

CONVERSATIONS ON PREACHING

Featuring:
David Jeremiah
Chuck Swindoll
Max Lucado
Albert Mohler, Jr.
Jim Henry
John Maxwell
Tony Evans
Ed Young, Sr.
John MacArthur
and more

CONVERSATIONS ON P R E A C H I N G

Visits with today's great preachers taken
from the pages of *Preaching Magazine*

Edited by Michael Duduit

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Introduction

One of the things preachers most enjoy doing is “talking preaching” with their counterparts. We may go to conventions and conferences for the business and programs offered, but the most enjoyable times are those conversations with fellow preachers. We like to “talk preaching.”

Over nearly twenty years as editor of *Preaching* magazine, one of the great privileges I’ve had has been the opportunity to “talk preaching” with some of the most effective preachers in the world. The chance to sit down and visit with a Chuck Swindoll or John MacArthur, a Warren Wiersbe or Gardner C. Taylor — it just doesn’t get much better than that.

It’s clear from the comments I receive that *Preaching* readers enjoy the chance to listen in on these conversations. That’s why we’ve taken this opportunity to share with you some highlights drawn from the dozens of interviews which have appeared in *Preaching* magazine through the years. Although I’ve conducted most of them, a number of interviews cited in this collection were conducted by R. Albert Mohler, who served as associate editor of *Preaching* until his election as President of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, KY. One of the interviews used here was conducted by Mark Johnson, who served as managing editor of *Preaching* prior to his call as pastor of a Maryland church.

This little volume is offered with the prayer that you’ll gain some new insights and a great deal of encouragement as you listen in on these conversations on preaching.

Michael Duduit
Editor
Preaching magazine

Editor’s note: The designation next to the name of the preacher being quoted represents the issue of *Preaching* magazine in which that interview first appeared. For example, “JF 99” stands for January-February 1999. “MA” is March-April, “MJ” is May-June, and so on.

Why do we preach?

Rick Warren (JF 08)

The bigger the church gets the more important the pulpit becomes because it is the rudder of the ship. Where else do you get an hour of undivided attention with all these people on a weekly basis? Most pastors do not understand the power of preaching. But even more important than that is they don't understand the purpose of preaching. I've read more than 500 books on preaching, and as I've read them, the vast majority does not really understand that preaching is about transformation, not information.

So, to understand the purpose of preaching you have to go back and look at a few things. First, what is the purpose of God for man, and second what is the purpose of God for the Bible? Once you understand those two things, your purpose for preaching becomes very clear. What is the purpose of God for man? Well, the Bible tells us in Romans 8:29, "For those he foreknew he did predestine to become conformed to the image of his Son." God's purpose from the very beginning of time has been to make us like Jesus. In fact, in Genesis He says to let us make man in our image. That has always been God's purpose — to make man in His image. Not to make gods but to make us godly, to have the character of His Son, to be conformed into the image of Christ. So, He wanted to make us like Himself. In Genesis there was the fall — Jesus came to restore what was there before, so the goal of all preaching has to be to produce Christ-likeness in an individual. Is that person becoming more and more like Jesus?

Now, what is the purpose of the Bible? Well, it says in 2 Timothy 3:16-17, "All scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be thoroughly furnished unto every good work." People misread that verse most of the time. The purpose of the Bible is not for doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness. Those are all "for this" in the Greek. For this, for this,

for this, in order that. The purpose is in order that. Doctrine in itself is not the purpose of the Bible. Reproof in itself is not the purpose; correction, nor training are the purpose. The bottom line is to change lives: "That the man of God may be thoroughly furnished unto every good work." Every message must be preaching for life change.

I hear people talk about "life application" as being a genre or type of preaching. If you are not having life application, you are not preaching. It may be a lecture; it may be a study; it may be a commentary, but it is not preaching. To me, preaching is for life change. I am not the master of this. Don't make John the Baptist your model. Don't make John MacArthur your model. Don't make Rick Warren, or Spurgeon, or Calvin or anybody else your model. Make Jesus your model.

In my two day seminar on preaching that we take thousands of pastors through I just keep coming back to, "Now let's see how Jesus did it. Now, look at how Jesus did it." You take the greatest sermon in the world — which is the Sermon on the Mount — and He starts off, "Let me tell you eight ways to be happy." Happy are you if you do this; you are happy if you do this. Then He talks about anger: Don't get angry. He talks about divorce: Don't divorce. He talks about worry — let me give you two reasons not to worry: It's unreasonable; it's unnatural. Jesus talks about all of these practical things, and then He says, "Now, if you put this into practice you are a wise man. If you don't, you are a fool. Build a house on a rock." The Pharisees were amazed because Jesus preached as one having authority. It is 100 percent application. My model is not anybody but Jesus.

