

Preaching Basics

May 2021

Introduction

Like most things we learn in life, we start off unconsciously incompetent as preachers. We don't know what we don't know about the art of preaching. We are enthusiastically inexperienced. We've seen it done a lot but haven't done so much ourselves. But as we journey forward, we typically reach a moment of feeling overwhelmed by how much we don't know, as the enormity of the awesome responsibility grips our hearts. This is difficult but good. If preachers embrace this humbling season, God can rebuild our confidence on the right foundations (e.g. his glory not man's approval), and help us to grow in anointing and ability, until, over time, we are in a position to support others, who are called, along the same path.

Preaching - a definition

It's hard to give a better definition of preaching than Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones' summary 'logic on fire'. Preachers should expect people to be transformed on the spot, in the moment, such is their conviction about the power of God's word, and the love of God to save and transform people.

P.R.E.A.C.H.

Here are some of my keys to preaching.

P - prayerful revelation. Everything to do with preaching must be soaked in prayer, including your preparation. You must ask God to grip you with something in his word; to set something on fire. To give you something you desperately need, as well as the church. A word, a phrase, a theme, a question, or all the above, that becomes alive and pulsating with his Spirit.

R - reliable exegesis. You must do the hard work of sustained, careful, thoughtful, systematic Bible study. Read your passage again, and again. Pray it over and over. Read it in context. Read it in different translations. Dialogue with God about it. Ask him lots of questions. Write down all the thoughts you get. I print out the passage, double-spaced in different translations (usually, ESV, NIV, NLT and The Message paraphrase). Refer to top commentaries to see if your thinking is inline with theirs, and if you've missed anything good that God might want you to include. This is a good

website: <https://www.bestcommentaries.com/> Errors to avoid include: saying a point we'd like to make, and illustrations that we'd like to use (because people may laugh at them, or they make us look clever, or cool) but they're not really inline with the content of the passage we are preaching on.

E - engaging presentation. You can't preach everything in a passage. Ask God to give you a good structure that focuses on the points he wants you to make. Your message should really be a one theme/point message with subpoints. I like three subpoints, it's nice and Trinitarian and there's been some research done saying people remember things better in threes. But it's good to change things up and be led by God and the passage you're preaching. Before giving you some structures you can try, here are some basic points. Use good illustrations to make key points come alive. Ask people questions in your preach to make it feel more like a conversation. 'We' comments/questions draw people in. 'You' questions challenge people. Think of the difference here of me writing: You need a balance vs. We need a balance. Or what is God challenge us to do? What is God challenging you to do? Young preachers more often than not use too little 'you' because of nerves, discomfort challenging people, and can turn a preach into more of a seminar. Emotionless preaching is not engaging and also not real. Human beings are emotional. Use emotion appropriately. Let the strengths of your personality shine through. It will help you connect with people.

<i>Andy Stanley structure</i>	<i>Tim Keller structure*</i>
We - here's a problem we all wrestle with (and why it's not great and needs addressing)	The problem
Me - here's how I struggle with it personally (and therefore you might also)	How Christ dealt with it
God - here's how God answers it in this passage, how we can overcome in him	But we can't be like Jesus in our own strength
You - here's how you need to respond (repentance, application steps)	Only when we receive Christ's ministry can we do what Jesus did (grace)
Us - here's what could happen if we all do this (exciting vision, hope for the future)	*my summary of it.

Notice how they both begin with relevance. Here's why you need to listen. Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones often did this by saying that the passage he was preaching on was the most important one in the Bible (because right then for the people listening it was).

