropouts. A host of objections, generally revolving around “I’ve already been there, done that,” preempts a positive response. Why is that?

What about “evangelism”?

Our traditional understanding of evangelism, revolving around preaching the gospel, is not effective for the believer who has dropped out. They already believe in Jesus—they just do not care for His people, or they have other excuses. Their false belief systems have set aside the necessity of the church community. These beliefs have to be brought down if the people are to be reconciled to Christ and His body. A one-day or casual interaction with a dropout will not change or accomplish anything.

The only thing that will work to reconcile a dropout back to the community of believers is a consistent, loving relationship with an active believer over time. Dropouts respond in their hearts to the love of Christ for them demonstrated by believers.³

What should we do?

This brings us to Jesus’ parable of the 1 and 99 sheep. Let’s be honest; Jesus gave this analogy to His followers for a reason. Human sheep are often

spiritually dumb—ignorant, rebellious, proud, hurt, selfish, distracted, misguided. Any and all of these are ways that Christians drop out. Now, what should you do?

Of course, keep praying. And there is a biblical strategy that will give focus to your prayers while developing a relationship of restoration with the dropout. There is a strategy that can be imparted to the congregants via small groups. Most people are not evangelists, but they do know dropouts. This is a nonthreatening approach for these to reach out to those they know already. And it works!⁴

What is the strategy?

We need to identify, engage, restore, and reconnect believers who have dropped out in the last days.

The foundation scripture for this harvest is found in Jeremiah 16:16: “Behold, I am going to send for many fishermen,” declares the LORD, “and they will fish for them; and afterwards I shall send for many hunters, and they will hunt them from every mountain and from every hill, and from the clefts of the rocks” (NASB).

This harvest is twofold: the gathering of the lost in the nations (John 21:11) by the “fishermen” and the “net”; and the return and restoration of the believer who has dropped out by the “hunter” who tracks down each, one by one (Matt. 18:12).

Just as God desires the unsaved to turn to the kingdom, He desires those believers who have dropped out to return to the kingdom. Fishers fish for the lost. Hunters hunt for the dropouts.

A divine strategy

In 1 Samuel 30, a divine strategy is revealed to David to enable him to restore his children from the Amalekites who had kidnapped them from his camp. These are the five steps David took:

1. Strengthen yourself in the Lord.
2. Inquire.
3. Pursue.
4. Locate the stronghold.
5. Recover all by warfare.

These steps not only were effective for David—he recovered every last person unharmed—but also are effective today for the church family, the body of Christ.⁵ Satan has come into our camp, the body of Christ, and through deceit has taken our brothers and sisters in Christ back to the world. Now they are being held captive in a stronghold of the enemy.

Where are they? How can we find them? What can we do when we find them? Are we strong enough to recover and restore them? These are the questions we must answer to understand the strategy for restoring dropouts to the church.

And that’s only part of the problem—getting them back in church.

Connection to the local church

The other critical part of the problem is connecting every believer, including dropouts, to the church. Unless a believer is connected to the

church, he or she is likely to become a dropout when the storms of life come.

Connection to the church is the key to closing the “back door.”⁶ Connection involves a “three-stranded cord” that is “not easily broken” (Eccl. 4:12, CJB). These cords of connection are as follows:

1. Heart for the pastor and vision of the local church
2. Personal relationships in the local church
3. Area of ministry in the local church

Without each of these three “cords” of connectivity, *any* believer is likely to become disconnected—a dropout—when the storms and issues of life come.

What are we waiting for?

So, when are we going to take seriously the imperative to search out our wandering fellow believer and put real effort into restoring him or her via a genuine relationship of love and restoration? Here is the crux of the issue—dying to self. Unless we relinquish our overcommitted, self-oriented life and activities, we will never see God’s power to restore the dropouts using us! We have lost our first love if this modern-day spiritual tragedy does not move the church to action. We must repent and return. This is the way back to the heart of Jesus.

Believers: arise and shine into the lives of the dropouts. Churches: be the shepherds that go after the wanderers—the dropouts. That will radically revitalize their lives and your community for God!

Remember: Love never fails.



