

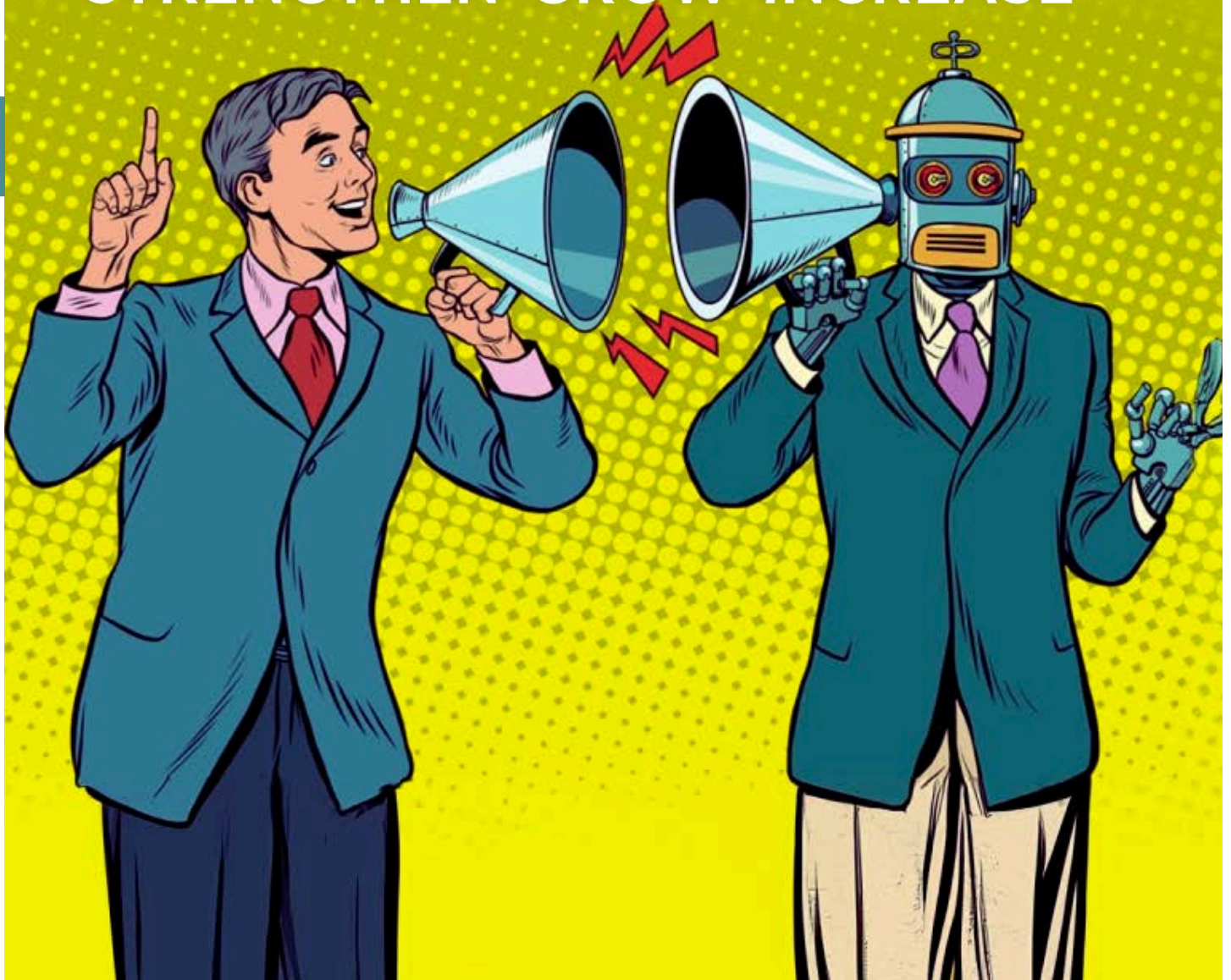
SGI

STRENGTHEN · GROW · INCREASE

No
23



September-October 2024



PREACHING
IN THE TWENTY-
FIRST CENTURY

THE SGI
JOURNAL
OF LEADERSHIP

TABLE OF CONTENTS

FROM THE SGI COMMITTEE CHAIR

Preaching in our Contemporary Culture

Darrell Johns

FROM THE GENERAL SUPERINTENDENT

Preaching the Word

David K. Bernard

Preaching: Truth through Personality

Raymond Woodward

SGI Interview with Sam Emory

Is It Still New? Preaching to a Post-Christian Generation

Ken Gurley

Does Anyone Care What I'm Saying?

Joshua B. Carson

Is My Sermon a Message?

Josh Herring

Life Preaching

Jonathan McClintock

ISSUE 23 TOOLBOX

Apostolic Preaching Resources



MISSION STATEMENT

Leading the United Pentecostal Church International to think strategically about future growth.

THE STRATEGIC GROWTH INITIATIVE STEERING COMMITTEE

Darrell Johns, Chair
Bryan Parkey, Vice Chair
Nathan Scoggins, Secretary

GENERAL EDITING

Sylvia Clemons
Seth Simmons

GRAPHIC DESIGN & LAYOUT

Seth Simmons

DISTRIBUTION

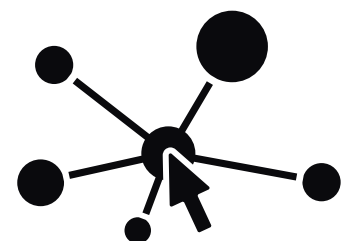
Nathan Scoggins
Seth Simmons

SPANISH TRANSLATION EDITORS

Trinidad Ramos
Rene Moreno

FRENCH TRANSLATION EDITOR

Liane R. Grant, *Certified Translator*
(Nonprofit Translation Solutions)



This resource is interactive. Click the items in the Table of Contents to move around and explore each issue.

FIND HELP TO GROW
ON MINISTRY CENTRAL!
CLICK BELOW
TO FIND OUT MORE.