My goal is not to inform but to transform. Unless you understand that, your messages tend to be based on the traditional style of teaching. I say interpretation without application is abortion.

Albert Mohler, Jr. (JA 07)

Preach the Word! That simple imperative frames the act of preaching as an act of obedience. That is where any theology of preaching must begin. Preaching did not emerge from the church's experimentation with communication techniques. The church does not preach because preaching is thought to be a good idea or an effective technique. The

sermon has not earned its place in Christian worship by proving its utility in comparison with other means of communication or aspects of worship. Rather, we preach because we have been commanded to preach.

Preaching is a commission — a charge. As Paul stated boldly, it is the task of the minister of the gospel to "preach the Word, . . . in season and out of season" (2 Tim. 4:2). A theology of preaching begins with the humble acknowledgement that preaching is not a human invention but a gracious creation of God and a central part of His revealed will for the church. Furthermore, preaching is distinctively Christian in its origin and practice. Other religions may include teaching, or even public speech and calls to prayer. However, the preaching act is *sui generis*, a function of the church established by Jesus Christ.

As John A. Broadus stated: "Preaching is characteristic of Christianity. No other religion has made the regular and frequent assembling of groups of people, to hear religious instruction and exhortation, and integral part of divine worship." The importance of preaching is rooted in Scripture and revealed in the unfolding story of the church. The church has never been faithful when it has lacked fidelity in the pulpit. In the words of P. T. Forsyth: "With preaching Christianity stands or falls, because it is the declaration of the gospel."

The church cannot *but* preach lest it deny its own identity and abdicate its ordained purpose. Preaching is communication, but not *mere* communication. It is human speech, but much more than speech. As Ian Pitt-Watson noted, preaching is not even "a kind of speech communication that happens to be about God." Its ground, its goal, and its glory are all located in the sovereign will of God.

The act of preaching brings forth a combination of exposition, testimony, exhortation, and teaching. Still, preaching cannot be reduced to any of these, or even to the sum total of its individual parts combined.

The primary Greek form of the word *preach* (*kerusso*) reveals its intrinsic rootage in the *kerygma* — the gospel itself. Preaching is an inescapably theological act, for the preacher dares to speak of God and, in a very real sense, for God. A theology of preaching should take Trinitarian form, reflecting the very nature of the self-revealing God.

In so doing, it bears witness to the God who speaks, the Son who saves, and the Spirit who illuminates.

Jim Henry (SO 99)

I think if I had to do it over I would have put more of a priority on (preaching) earlier in my ministry; I would have applied myself at being a better communicator. Even though God has given me a gift — I'm not a great communicator, but I feel like He has given me a gift of relating to people — I think I would have worked at it and studied it, watched others and tried to hone my skills more than I did, rather than flying by the seat of my pants. Then, I could have because the churches were smaller, were not as demanding. But because I was not as disciplined, I would spend my time doing other things. I probably wasted time; in fact I know I did. A lot of times I would study for thirty or forty minutes, then I'd be up and say I've got to do something; I'd go and write a letter — I didn't just focus in on preaching and getting ready to preach. I would watch others and hone my skills earlier; I wouldn't wait until later. I would do that.

I would see that preaching is a priority. I mean, other than your personal walk with the Lord, it goes hand in hand with everything else you do. Even if you are a good pastor, as much as I can do one on one — as important as that is to my preaching — if I can't communicate that on Sunday, then it doesn't make any difference in one way what I've done all week long. For instance, I used to do a lot of counseling. I wouldn't have done as much of that. I know sometimes you are the one that's got to do a lot of that, but I did too much. I didn't realize that when I'm preaching God's Word and applying it to life that I get more done in 35 or 40 minutes on Sunday morning than I could if I'd spent every hour five or six days a week listening to people. I've got to do some of that — there is a balance there — but I would have put more priority on preaching.

Come Sunday morning, it is just like an athlete. You know, can you hit the bucket? Can you hit the golf ball?

There is a sense of people saying, "What have you produced now on Sunday morning that will help me on Monday morning?" I must realize

it is a priority. I cannot make it third, fourth, fifth in the list. Next to my family and my walk with the Lord, I think it is co-equal with pastoring. You have got to be careful because you can say, “well, I’ve been out pastoring,” and neglect your preaching. Or on the other hand you can say I’m preparing preaching and neglect your people.

John Maxwell (JF 98)

All great leaders are effective communicators. It is the vehicle for the vision. For me to know where I want to take a group of people and not have the ability to cast that dream, preach that message, communicate that heart, makes the dream impossible. The vision won’t be accomplished.