- 1 A version of this article was published as, “This Statistic Should Alarm Every Sincere Believer,” *CharismaNews*, July 17, 2019, <https://www.charismanews.com/opinion/77217-this-statistic-should-alarm-every-sincere-believer>
- 2 The Barna Group, “The State of the Church 2016,” Barna, September 15, 2016, barna.com/research/state-church-2016/.
- 3 See Louis Posthauer, “Could This Be the Biggest Myth in Evangelism Today?,” *Charisma*, May 8, 2018, charismamag.com/life/men/36852-could-this-be-the-biggest-myth-in-evangelism-today.
- 4 See Mark Finley, “Cultivating Relationships Through Small Groups,” *Ministry*, December 2017, ministrymagazine.org/archive/2017/12/Cultivating-relationships-through-small-groups.
- 5 See Hunters of the Harvest Ministry at huntersoftheharvest.org and Magdiel Perez Schulz, “Finding the Way Home,” *Ministry*, April 2019, ministrymagazine.org/archive/2019/04/Finding-the-Way-Home.
- 6 See Jerry Page, “Shutting the Back Door,” *Ministry*, July 2017, ministrymagazine.org/archive/2017/07/Shutting-the-back-door; Alan Parker, “Five Keys to Locking the Back Door,” *Ministry*, July 2017, ministrymagazine.org/archive/2017/07/Five-keys-to-locking-the-back-door.

12 PRINCIPLES *of* EVANGELISTIC PREACHING

“Preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction”

(2 Tim. 4:2, NIV).

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SCAN FOR AUDIO

As ministers, one of the most awesome opportunities we have is to preach God's words of life to spiritually thirsty people. Most of us do this on a weekly basis at church. However, a major difference exists between worship-service preaching and evangelistic preaching. Here are 12 practical and powerful principles of evangelistic preaching that anyone can incorporate into their ministry.¹

1

Spend time praying over your message

No matter how qualified or experienced you are, the only Entity that can convict the human heart and move people to respond is the Holy Spirit. “‘Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit,’ says the LORD of hosts” (Zech. 4:6, NKJV). If I rely on my own abilities, I might entertain people, but I will not convert them. Ask the Lord to empower you to deliver the message with conviction, to imbue you with the right words, and for the Holy Spirit to move upon the listeners. It should be our first work.

2

Adequately prepare

Second Timothy 2:15 says, “Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (NKJV). We should never think that we know something so well that we do not need to prepare. Take adequate time to study the topic. If you are using a manuscript, read through it numerous times so that you can memorize the main points and preach it from your heart. Practice the message out loud a couple of times. Studies have shown that saying things out loud embeds them in your mind and makes them easier to remember.

3

Do not read the sermon

Being glued to your notes generally does not grasp people's attention. Adequately preparing and practicing a sermon will enable you to move away from the pulpit and connect with your audience. Don't worry if you forget something that is in your notes. The listeners will not know it anyway. Trust the Holy Spirit to bring it to your mind at the right time. If you are using a prepackaged evangelism series, it is important to edit the notes and insert your own stories and illustrations to help make the sermon your own. We are always more compelling when we relate our own stories.

4

Be passionate and enthusiastic

Passion will not look the same for every person. We all have different personalities and speaking styles. But that is no excuse for being boring. You do not have to use Hollywood gimmicks or do acrobatic feats to get people's attention. Remember, you are sharing the most important message people will hear all week. Be excited about it. Speak boldly and confidently. Employ different tones of voice and alternate the volume. Use your hands to provide emphasis on essential points. Let people see that you clearly believe what you are saying. Walk the platform a little. Don't hide behind the pulpit

the entire time. (Note: Don't overdo the roaming, though. Too much movement can be distracting.)

5 Keep it simple

One of the best compliments you can receive is when a kid says, "I liked your sermon." Or even when an adult tells you, "I understood that for the first time. You made it so clear and simple." Know your audience and speak their language. People do not make decisions about things they do not understand. Conviction happens when the message is clear enough for them to grasp.

6 Be positive and smile

We tend to be drawn to positive people and want to hear what they have to say. Of course, there are times to be serious, but it is essential to show how your topic will help people's lives in a positive way. Doomsday messages riddled with negativity will repel most people. A tangible way to be positive is simply to smile. It communicates warmth and genuineness. It also opens the door for people to approach you afterward. Speakers who don't smile are often seen as distant and unapproachable. Such a reaction can lessen the impact of your words. You want people to feel comfortable enough to talk to you, just as the crowds did with Jesus.

7 Be genuine and transparent

When I began preaching, I tried to emulate one of my favorite speakers. My wife knew what I was doing and told me it

was not coming across as genuine. And she was right. I just needed to be myself. God did not call you to ministry for you to be a clone of someone else. Be genuine—and transparent. Do not be afraid to talk about your own life experiences and even your mistakes. When we appropriately share our own faults and failures, it helps people relate to us. *Appropriately* highlights two notes of caution, though. Number one, do not share faults and failures that are of an extremely private nature. Some things we should reveal only to God. Number two, do not use stories (especially mistakes) of your spouse and children without first getting their permission. They will not like being embarrassed or caught off guard.