Derald Weber
UPCI Louisiana District Superintendent

0:15 / 2:10

SGI Church Growth Resources
Unlisted

United Pentecostal C...
38.6K subscribers

Subscribed

Like Share Clip

SGI
STRENGTHEN · GROW · INCREASE

Strategic Growth Initiative

The mission of SGI is to create a culture of health that produces spiritual and numerical growth in ministers, churches, and districts in the UPCI.

Church Health Check-Up

Welcome to the *Church Health Check-Up*. This evaluation is designed to give you a more clearly defined understanding of your church's overall health. With a better understanding, you, as a pastor, can move forward to make the proper changes necessary to either continue the growth process, begin to grow again after a period of non-growth, or restructure for growth after a period of decline. Click below to access the Church Health Check-Up.

[Click Here](#)

A Church Growth Track

Now available for ALL! View this tremendous resource for pastors, districts, church leadership teams and those involved in the local church. This Church Growth Track will consist of eleven lessons, each taught by Apostolic leaders on the front lines of revival and growth. Please click VIEW COURSE for this free resource.

[View Course](#)



SGI RESOURCES! CLICK THIS PAGE TO VISIT PENTECOSTAL PUBLISHING HOUSE



Search for books, bibles and more

Search

Hello, Log In Create an Account



Curriculum

Books

Bibles

Bible Studies

For Churches

Media

Sales

Blog

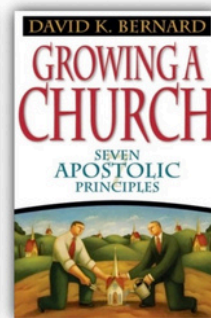
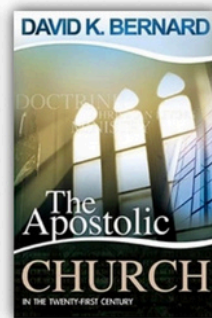
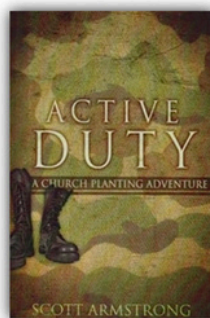
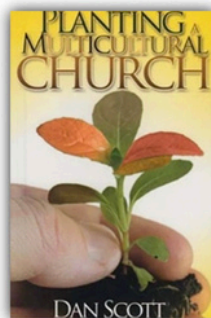
Strategic Growth Initiative (SGI) Resources



The Strategic Growth Initiative (SGI) was born in the heart of General Superintendent David K. Bernard as God gave him a vision for growing the North American church. The General Board of the UPCI approved the forming of SGI for the purpose of highlighting growth in the areas of the number of churches and ministers in North America. The four focus points of SGI are outlined below along with resources available through the Pentecostal Resources Group.

Multiply the number of churches

SGI will assist districts by providing promotion, planning, and training with the goal of enabling every district to at least double the number of churches (including preaching points, daughter works, autonomous church plants, multicultural church plants, integrate independent Apostolic churches, etc.) in one decade.





Preaching in our Contemporary Culture

Darrell Johns, SGI Committee Chair

The church's message and mission are unchanging and non-negotiable. The apostolic message transcends cultures and times. The gospel is universally relevant and efficacious in all places and in all eras.

Although the message and mission are unchanging, the methods by which the message is preached and the mission is accomplished can vary depending on the cultural context, provided those methods remain biblically sound and Spirit-directed.

The Book of Acts is a template for preaching the gospel in diverse cultures. The apostles adapted their approach for delivering the message so it was effective for their respective audiences. Jewish audiences understood biblical history, so Paul and others could preach to Jews in the synagogues from the Old Testament. Conversely, to those in pagan cultures, the apostles preached the gospel, often referring to nature and creation because that was the frame of reference for audiences in those cultures (Acts 14: 6-17; 17:16-32).

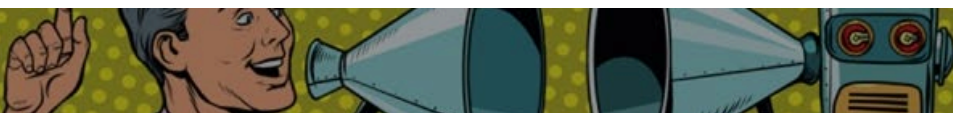
It is imperative that the purity of the gospel is never compromised to conform to the cultural context; however, we are wise to consider the context in which we are preaching and allow it to guide and inform our approach. Many Americans have at least some basic biblical framework. On the whole, however, we live in a post-Christian culture where an increasing number of people have never heard the most fundamental Bible stories. (Not all readers of the SGI Journal reside in Canada or the United States or a post-modern culture.) This presents challenges—and opportunities—as we communicate the gospel to them.

Regardless of our audience's level of biblical understanding, like Philip, the evangelist who preached Christ to the Ethiopian eunuch, we must begin at the place of the listener's current knowledge and not make assumptions about what they know, understand, or previously have heard (Acts 8:26-39).

There are clear Bible prophecies pointing to the cultural context of the last days. We teach and preach to people who fit the description of II Timothy 3:1-9, who love themselves, their money, and their pleasures. According to II Timothy, they are disrespectful, unthankful, unholy, unloving, and unforgiving. The list is longer, but you get the picture and know the passage. As dark as these times have become, the light of the gospel will drive out the spiritual and biblical darkness.

Truth preached in wisdom and with love will prevail.

The words of Paul to Titus persuade me that there is no place on earth, culturally or geographically, where the gospel will not work. The Cretans had a long history of paganism. Six hundred years before Paul left Titus on Crete to ordain elders in every city, a Cretan philosopher named Epimenides described those islanders as always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons (Titus 1:12). Six centuries later, Paul said that Epimenides' description was still true (Titus 1:13).

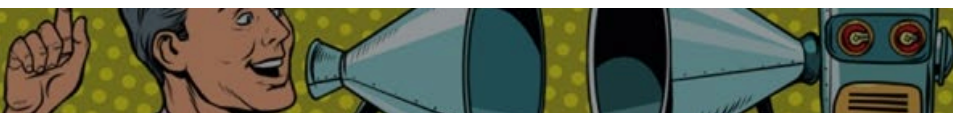


In the face of generations of paganism and immorality, Paul assured Titus if he rebuked them sharply, the Cretans would become sound in the faith (Titus 1:13). The power of the gospel would convert their souls and, as a result, there would be churches in every city on Crete (Titus 1:5).