So one of the reasons I have committed so much time, not only in teaching leadership but communication, is I think they are so compatible. You show me a great leader and I’ll show you a person that became a great leader because of his or her ability to communicate effectively. You can be a good preacher and not a good leader but you cannot be a good leader without being a good preacher or a good communicator. You have to be able to communicate the vision. What I love about it is that they all do it differently, there is not a certain style or a certain method. But they all have the ability to get their heart into the heart of their people. And that is always done through preaching and through communication.

Tony Evans (ND 97)

Preaching is a powerful tool. It starts with your view of the Word. If you believe in an innerrant, authoritative Word, then that means you take preaching very seriously and you look at it as a powerful process of making a difference. And you don’t just preach to teach, you preach to transform. So, the issue at the end of the sermon is not only did they understand, but what will happen differently because they came here and I was in front of them with God’s Word? When you look at it that way, preaching becomes a very powerful, powerful thing that we cannot take lightly.

Ed Young, Sr. (ND 94)

I think preaching is vital, I really do. First of all, I think worship is vital and preaching is a part of worship. It's where the family meets, where they give praise to God, where there is celebration, where there is testimony, where the Word of God is read, and where the Word of God is proclaimed. It's a vital part of worship. It's amazing to me how sometimes we can take the Bible and exegete it and teach it and preach it — and make it boring.

To me, good preaching involves a variety of approaches. I think all preaching, by definition, introduces people to Christ and must be biblical; but the approach has to be different so they don't say "S.O.S." (Same Old Stuff). The Bible is so relevant, and we can take that relevancy in God's eternal Word and let the Holy Spirit work with it. Then preaching will be blessed by God, people will come to Christ, and the family will be nurtured.

James Earl Massey (SO 92)

The sermon becomes, first of all, an invitational word to consider Christ. Secondly, the sermon becomes a means of expanding one's understanding of Christ. Sometimes the understanding must come before a decision can be reached. The sermon becomes a tool for helping a person consider Christ in the New Testament witness, and then the sermon takes on a teaching function. According to the New Testament, the preacher must be a teaching minister. The preacher has to lead the congregation to understand the meaning of Christ for the whole of life and for the believer to see all of life in the light of Christ. This tool we call the sermon is an invitational means, but also a means for increasing our understanding.

I as preacher must be persuaded to act upon the information placed before me in the text. All information concerning Jesus Christ presents me with a decision. As I receive this information, I must be persuaded to act upon it. All New Testament witness concerning Jesus Christ presents implications — and I must be persuaded to act upon the implications, to trust the implications.

It is not only the preacher who must heed these implications but all those who hear the preacher's voice. I might speak a word and lack the persuasiveness to help the person who heard me to follow through. But I must leave that in the hands of God — to send along someone else who might be able to bring that persuasion, to build upon the foundation I have made. I do not expect always to see everyone who hears me believe or accept this word, but at least I have done my part in getting them ready for this decision.

Frank Harrington (JA 92)

My own view is that preaching is the central task of the preacher. All else in ministry radiates from the effectiveness of the man or the woman in the pulpit. The pulpit is your best opportunity to be an evangelist, your best opportunity to be a pastor, your best opportunity to be a prophet. The pulpit sets the tone for the parish.

The preacher ought to consider himself as God's chief dreamer in this church — as the standard to articulate the dream God has placed on the heart, so that preacher and people together can make the dream come true. That is the central task of the preaching minister.

John MacArthur (ND 91)

The measure of my ministry is this: was he a steward of the mysteries of God? Did he guard the treasure so that from the beginning to the end of his life he kept the purity of truth? Did he faithfully proclaim the truth as it should be proclaimed? Those are the marks of a faithful steward.

I am so passionately burdened not to misinterpret Scripture. I am driven by my understanding of Scripture. It drives everything in my life because I take God's statement to be true when He said, "I have exalted my Word above my name" (Psalm 138:2). Nothing is more precious to God than His Word, and every time I interpret a passage I exercise a sacred trust. I'm driven by that — compelled to be a steward of that treasure and to regard it with all the faculties and spiritual resources that I have.

The Word — preach it! Be quick to preach the Word whether it seems appropriate or not. The culture will tell you that it is inappropriate and that it doesn't matter. But preach the Word:

The essence of that preaching is reproof and rebuke and exhortation. People will not always like it but that is what will transform their lives. Don't succumb to those people looking for teachers who will tickle their ears, make them feel good and raise their self-esteem: They are seeking a diversion from the gospel.

When you preach the Word with faithfulness, you can say with Paul, "I don't have to worry about going to face my Lord. I'm ready because I have been faithful to His charge." The measure of your ministry is the truth of your preaching and your faithfulness to guard the treasure and pass it on.