8 Interact with the audience

It is essential to get your listeners involved in the message, thus keeping their attention as well as preventing them from slipping into passive listening (or even texting). You can do this in several ways. For example, ask them to raise their hands in response to a question, such as, "How many of you have ever wondered about that verse?" Invite them to finish a sentence or a well-known phrase, look up a text and read it with you, or verbally fill in the blank. Encouraging the audience to say *amen* is another common way of getting people involved (however, you can overdo this, so utilize it judiciously).

Suggesting that the audience use their imagination as you describe a scene or tell a story is another effective tactic. Some preachers

ASK YOURSELF, *WHAT DOES THIS TOPIC OR PASSAGE TELL ME ABOUT CHRIST'S LOVE AND CHARACTER? HOW DOES THIS TOPIC OR PASSAGE POINT ME TO THE CROSS?*



invite their audience to text questions to them. Asking volunteers to come up front as a “human” illustration can also be an attention-getter. Always use eye contact. Look at different sections of the audience as you speak. Let your gaze pause on numerous individuals so that your communication becomes more personal. Sufficient eye contact should last about two to three seconds.

9 Tell stories to illustrate key points

When I was a district pastor, it seemed that the people always liked it when I told stories or talked about personal experiences or used illustrations (especially the youth). If we are careful to connect spiritual lessons to our illustrations and not just tell stories for entertainment, people will recall the lessons that go with them. Jesus told the story of the prodigal son in order to illustrate the mercy and grace of the Father in a way that relates to real life. His listeners could actually picture the Father running to hug him or her, allowing them to comprehend the Father’s love in a more powerful way than just making a theological statement about His love. Since stories have the potential to be so gripping, it would be good for every preacher or lay preacher to acquire a few books of potential sermon illustrations arranged by topics.

10 Make it Christ-centered

Every message should point to Jesus. “Lift up Jesus, you that teach the people, lift Him up in the sermon, in song, in prayer. Let all your powers be directed to pointing souls, confused, bewildered, lost, to the ‘Lamb of God.’ . . . Let the science of salvation be the burden of every sermon, the theme of every song.”² Ask yourself, *What does this topic or passage tell me about Christ’s love and character?* How does this topic or passage point me to the cross? We are so used to giving information-based sermons in evangelism, but what we need just as much are heart-based, Christ-centered sermons.

11 Appeal, and appeal often

Appeals are neither necessarily manipulative nor controlling. Rather, they (a) invite people to make a decision, (b) explain why they should do so, and (c) show what positive blessings will then result. Taking action strengthens the decision made in the

heart. Make small appeals throughout your message. They help lead to a big appeal. Your final appeal may involve raising the hand, standing, coming forward, filling out a card, or having a time of silent prayer in the pew to solidify a decision in the heart.

Remember what Mark Finley calls the mini-max principle: minimize the negative and maximize the positive. If I were appealing for my audience to be faithful stewards and surrender the financial side of their lives to God, I would not mention how there might be less money in their bank account. Instead, I would talk about the peace that comes from trusting Jesus and how God is our Provider. You might say, “But if I make direct appeals, then people will think I’m trying to convert them.” But you are! That’s what *evangelistic* preaching is. You are urging them to follow Jesus. Do not be ashamed of it.

12 Visit people

At first, this principle may surprise you. You might even think it has nothing to do with preaching, but it has everything to do with evangelistic preaching, especially in the context of a public evangelistic meeting. Visitation is simply another form of preaching. It gives the opportunity for dialogue, encouragement, and making personal appeals to the heart. Conviction may come from the formal preaching, but the decisions result from the personal visitation. Those who only preach become entertainers, while those who visit become soul winners.

The Spirit’s work

During one of our recent evangelistic series, three women came each evening and sat together on the front row. When the nightly meeting concluded, they would stand in the parking lot just outside the church for the next hour excitedly discussing what they had just heard. That’s when you know the Spirit moved through the preaching of His Word. May you see fruit for your labors and have the privilege, through the Holy Spirit, of making a difference in someone’s heart now and for eternity.



1 A version of this article was published as, “Principles of Evangelistic Preaching,” NADMinisterial, June 6, 2019, <http://www.nadministerial.com/stories/2019/6/6/principles-of-evangelistic-preaching>.