We need to understand our cultural context and pray for wisdom in our approach. Ultimately, however, we must unabashedly teach and preach the unadulterated gospel of Christ. We never need to be ashamed of it—for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek (Romans 1:16).

Darrell Johns

Darrell Johns serves as pastor of Atlanta West Pentecostal Church, assistant general superintendent of the Eastern Zone, UPCI, and chair of the Strategic Growth Initiative Committee of the General Board.





Preaching the Word

Dr. David K. Bernard, General Superintendent

“Preach the Word!” (II Timothy 4:2).

One of the most important tasks of a minister of the gospel is to preach the Word. The Scriptures lead us to salvation; are profitable for doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction; and provide everything we need to minister effectively. (See II Timothy 3:15-17.) Our preaching should be positive, encouraging, faith-building, and visitor-oriented.

1. An effective preacher studies the Word of God.

We study not merely for a particular message but for personal spiritual growth. Out of a life of prayer and study come messages from God. At different times we may study a particular book of the Bible or a particular topic. It's good to read various commentaries and reference works about the Bible, not to replace the reading of Scripture but to help us understand Scripture and consider it from different angles. A diversity of ideas can help us think afresh about the meaning of Scripture, but of course, we must be careful to identify and adjust for any non-Apostolic assumptions of authors.

The science and art of interpreting the Bible is called hermeneutics. For a full discussion, see my book *Understanding God's Word: An Apostolic Approach to Interpreting the Bible*. It contains an appendix, “Tools for Study,” which describes resources such as Bible translations, concordances, commentaries, encyclopedias, dictionaries, lexicons, and word studies.

It's helpful to maintain a filing system for sermon ideas and notes. Ideas sometimes come during general or devotional reading, while listening to other messages, and in the course of daily activities. Whenever a thought comes to me, I make a note for later reference. As soon as possible, I identify a possible text and title by which to remember the idea, and I file this digitally. Later, when preparing for a message, I review these sermon ideas to see if I feel led to develop one of them for the occasion.

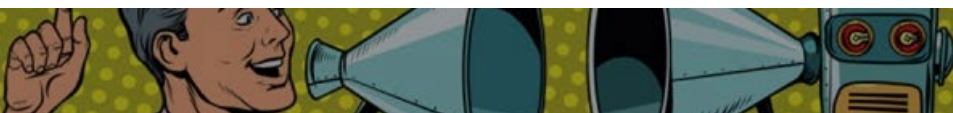
2. An effective message communicates one concept—a single, dominant idea—and has a central purpose.

The preacher uses a bullet, not a shotgun shell. The main thought should be definite enough to state in a thesis sentence. If it isn't, the speaker probably won't be successful. People won't remember the message unless there is one main thought. Even if they take notes, they may not discern the main point unless the speaker is clear and intentional. A thesis sentence answers questions such as who, what, where, when, and how. It has a definite subject, and it says something definite about the subject. While a speaker may not actually write or read this statement, he or she should have the thought clearly in mind.

**The preacher uses a bullet,
not a shotgun shell.**

3. A title is recommended.

A good title gets the audience's attention, unifies the message, communicates the central thought, and helps the audience remember the central thought. It may be intriguing, but most importantly it reminds hearers of the message's purpose. It is the sermon in a nutshell.



4. The main idea comes from Scripture.

We have no right to preach our ideas instead of those of the Bible; our central thought must come from Scripture. The biblical text should govern our message. A passage of Scripture should be the foundation of our message, even though we may not necessarily read it at the beginning. If we read a text, we should use it in context. If it doesn't truly communicate our main thought, we should choose another text instead. If we can't find any text to support our idea, then we shouldn't preach the thought. We shouldn't use a text as a pretext for our ideas but use it according to its intended, contextual meaning.

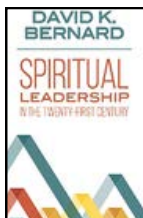
We have no right to preach our ideas instead of those of the Bible; our central thought must come from Scripture.

5. The preacher applies Scripture to the lives of the hearers.

We show people how the message makes a difference in their lives today and what they should do in response.



Dr. David K. Bernard is the general superintendent of the United Pentecostal Church International.



Recommended Resource
Article adapted from *Spiritual Leadership in the Twenty-first Century* by David K. Bernard (Word Aflame Press, 2015).



Recommended Resource
[Click here to access Apostolic Life in the 21st Century Podcast.](#)





Preaching: Truth through Personality

Raymond Woodward

It was Phillips Brooks who famously defined preaching as “the communication of divine truth through human personality.” Just as no two people have the same fingerprints, no two preachers are exactly alike. Your personal process of **discerning** a message from the Lord, **developing** that message through prayer and study, and **delivering** that message through preaching will be every bit as unique as you are.

To effectively communicate with a generation that values being “authentic” above all else, preachers must resist the temptation to copy and compete, and saints must resist the tendency to compare and critique. God delights in using different personalities to make preaching diverse and dynamic, using our individual competencies and strengths — and even our idiosyncrasies and weaknesses — for His glory (II Corinthians 12:9). Becoming your best imitation of another minister is not a worthy goal, but becoming a better version of yourself is always a worthwhile pursuit.

Preachers must resist the temptation to copy and compete, and saints must resist the tendency to compare and critique.

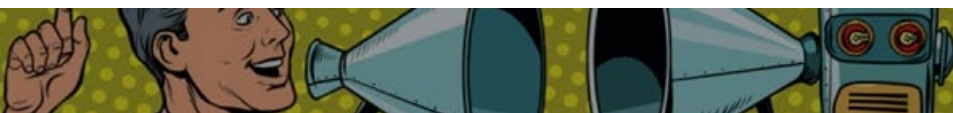
Some Apostolic ministers lean toward informational teaching, while others favor inspirational preaching. Some stay behind the pulpit, while others roam the platform. Some use a sermon manuscript, while others speak extemporaneously. Some possess an expansive vocabulary, while others communicate in simple terms. Some declare with matter-of-fact authority, while others deliver with high enthusiasm — or as my elders used to say with a smile, “Some tell, and some yell.” But regardless of the substance of the message, or the style of the minister, our primary purpose must always be to preach in such a way that **the Word becomes clear**, and **the Spirit draws near**.