I believe it's good to 'get out of the blocks', i.e. start well in preaching. Start with an engaging/interesting/provocative illustration/story/anecdote that immediately opens up the issue you're addressing well. For example, I started a preach on Daniel 3, titled 'Love Wins', the first point of which was 'Religion [as distinguished from Christianity] Kills', like this: "'God is not Great' [show book], because, as the subtitle of the book, written by atheist Christopher Hitchens goes on to explain, "religion poisons everything". I 100% agree with him. Hi, my name's Howard, I'm the Lead Pastor of Westminster Chapel. Thank you for joining us. So, how can I agree with him? ..." Or, for one of the tag preaches we did at Chapel on Matthew 10:38-42, titled 'One Thing', which was dealing with the problem of being distracted by many things, we came up with the idea of the preacher walking on with his phone, and it going off, as he walks on stage, he answers it, then a minute later it beeps interrupting him introducing himself, and he stops what he's doing - all to demonstrate the common experience we all have of being distracted and even controlled by our phones, in a humorous but powerful way.

It's also important to end a message well, with a clear call to action, in the power and grace of Jesus Christ.

A - anointed unction. We must pray for this - for God's backing on what we're preaching because we are so anchored in his word and heart. Repent of anything that may grieve or quench the Spirit throughout. Regularly ask God to search your heart and see if there is any unclean way in it. Ask God for a burden for his glory and the people you're addressing; a holy fear of the Lord and a deep love for his people. This, in my experience, is what the anointing flows out of. Anointing is the most intangible part of preaching. The Holy Spirit goes where he wills but there are ways we can invite his presence to come close as we prepare and preach, and grow in greater sensitivity to him. If I only had one thing in a sermon I would want anointed unction. Some advice Andre Agassi, one of the greatest ground-stroke tennis players, who is said to have hit the hardest and fastest passing shots in the world in his day, was given by his dad when he was young was to just hit the ball as hard as he possibly could, without caring where it went. Some would even fly out over the tennis court fence. He learned from a young age to hit with power. Preachers should learn from a young age the need for Holy Spirit power, and feel some freedom to hit hard, even if the end result isn't as refined just yet.

C - Christ exalting. People are transformed by seeing and meeting Jesus not hearing our 'clever' words. We are privileged to facilitate an encounter with Jesus as we preach. Christ, the cross and resurrection, should feature in every sermon. We are not preaching about a dead, religious leader but a living, victorious one. We are not preaching about works based salvation but salvation by grace through faith in Christ alone. It's only in Christ, through Christ, with Christ, that we can bear fruit. How can your

message glorify him? How can it reveal his gentle and lowly loving heart? Will your sermon result in people exalting the name of Jesus?

H - honest and vulnerable application. In the age we live in it's more important than ever that we are authentic and don't attempt to present a fake persona whilst preaching. People want the real deal not a cheap imitation. This means we need to share our good and bad stories, our achievements and struggles. Don't let people put you on a pedestal, instead of Jesus. We are after a culture of honest, open vulnerability, so that real trust, deep friendship and true community can form and thrive. That's where we believe people grow best, a community they don't need to wear a mask in, or hide their sin issues, etc., but can find help and give support to others, without being judged. Will your message help with that? And will it be specific about what you're asking people to do/think/be differently, in light of the passage, in the power of Christ?

Other comments

As a Lead Elder, I like to spotlight key ministries, events, etc. that we want people to get behind. Since Life Groups are such an important ministry, I try to drip feed them into my sermons whenever I can.

Books to read

1. *Explosive Preaching* by Ron Boyd-MacMillan
2. *Preaching* by Timothy Keller
3. *Preaching & Preachers* by D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones
4. *Preaching to a Post-Everything World* by Zack Eswine
5. *The Sermon Maker* by Calvin Miller

TAG Preaching Tips

If you're doing a TAG preach at Westminster Chapel, in person, you only have 15 minutes. That means you can't do all the things you might do in a full preach, and that you need to work together well with your TAG partner about who will cover which essential elements.

If you are doing two different passages but the same theme, it may work to have two mini-messages, rather than a message in two parts.

TAG preaches are intended to be training opportunities. They should be challenging but fun.

We give feedback for every TAG preach, usually 3-4 good points and 1 thing to work on.
It's meant to be encouraging!