2 Ellen G. White, *Gospel Workers* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1915), 159, 160.



Holy Spirit breathes life into evangelism in Mongolia

ULAANBAATAR, MONGOLIA

Pastors and church members in Mongolia have shown that when it comes to sharing God's message with people, one size does not fit all. Recent evangelistic meetings energized and prompted every local congregation in the capital city of Ulaanbaatar to devise creative ways of reaching others for Jesus. Evangelistic meetings were launched in the 11 Seventh-day Adventist congregations across Ulaanbaatar.

Mongolia Mission president **Yo Han Kim** said he visited the 11 Adventist congregations where evangelistic meetings were taking place.

"We felt the presence of the Holy Spirit at every church we visited. At one specific church, we had more than a hundred attendees each night, including eighty children," Kim said.

At another church, in spite of travel difficulties caused by heavy rainfall and mud, there were not enough seats in the church. Tents were erected outside for those who came later. At the end of the meetings, six people were baptized.

Another congregation made special plans for the last day of meetings. On Friday afternoon, all the volunteers, church members, and baptismal candidates traveled to Gorkhi-Terelj National Park and camped in tents to spend that Sabbath in God's nature. Seven people were baptized in that beautiful testament to God's Creatorship.



Another church focused on music as part of the evangelistic outreach. Leaders reported that the church was blessed with a special music team of saxophonists, a classical guitarist, and a vocalist.

"In the afternoons, they provided their audiences with an amazing musical concert and touched many hearts," Kim shared. "Fourteen people from this church were baptized at the end of the evangelistic meetings."

At Ulaanbaatar Central Seventh-day Adventist Church, speaker **Jo ChoonHo** spent the afternoons treating people with his oriental medicine skills. Leaders reported that many guests were very grateful for his healing touch.

"People were moved to tears when they listened to the testimonies, and twenty persons are having Bible studies in preparation for baptism," Kim said.

Kim said he is thankful for the coordinated and faithful efforts across Ulaanbaatar.

"I look forward to the next Ulaanbaatar-wide evangelistic series three years from now, and I praise God for His bountiful blessings and His protection throughout these meetings," Kim said. "I cannot thank everybody enough." [Yo Han Kim, Mongolia Mission / *Adventist Review*]

Women in ministry retreat fosters dialogue, fellowship, and prayer

BEČIČI, MONTENEGRO

For female pastors, Bible workers, and administrators from across the Trans-European Division (TED), the opportunity to meet, relax, and share at the Women in Ministry retreat was a blessing.

"It was a timely retreat, full of fellowship, a refill of energy and optimism, with speakers that shared positive, uplifting messages but also the challenges of being a female in church ministry," said **Marianne Dyrud**, executive secretary and Youth Ministries director for the Danish Union Conference.

This was precisely the intention of the weekend, according to TED ministerial director **Patrick Johnson**. He was one of only five men to participate in the conference alongside 110

women, who traveled from countries including Iceland, Norway, and Finland in the far north; the British Isles and the Netherlands in the west; and Poland, Hungary, the Balkans, Greece, and Cyprus farther south and east.

Throughout the weekend, a myriad of languages and cultures blended as the women exchanged ideas and solutions with others who faced similar challenges and who, often spontaneously, could lift each other up in prayer.

"New friendship connections have been made that, if nurtured, will continue throughout their lives," Johnson said, noting how beneficial it was for the women to share experiences, both pleasurable and painful, as a much-needed healing activity. He is planning an online forum that can provide them with additional support.

PHOTO: VICTOR HULBERT/ADAMS



Women in leadership, particularly pastors, often work alone, so a retreat where they can be together with other women who share similar experiences, thoughts, and emotions proved highly beneficial.

The preaching was also intentional. **Marjukka Ostrovljanović**, a pastor in the ministerial district of Bavaria, Germany, is from Finland, and her husband, **Mike**, also a pastor, is from Serbia and ministers in the district next door. With this multicultural background and a deep love for the Hebrew Scriptures, she was well qualified to

PHOTO: VICTOR HULBERT/ADAMS



Lolly Fontaine, associate pastor of Stanborough Park Church in the United Kingdom

dig into Old Testament themes. Reflecting that "God is so good," she shared the story of Job and his recognition of God's presence even when He seemed far away.