Jerry Jones, in his excellent book *We Preach*, calls preaching a “fascinating collaboration between God and human beings.” God’s leading and anointing ensures that preaching will always be vastly **different** from other forms of communication. And yet, because our sermons are directed to *human beings*, preaching must of necessity remain **similar** to other forms of communication. Simply put, if we can become better *communicators*, it follows that we can become better *preachers*.

In their best-selling book *Made to Stick: Why Some Ideas Survive and Others Die*, brothers Chip and Dan Heath offer six principles that make any communication memorable. While their target is the professional community rather than a Pentecostal congregation, the human brain works the same whether it is exposed to a media advertisement, a college lecture, a viral video, a personal conversation, or an Apostolic sermon. Because I want every message I preach to be as memorable (“sticky”) as possible, I find their acronym **SUCCEs** to be useful in thinking about preaching in the 21st Century. (And yes, I know it is misspelled — but more on that in a moment.)

Simple – Focus on the core of your message.

Not everything that inspires you in study should make it into your sermon. It is easy to discard trivia, but harder to cut interesting details not critical to your message. Do you have a clear sense of what God wants to say? Can you state the purpose of your sermon in a single sentence? If not, you might not be ready to preach it just yet.



Unexpected – Grab attention by breaking patterns.

You cannot demand attention; you must attract it. Human beings think in predictable, comfortable, familiar patterns. The key to making a message memorable is breaking those patterns, especially as you begin. Jesus did this by asking pointed questions, addressing objections up front, and using visual illustrations or memorable sayings.

Concrete – Use vivid details to help them “see.”

Something is “concrete” when it can be described by the human senses. Your brain processes print at one hundred bits per second, but pictures at a billion bits per second. So the old aphorism is simply not adequate. A picture is not worth a thousand words; it is worth ten million words! Be diligent about “painting a picture” with descriptive words.

Credible – Be certain of your sources.

The newsprint generation used to say, “Paper doesn’t refuse ink.” In other words, you can write anything and someone will believe it! As you study, remember that the Internet doesn’t refuse urban legends either. If an illustration seems too good to be true, assume it is false, because this generation can fact-check you in real time on their smartphones.

Emotional – Help them “feel” your message.

We retain only 5-10 percent of what we hear, but 80-90 percent of what we experience. Emotion is what moves a message from short-term to long-term memory, and inspires us to action. Apostolic preachers have an advantage here, but it must be genuine emotion, not just “pushing buttons.” Your sincere passion will always impact the depth of their response.

Stories – Use narrative to connect the dots.

Matthew observed that Jesus always told stories (Matthew 13:34). The Master took profound concepts and made them tangible, using common objects and experiences. Always be on the lookout for a good story, but never let an illustration become your whole message. And always remember that the Bible contains many great stories!

Spiritual – Let the Holy Ghost interrupt you!

(The perfectionist in me just has to spell “SUCCESS” correctly!) The most important part of Apostolic preaching is to follow the Spirit’s leading. Stop for moments of worship or prayer throughout your message. And never preach past that “moment” when God intervenes in your sermon! The adage is true — He can do more in a moment than we can do in a month. Those powerful “moments” are why we preach in the first place!

T.D. Jakes has often shared this succinct summary for sermon preparation: “Study yourself full. Think yourself clear. Pray yourself hot. Let yourself go.” To be an effective preacher, you need to be yourself, but you also need to forget yourself. If people leave impressed by your oratory but never encounter God’s glory, then your personality has become an obstacle. But if your preaching allows the Word to become clear and the Spirit to draw near, then you have become “a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (II Timothy 2:15). There is no greater privilege.

Raymond Woodward

Over forty years of pastoral ministry have seen Raymond travel extensively in the United States, Canada, and overseas to share the Word of God. He currently serves the United Pentecostal Church International as executive presbyter for Canada and serves Northeast Christian College as chancellor.

Since June 2021, when Rev. Jack Leaman was installed as lead pastor of CCC, Raymond has continued to serve the congregation as bishop and teaching pastor. He remains passionate about missions, mentoring, teaching, and team ministry. He and Beverley were married in 1983 and have two adult children, Emily (married to Ryan) and Matthew (married to Katricia).





Interview with Sam Emory

SGI: What is your theological perspective on preaching?

SE: I am an Apostolic preacher of the gospel. All sermons are based on and centered on promoting the Apostolic doctrine, the born-again experience, and furthering the kingdom of God. So, I do read and listen to podcasts. I watch and listen to Apostolic preaching online. It is important to stay in tune with our surroundings, to listen to other voices, and to see the direction our society may be going. We cannot help if we are not in tune with the mental, emotional, and spiritual needs of our culture.

In this day and age, our society is drifting away from biblical-based values. The cry of our present world seems to be godly-less instead of godliness! I'm cool with theology. However, our present society needs a Word from God! They need something birthed in prayer and served in love and compassion to bring about a godly transformation in the heart, soul, mind, and spirit. The people we preach to, or rather the "souls," will be ministering the Word, too!

SGI: What personal experiences shaped your preaching?

SE: Our ministry was born, shaped, and formed by my pastor, Bishop W. P. Yandris, affectionately known as Elder Bill. He is my father, teacher, and mentor. He was/is the man. Of course, we are shaped, molded, and formed to become the product of every sermon preached by a man of God. Yet, there will be life changes that intersect life.

Years ago, I went to pray for a Hmong family in Merced. The grandfather had died. I do not speak the language at all. Everyone was crying, and the room filled with grief. I was uncomfortable because I could not communicate with them. So, I stood and motioned for the wife to come to me; she did, and then she burst into tears. All of a sudden, the whole room was around me; I was so overcome by grief I could not breathe! Then I started to cry and pray for everyone. I left the house feeling like a failure. Once in the car and still overcome by that emotional moment, I asked God, "Why did you send me here? You knew I could not speak Hmong!" He said you spoke an international language: LOVE!