The personalized, narrative preaching style of the female pastors seemed to carry the weekend. **Lolly Fontaine**, associate pastor of Stanborough Park Church in the United Kingdom, related, animatedly and with great humor, her own experiences to that of Moses and his face-to-face encounter with God. Moses could be considered a failure when, after all his leadership and teaching, Aaron builds the golden calf in his absence.

"Sometimes in ministry, our hopes and dreams come crashing down, and we may even doubt our calling," Fontaine noted. Moses was very human, and his emotions came through in the story—disappointment, sorrow, apathy, even rage. But in those moments of disappointment, you also find his solution. Entering the tabernacle tent, he talks with God as to a friend (Exod. 33:11).

"Run into the tent," Fontaine challenged. "It is our only option."

TED president **Raafat Kamal**, who attended the retreat as an observer to show support, stated, "I was personally touched by the authenticity and openness of expressions during worship, discussions, and personal exchanges," he said. "There was a high octane of positive energy that I rarely witness at other meetings that I attend," he added. "We praise God for the service and witness of our women within the TED. They are precious in God's eyes and in their ministry for Him." [Victor Hulbert, Trans-European Division / *Adventist Review*]



The art of the “ask”

Jesus asked more questions than He answered. In fact, “according to the Gospels, Jesus asks 307 questions, is asked only 183, and answers fewer than 10 of those he is asked.”¹

When we ask for a response, we are asking a question, wanting the hearers to do something. What do we want people to do?

There are only two keys to the “ask”: First, we have to *ask*. Second, we have to ask *correctly*. That’s it. We need to look no further than the apostle James for this key: “We lust and do not have. We . . . covet and cannot obtain. We fight and war. Yet we do not have because we do not ask. We ask and do not receive, because we ask amiss, that we may spend it on our pleasures” (James 4:1–3, author’s adaptation). The key in the text is, “We ask *amiss*”; that is, we ask *wrong*.

Defining the “ask”

The “ask” with the most impact for my life comes from the time in Paul’s life when God knocked him off of his pony while he was traveling from Jerusalem to Damascus, Syria, as described in Acts 9:6: “Lord, what do You want me to do?” (NKJV). This is my go-to line when asking the Lord or asking people for something. I challenge them to do the same: “Lord, what do You want me to do?” The strength in doing so is that we are placing the onus on God. This question asked sincerely (I believe) will always be answered.

To preach or teach without wanting the hearers to do something is, at best, mere entertainment. Everything is to accumulate, leading up to the “ask.” Therefore, when preparing a talk, the wise will begin with the question, what do I want the hearers to do? Then build your message.

What is asking correctly?

Sorry, there are no three- or seven-step methods. The only way to make the “ask” is *sincerely*. That is, I must believe in what I am asking and that it is best for the ones whom I am asking to

respond. I must be bold, and I can be genuinely bold only if I am totally sold on what I am asking.

Depending on the size of the “ask,” it usually should not be spontaneous. A spontaneous ask most often gets an emotional response.

The “ask” is only as effective as the presentation leading to it. The greater the “ask,” the greater the preparation needed.

Growth attracts; debt repulses

When asking people to give of their time or finances, I have learned that people give to a cause much more readily than a need. Growth attracts; debt repulses. It is very hard to raise monies to eliminate debt. If entering a large capital stewardship campaign, expect to take months of vision casting and dream building before asking. Consider bringing on the gifted people (for example, a capital stewardship company) to lead such a task.

The invitation

The message is to do more than educate; it is to instruct the hearers in what they are to do, not do, or do better. It should convict the sinner, edify the novice, and sharpen the mature. The clearest way to get people to respond to the “ask” is to ask one thing. To do so, you must have a point, a goal to the message.

Chris Anderson of TED says, For anyone having a story to tell: “One, limit your talk to one single idea. . . .

“Two, give your listeners a reason to care. . . .

“Three, build your idea . . . out of concepts that your audience already understands. . . .

“Four . . . : Make your idea worth sharing.”²

The offering

Every gospel-preaching church has two things available from God: His Word and His Spirit. What God requires of us are the *resources* to do His ministry: people and money. These are to be

The “ask” is only as effective as the presentation leading to it.

The greater the “ask,” the greater the preparation needed.

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mind,” and “your neighbor as yourself” ’ ’ (Luke 10:27, NKJV). The measure of the “ask” is obedience to the heavenly calling (Acts 26:29). For most of my ministry life, I thought it was the numbers; I was wrong; it is obedience. However, I found the more obedient I was, the better the numbers.

The art of the ask is to tell your story with enthusiasm, conviction, authority, and the power of the Holy Spirit.

contributed by us, His church. Reaching people ought to be the main focus of the church. “Do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry” (2 Tim. 4:5, NKJV).