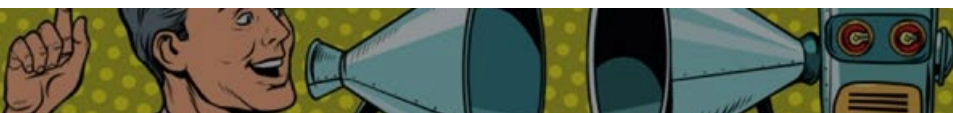
So, when we minister in any capacity, we must strive to minister in the love of God!

SGI: What helpful insights would you share to help fellow ministers prepare their message?

SE: Sermon prep starts with me and my attitude. I need to make sure I'm mentally, emotionally, and spiritually fit before I minister the Word. Then, I need to find the mind of God and the heart of Christ, and the desire of the Spirit. That starts with my attitude and where I am with God.

Then, I try to determine the direction to go based on what I feel in prayer and what I may encounter in that service. Also, I'm trying to feel after the Spirit and which direction God would lead. When I have a direction for the service, I prepare the sermon to preach, the words to speak, and how to speak them.

Sermon prep starts with me and my attitude.



SGI: What are your guidelines for preaching?

SE: First, I pray to find out what God wants me to preach and then the direction I am to go in the sermon and sermon prep itself. How we preach is often more important than what we preach. We can preach love in a manner that no one will want it. We can preach sin and cause someone to fall. So, then, I must follow after the Spirit of God! We can serve up any sermon to preach, or we can seek after God and follow after His will. We must be filled with His Spirit and minister according to the unction of the Holy Ghost.

How we preach is often more important than what we preach.

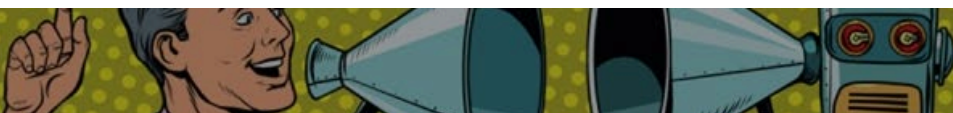


SGI: Do you have any final words of advice for aspiring preachers?

SE: He is our Lord, and we are His servants. The bottom line is that we are here to serve and please HIM! This is the actual purpose of true end-time Apostolic ministry.

Sam Emory

Sam Emory, along with his lovely wife, Shirley, has pastored Apostolic Tabernacle in Merced, California since 2006, after evangelizing for ten years. Apostolic Tabernacle is a thriving, ethnically diverse, all-nations church that places a strong emphasis on discipleship and vision. They have five local campuses, five campuses in Thailand, and a missionary campus in Uruguay.





IDEA IN BRIEF

PREACHERS ARE
COMMUNICATORS

RELATIONSHIPS MATTER

WHERE YOU START
MATTERS

THE WAY YOU
TAKE MATTERS

THE LENGTH OF THE
SERMON MATTERS

THE ALTAR MATTERS

LIFESTYLE MATTERS

Newspapers are dying. People are less literate and more visual, less inclined to spend hours poring over print, and more apt to scroll vertically or swipe horizontally. The average person no longer awaits the Sunday newspaper any more than they do Sunday worship. Witness Gallup's 80-year decline in church attendance—with the steep decline from 2000 onward.

Effective preaching of the gospel (good news) demands an audience. For news to be acted upon, it must first be heard (Romans 10:14-15). Unheard preaching is like an unread newspaper. Embrace the challenge of presenting the everlasting gospel to a changing audience.

The first job of a leader is to define reality.
- Max DePree, *Leadership is an Art*

The changing audience. In today's post-Christian West, the audience has changed radically. Godlessness, not godliness, is the spirit of the age. Witness the rise of the "nones" in the past few decades. Eight percent of Americans answered "None" to religious preference in 1990. That rose to 28 percent in 2023 (Pew Research Center). The fastest-growing religion in America is no religion.

How else has the audience changed?

Collapse of trust in ministry. Society has forgotten the respected days of the "man of the cloth." Preachers rank right alongside used car salesmen in the minds of many. (No offense meant to purveyors of rusting wrecks.) So, we no longer preach with the former advantage of people trusting what we say.

Dissolving families. The message of “repent” has been augmented with “reparent.” Hence, the number of preachers graduating from our institutions is rivaled by the number of counselors. John 3:5 and Acts 2:38 are needed more than ever, but on their heels are the messages found in Colossians 2:9-10 and II Timothy 1:7.

Biblical illiteracy and shorter attention span. Although accessibility to the Word has never been greater, the average American has less Bible knowledge than previous generations. Post-pandemic, Bible engagement has plummeted (State of the Bible, 2023). That means we must presume a lack of biblical knowledge on the pew. Shorthand references to Bible stories and concepts go over the heads of most Americans, and once their attention is lost, it’s hard to regain.

Seasoned complacency. Some in the audience will know the Word, but the probability is high that these individuals are less apt to have reached and discipled a soul than previous generations. The Word has never traveled the eighteen inches from their brains to their hearts. They are hearers, but not doers (James 1:22).

These and other factors affect how preachers communicate. Preachers should not assume that communication occurs simply because the message is delivered. People need to hear and respond to the good news.

The single biggest problem in communication is the illusion that it has taken place.
- George Bernard Shaw

Preachers are communicators. Preachers are honored to make God’s Word come alive in hearers’ hearts. What a sacred privilege and weighty responsibility! To communicate the gospel, we constantly insist on being heard by navigating the modern hearer’s roadblocks and filters. Consider these timely suggestions that stem from timeless communication methods.

Relationships matter. People should get their news from you—living letters known and read of all men (II Corinthians 3:1-3). Building relationships with hearers has never been more critical. The greatest preaching probably occurs in a small group, at a kitchen table, or in a coffee shop. Think Acts 2:42 or Acts 20:20. “Back to Acts” should be more than a slogan; it should be a way of life.

Where you start matters. In our preparation, we begin with the Word, but in speaking, we start with a perceived need. Lloyd John Ogilvie, the late U.S. Senate chaplain and prolific author, welcomed people at the front door of his church each Sunday morning and asked, “What do you need from God today?” Although his message was prepared, he mentally took those responses into the pulpit.

Lest that sound heretical, remember the building of the furnishings of the Tabernacle. God described them from the inside out, beginning with the Ark (Exodus 25-27). But when a man approached the Tabernacle, it was from the outside in, starting with the Brazen Altar. The preacher knows the unseen objective, but always leads the hearer from where he is to where God wants him to be. So, begin by planting a bold “You Are Here” marker in your message. Then Sherpa your way with the help of the Holy Spirit to the objective.

The way you take matters. Visuals, illustrations, and Bible stories told and explained are needed waypoints in a message. Stories are more crucial than ever. People find themselves in a narrative, so tell stories. You will never have people’s undivided attention better than saying, “Once upon a time...”



The length of the sermon matters. I could listen to preaching for hours—I love it that much—yet I recognize that every second counts when the Spirit convicts a human heart. So, my messages today are shorter than they were in years gone by. If the subject needs more time, it becomes a series. How long should the sermon be? Just long enough—and no longer.

The altar matters. My personal conviction is that no sermon should be preached without the gospel. And no service goes by in our church without inviting people to the altar and salvation. If it does not lead to that, are we preaching the Good News? I know those “seasoned saints” who consider themselves connoisseurs of phenomenal sermons will be disappointed. But we get what we preach: tickled ears or changed lives.

I recently preached about the Holy Spirit baptism in our church. Two of those who received the Spirit have been raised in Pentecostal churches their entire lives but had never received the Spirit. Assume nothing. Preach the whole counsel of God, but always include the gospel (Acts 20:27).

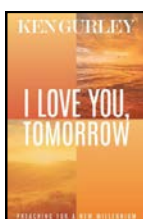
Lifestyle matters. The preaching doesn’t stop when the sermon ends. Who you are matters as much or more than what you say. Jesus said the words He spoke were “spirit” with a lowercase “s” (John 6:63). Our human spirits entwine with the words we speak (Luke 6:45). Hearers can sense if you love them—and that has more eloquence than a wordsmith.

Preaching matters, and how we preach matters now more than ever. Try these suggestions. Innovate and experiment. New wine deserves new wineskins (Mark 2:22).

Ken Gurley



Ken Gurley has served as senior pastor of First Church since 1988. He and his wife reside in the Clear Lake area and have six children - one son, two daughters and their spouses - and eight grandchildren. He is the author of numerous books and the host of “Morning Devotion with Ken Gurley.”



Recommended Resource
I Love You Tomorrow by Ken Gurley, Word Aflame Press, 2024).



[Click here to subscribe.](#)





Does Anyone Care What I'm Saying?

Joshua B. Carson

Have you ever preached and felt it went so poorly that you wanted to run away?

You know, one of those messages where you received more “Bless him, Lord” from the congregation than “amens.” The good news is you are not alone; but the bad news is you probably have to preach again in a few days. Certainly, it is an honor to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ; however, it is a weighty honor. Herein lies the purpose of this little article.

We all want to be effective preachers and teachers to the culture housed within our current congregation and community. The question is how do we accomplish that goal?

The late, great minister Rev. Johnny James told us what not to do. He'd say, “Don't use big words no one understands” and “Don't think we can be preachers while being worldly at the same time.” There was another guy a few years before him who gave us some pretty great information that ended up forever recorded in the Holy Scriptures.

In the New Testament, it seems Paul becomes an overnight preaching sensation after his dramatic revelatory conversion. Even a cursory glance through his works leaves the reader aware of Paul's burden to preach “Christ and him crucified” to every audience possible. His heartfelt burden to convey the doctrine to the next generation and beyond is evident throughout his ministry, even within the very last of his letters.

From one scripture, from one book, from one man, we find a model that worked then and still works now in this age. “Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (II Timothy 2:15).

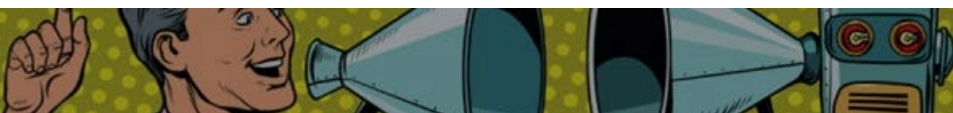
Approved unto God

The study of scripture should first and foremost be for our own personal growth and devotion. God's approval must always be the primary purpose of our ministry. I was only a few years out of Bible college, and to say I loved preaching would be an understatement. There was a well-meaning elder who pulled me close and told me, “Josh, fall in love with preaching.” And I did. I consumed every preaching tape, and I tore apart every preaching outline in the study of hermeneutics and homiletics. However, I will never forget the day as a young minister when I walked in and sat down on the couch in my pastor's office. Through tears and repentance, I confessed that somewhere along the way, I had fallen more in love with preaching than with the people. Preaching just to be a great preacher is never the purpose. God is in the people-loving, soul-saving business.

Somewhere along the way, I had fallen more in love with preaching than with the people.

A Worker Not to Be Ashamed

When pleasing God is the primary purpose, laziness is not an option. Every preacher striving to effectively communicate with this generation must become a student of scripture. We should be constantly investing in our own spiritual and intellectual growth and engaging the most thoughtful and appropriate tools and resources available. If you touch on hot topics, they should be handled with Word and wisdom. Our current culture expects whoever is speaking to be educated on the text and to display discipline within all areas of their own life—spiritually, physically, mentally, and emotionally.



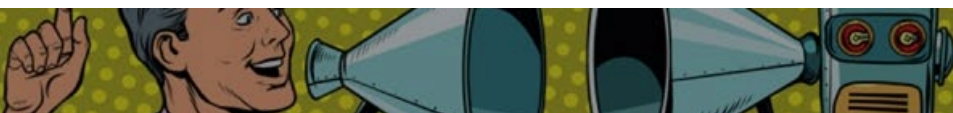
Rightly dividing the Word of Truth

Every preacher needs people in their life who can judge their message privately before it is preached publicly. Textual accuracy is of the utmost importance when relaying God's Word. Undoubtedly, at some level, your personality will portray itself as you speak because God called you to preach. However, your humor or genius cannot ever make up the difference for scriptures pulled out of context or misrepresentations of God's Word.