First, as pastors, we are to know the conditions of our flocks (Prov. 27:23) by regularly checking people’s giving. There is no greater barometer than giving. When people stop giving, it is seldom about money; it is more than often a cry for help or an injury. Part of the “ask” is, “Are you OK?”

When receiving the tithes and offerings, do not do it by rote, merely saying a rhetorical prayer, passing the bucket, and singing the doxology. Do not mix it with praying for the sick, birthdays, announcements, or anything else. Receiving the offerings is a serious matter (consider Acts 5); give it the attention it deserves.

When preparing for the ask, I delivered the message with love. “ ‘Love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your



- 1 Martin B. Copenhaver, *Jesus Is the Question: The 307 Questions Jesus Asked and the 3 He Answered* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2014), xi, xii.
- 2 Chris Anderson, “TED’s Secret to Great Public Speaking,” March 2016, TED, 7:48, [ted.com/talks/chris_anderson_ted_s_secret_to_great_public_speaking?language=en](https://www.ted.com/talks/chris_anderson_ted_s_secret_to_great_public_speaking?language=en).





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Between Two Worlds: The Challenge of Preaching Today

by John Stott, Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2017.

The 2017 publication of John Stott's book *Between Two Worlds* celebrates 37 years in print. Can its republication, under a revised subtitle, remain relevant today? Stott himself admits, on page 96 of his original publication (and page 45 of the 2017 edition), the difficulty imagining "the world in the year A.D. 2000." One is tempted to ask whether or not the chasm has widened over the intervening decades. We no longer reside between two but rather between *three worlds*. The present world, so far removed from his first publication, cherishes the doctrines of postmodern thinkers, such as Richard Rorty, Jacques Derrida, and Michel Foucault. These men reframed many assumptions about truth, goodness, beauty, and justice that appear to challenge contemporary preaching.

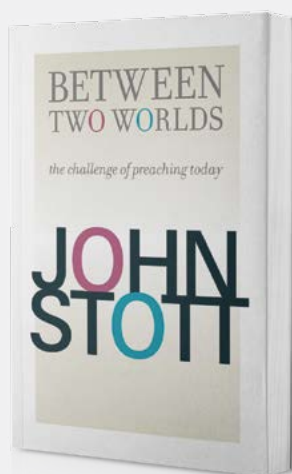
This book elevates preaching's unique task throughout history. Stott probes the varied social dynamics that impact communication. And he offers a historical sketch of preaching and preachers. The book is saturated with quotes, such as the one from the English Reformer Hugh Latimer, where he quips that the history of preaching reveals times when the devil . . . "is the most diligent . . . preacher in all" the realm (11). Stott wants his readers to remain vigilant during the emerging challenges to preaching in the wake of modernity and its fallout. While grounded in the history of preaching, the book

offers a treatise on the transhistorical principles of sermon development and embodiment: principles that have stood the tests of time.

The current volume provides the reader with a look into Stott's nuanced thinking. For example, he subtly concedes that the first-century communities that gave us the New Testament "both preserved the tradition and to some extent shaped it in a sense that (humanly speaking) it was their needs of evangelism, instruction, and worship which largely determined what was preserved" (69). This context enlivens his series of questions on page 60: "How far does the cultural conditioning of Scripture affect the normative nature of its teaching?" or "Do we have liberty to reclothe this teaching in modern cultural dress without being guilty of manipulation?" or "What are the relations between history and faith, Jesus and Christ, Scripture and church traditions?" Stott offers helpful ways to do the exegesis of Scripture in the world in which we live.

Stott's central metaphor is preaching as bridge-building. For him, the world of being has encroached on the world of becoming in the incarnation of Christ. For this reason, Christian preaching is incarnational. The two worlds Stott envisions are not simply the world of the Bible and the world of the contemporary moment. Without a doubt, his central tenant regarding the essence of preaching is that it is the exposition of Scripture.

Furthermore, he does receive the Scripture as the Word of God. But Stott has a mind subtle enough to recognize that no time in history is free from the weight of historically conditioned human categories, not even the time of Christ's incarnation. So, his thesis—preaching is the bridge "to relate God's unchanging Word to our ever-changing world" (107)—calls all Christian preachers to faithfully exegete from the Scripture the Word of God for our day. This thesis is not new, not revolutionary. But it is an exhortation to be recalled. It revolutionizes our work. This will be required reading for my homiletics students. 📖





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