In conclusion, remaining true to these principles is imperative. Within this all-important framework, we can craft a message as directed by God, with cultural relevance that resonates with the modern-day audience. For instance, if you are preaching about the dangers of certain music and you mention an artist, consider if that person or type of music is pertinent to the assembly to whom you are speaking. A relevant speaker needs input from different generations. Ask yourself who you know and trust that can speak into your life and keep you culturally appropriate as you proclaim the Word.

Joshua B. Carson

Josh Carson became pastor of Calvary Tabernacle and president of Indiana Bible College in the spring of 2020. He has worked in youth ministry for nearly twenty years, serving at Youth Ministries in St. Louis since 2013 and most recently as the president of UPCI Youth Ministries. He is passionate about leading and training the next generation of Apostolic youth to reach the world. He met the "love of his life," Rachel while attending Indiana Bible College, and they have been married since 2002. He loves being a dad to his amazing four children, Canan, Carver, Kadynce, and Casen. Josh enjoys reading, writing, spending time outdoors, running, Mexican food, and more than anything, wrestling time with the kids. The motto at the Carson house is, "These are the best days of our lives."





Is My Sermon a Message?

Josh Herring

According to *Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations* by Paul Lee Tan, the longest sermon on record was preached by Rev. Robert Marshall in Birmingham, Michigan, in 1976.

The sermon was recorded to have lasted sixty hours and thirty-one minutes. The previous record holder was Robert McKee who preached a sermon that lasted fifty-two hours. Marshall said that it took him two and a half years to write the 500,000-word sermon. Despite the length of that record-setting sermon, I haven't read any headlines about The Great Birmingham Revival of 1976.

Preaching in North America has a different vibe than any other culture in the world. While nothing is more important than hearing from God every time one is called upon to preach, time should be of the essence when engaging a North American audience. It is scary when a minister is more pleased with the length of his or her message than the outcome of it. I am afraid some ministers would feel more fulfilled in the warden ministry than the pastoral. The saints feel sentenced rather than stirred when the sermon begins to ruin their plans for the week.

I also believe the content and delivery of the message being preached or taught are vital when relating to the life of the individual in the audience. The minister needs to find the pathway of connecting the biblical truth to the active trials, traumas, and tragedies currently afflicting the life of the hearer, or else it is just another Bible study or story.

For instance, Jesus rebuking the wind while walking on the waves might mean nothing to the first-time guest. However, if the minister digs into the subject and discovers that in the original text, to rebuke means to threaten, then the story can take on a whole new journey into the listeners' ears. Beginning to describe the wind as the invisible pressure we all deal with, the minister can let the listeners in on the secret the Lord was saying then and continues to say now. And that is, the pressure you are facing that no one can see is being threatened by the God of glory. Now the sermon is becoming a message to the people in the crowd because they feel the wind also.

It is of the utmost importance that the minister realizes there are a multitude of scenarios, situations, and struggles going on in the audience. Therefore, praying for a message loaded with content to hit as many of these battles as possible will go much further than a canned thought from Spurgeon's vault.

Lazy study leads to shallow and boring sermons. One of the greatest ways to discover a nugget of revelation from a text is to read it throughout the week over and over until you see what is not there as much as you see what is written. I know that I can read a text fifty to sixty times and see the same thing and, then, next time I look at it, another world opens up. Your audience deserves the secret, deeper revelations discovered by prayer, fasting, and study. That is what will carry the original, convenient thought so easily attained into the deeper crevasses of their hearts and minds. I believe they deserve your best thoughts!

Lazy study leads to shallow and boring sermons.

Other things to consider:

- Does my preaching challenge, convict, and consume the crowd?
- Does the person listening to my message want to go to the altar or the car when I am done?
- Are the carefree challenged to go to another level?
- Do the comfortable get convicted?
- Will the cold become consumed by this word?



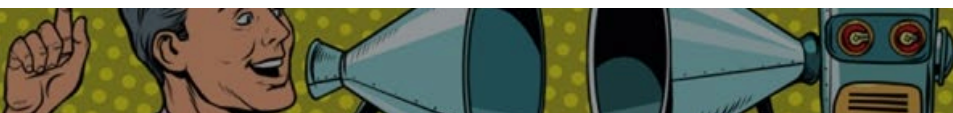
This is why praying over our messages is irreplaceable. We need to drop tears over what we plan to preach. Submitting to God privately before speaking publicly will help the speaker every time. North America needs to hear Jesus, not me. Jesus knows what each person at the service is going through and He has a way of bringing the message directly into the person's life.

We need to drop tears over what we plan to preach.

Lastly, have you ever or are you now living the message you are about to preach? If you have lived it, we will feel your dominion on the subject that you are delivering. If you are currently living it, we will feel your passion and pain as you conquer alongside of us! But if you haven't lived it and are not living it, your words will be hollow at best. There needs to be weight behind our words. Authority is imparted by a superior, but dominion is earned by conquering a foe. The message preached with dominion, leaves no doubts at its conclusion.

Josh Herring

In 2022, after serving twenty years as a full-time evangelist in the UPCI, Josh Herring, his wife Jenee, and their children Jude, Jhett, Jade, and Jax were called to start Revival Tabernacle in Frisco, TX where they currently pastor. They are excited to be a part of the quickly growing revival in the Dallas metroplex!





Life Preaching

Jonathan McClintock

It was a conversation I will never forget. The hotel lobby was all but empty as I sat in an overstuffed chair across from yet another great Apostolic preacher. I had been given the privilege of interviewing several Apostolic preachers for the book project I was working on, but this conversation sparked something. And the moment Bro. Raymond Woodward said “it,” I knew it had to be the title of the book.

In response to one of the many questions I asked him, he made the statement that some messages are “life messages.” Some messages have more meaning and a depth other sermons do not; these are the ones you preach from your life. They are the result of a deep relationship with Jesus. They are the culmination of a trial the Lord brought you through. They are the lessons you learned while holding on to Jesus and experiencing first-hand the power of God’s Word at work in your own life — the preacher’s life. Thus, the title, *Life Preaching*.

Some messages are “life messages.” These are the ones you preach from your life.

When I consider the mandate we have been given by the Lord Jesus to preach the Word and proclaim His gospel to the world, I am humbled to be in the number of those who are privileged to publicly proclaim this truth on a weekly basis. However, whether you have the privilege of preaching on a weekly basis or a handful of times per year, the responsibility of preparing and delivering the message has a way of weighing heavy on the messenger.

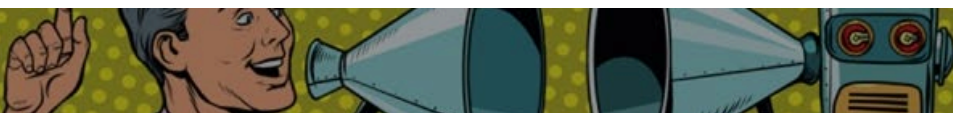
Sermon Planning

The best advice I could give to the pastor and preacher is to plan ahead. Here is the obvious: Sunday comes around every week. We have all had those weeks when it feels like certain days were skipped over and you think, “Didn’t I just do this yesterday?” But I have learned in my own pastoring and preaching that the Holy Spirit can anoint and direct us in our planning.

I would encourage the preacher who has the task of preaching on a weekly basis to plot out texts and themes for at least three months. If you are one who needs more lead time, then plot out six to nine months. However, three to six is probably sufficient. Looking at your church calendar, note special times when you want to cover special topics or texts. For example, in October begin looking ahead to the months of January, February, and March. How do you want to begin the year? What are the texts and themes you want to cover at the outset of the year?

I give the following solely as an example, not as a suggestion. This is just how I decided to do it this year. At the end of 2023, I began planning the preaching for first few months of 2024. I felt directed to set the tone for 2024 by preaching from Jesus’ words in Luke 4:16-21 when He stood before the crowded synagogue and read from Isaiah 61. I proclaimed 2024 to be “The Year of God’s Favor.” I spent the next few weeks preaching topically from the different aspects of prophetic fulfillment (“The Year of Healing,” “The Year of Deliverance,” etc.).

From there I preached leading up to Easter from the last few chapters of John. These were more textual or expository sermons that carried us to Easter-Resurrection Sunday. After that, I took a few weeks to highlight themes from the Book of Acts. That all being said, knowing my text and theme ahead of time relieved so much pressure from my week. I knew on Monday the direction I was headed in study and preparation for the upcoming Sunday. Planning is the preacher’s greatest ally in combating last-minute preparation. The thought of beginning sermon preparation on Saturday evening around 7 pm gives me hives. And we’ve all been there!



Sermon Preparation

Now, when it comes to preparation, every preacher has their own system, their own way of creating sermons. As I teach developing preachers at Urshan University, I do my best to highlight the basics and give them a foundational understanding of sermon preparation. Furthermore, I have found that though my way of developing sermons has changed through the years, some of the process still involves implementing these foundational methods.

My process looks a little like this: After settling on a text or passage of Scripture, I spend some time pouring over the text. I love to outline the main ideas and themes of the passage so that I get a good idea of what the author is trying to communicate. After determining what the author was trying to say, I then spend time crafting a statement that will summarize what I feel to say in the sermon. I call this the Take Home Truth. Then, I take time to walk through several different commentaries, the first of which I look to are the more theological ones before I venture off into those that are more sermonic. This process helps me to become as familiar as I can with the text of Scripture I will be preaching. This process has usually created a few questions for me regarding certain words and phrases in the passage and I will then go to resources to help me with understanding the biblical words behind the passage.

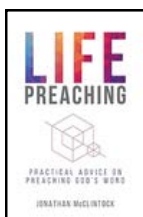
After all the textual study, I then begin the process of building out the frame and structure of the message. My goal is to structure the sermon so that everything points to the Take Home Truth. Once the frame has been built and I have loosely structured the “argument” and flow, I turn to either the Introduction (Opening) or Conclusion (Closing). If possible, I prefer creating an introduction that “introduces” either the Take Home Truth itself, or a portion of it. For example, my sermon this past Sunday (taken from Genesis 40) communicated this Take Home Truth: “God never forgets the dream or the dreamer.” My introduction took a lighthearted approach to how we as humans are so prone to forget.

Next, I will work on my conclusion or closing. I try to picture how I want the sermon to end and the audience to respond. I craft the direction of the conclusion to hopefully achieve that goal. Remember, this is what you have been working towards this entire sermon preparation process. We want the audience to respond.

Finally, after all the components have been assembled, it is imperative to begin verbally practicing the content to gauge how it is going to flow. Remember, the sermon is a spoken experience, and if left on the page as a written essay, it will not have the intended impact. We often think the sermon is finished when we are finished preparing the “notes.” However, the sermon is not finished until it is preached.

Preaching is a supernatural act.

Preaching is a supernatural act. God takes the efforts of a feeble man or woman and speaks through them His words of life. What an incredible privilege to carry God’s Word and proclaim it to both saved and lost. Just know this, your preaching is making a difference!



Recommended Resource
Life Preaching by
Jonathan McClintock
(Word Aflame Press, 2015).

Jonathan McClintock

Jonathan McClintock is pastor of Life Church Winghaven, a daughter work of The Sanctuary (Hazelwood, Missouri – Pastor Mitchell Bland). Jonathan also works for Pentecostal Resources Group as a Special Projects editor, serves as an instructor of Preaching at Urshan University co-hosts the Urshan Pulpit Podcast, and is the author of *Life Preaching: Practical Advice on Preaching God's Word*. He and his wife Angela live in O'Fallon, Missouri.





**ISSUE 23 TOOLBOX
PRACTICAL TOOLS
YOU CAN USE**




Apostolic Preaching Resources

Click the links and images below to discover more resources on apostolic preaching.

ministrycentral Resources Courses Credentialing Music Masterclass SGI (Church Growth) Contact

Continuing Education
Preaching
3 Lessons



Instructor
Scott Graham
and others

[View](#)