Fred Craddock (MA 88)

Well, because we must. We must join the biblical Word with the human voice of the believer standing up in the company of other believers. Preaching has a socializing, community-building force. It brings the page of the text to life in an oral way. The nuances of the human voice maximize the content of the biblical message.

Preaching has a heavy tradition that generates a high level of expectation like no other single act in the church. Wherever you have an expectation this high, the possibility of gain, of fruit, of change, is great.

The Life of the Preacher

Gary Robinson (JF 06)

The preaching life is a life of temptations and dangers, not the least of which is the temptation to think you're more important than you really are. None of us is irreplaceable. It's the message that's essential, not the messenger. As long as the preacher remains a servant of the Word of God, he'll be blessed. If, however, his ministry becomes a vehicle for his own self-aggrandizement, he's got a big problem.

That's why the preacher needs to remember another preacher (and sometime jailbird) named Paul. As we conclude the letter to the Ephesians, we take one last look at its writer. He's not tapping out a sermon on Microsoft Word, a cup of good coffee within reach. He's chained to a Roman guard, a prisoner of the state. Yet, Paul is free. They may have chained his wrist, but they haven't taped his mouth shut. All he wants to do is speak a message clear and bold. He doesn't ask the people to pray for his release. He doesn't ask them to pray he'd be treated well. He only asks that they ask God to let him preach Jesus.

Jack Graham (ND 02)

Preaching must come out of the life of the preacher, the authenticity of the preacher's life and the character we build. There is no effective preaching without credibility in the pulpit — we've seen that many times. What I have tried to do is to build within my life the consistency of character that produces a consistency of message. The standard of biblical preaching and the call is a high call. We all fall short, yet we should aspire to preach a message that is consistent with our character and that our character will be consistent with our message. The integrity of the pulpit.

Jim Henry (SO 99)

I realize that in preaching if I'm not where the people are and not engaged with them, then I'm probably not going to connect with them. God has given me a love for people — to reach out to people and be reached by people. I love people. So when I became a pastor, I was engaged with the people their families from the very beginning: hospitals, weddings, deaths and standing around afterwards shaking hands. Having coffee, eating lunch or dinner with them just was part of my routine. I did not know any better. I thought that was what you did.

Then as the churches grew that I was in, I tried to keep that connection and it became more difficult because your leadership role changes. You become more of a vision caster, the administration piles up. The fact that you've been at a place a certain amount of time, it's kind of like a snow ball. You get more people that want you to write a letter of recommendation for them or they want to get into school. You get more of that just by being there — you get asked to do more things. But I still realize that I can't pastor or preach to these people if I don't keep doing this. So I find some other ways to try to stay connected. For instance, after the services, I'm usually the last one to leave. Not always, but usually I'll stand around on Sundays and Wednesdays just to be with the people. They know I'm there. Or I will have a reception line where people can come by. But I am going to be available. If somebody wants to tell me something or introduce family or a friend, I want to be there.

I keep a list all year long of people who have lost a close family member by death. And at Christmas I write a personal note to those people because I know this first Christmas is a little bit different without your dad or your mom or your son or daughter. It is just a little note but it is a connecting thing. It is a pastoral thing. Whenever I see a name in the paper, members that have been promoted or received an athletic award or something, or like the kids who have been in state Bible drill recently, I write a letter and send it out to all of them to say, "I'm proud of you." I hand write some; sometimes I dictate. I still do weddings; I don't do them all because we have so many. I still do funerals; I don't do many but I do some. I still go to the hospital; not every week but some. If I don't live with the people where they are, then when I get up

there to communicate with them I'm not going to be talking to them about where their needs are and what does God's Word have to say to them.

I have had to fight sometimes because it is easy to get caught up in other things, which are also very important. But I still continue to go out and eat lunch with our people, at dinner sometimes. I have a dinner group that I meet with — in fact, two — just to stay connected in an informal way with our people. When you go in that relationship they say, “What did we sing that song for? Why are we doing that?” They talk to you. You are hearing the people. Most of these people love you and they will be honest with you so that keeps me connected. Not always, but you can keep up a lot with what is going on in the hinterlands with the people by doing that.

Frank Harrington (JA 92)

You know, great people encourage great preaching. Many people say the preacher makes the church, but the very opposite of that is true. The church makes the preacher. I have been encouraged immensely by the members of this church to go into the pulpit and preach what God has laid on my heart. I have never had anyone suggest that I do otherwise, and the reason for that, I think, is because the prophetic and the pastoral must go together.

When I stand to preach it's within this family of faith in which we love each other. Together we have known happiness and heartbreak, success and sadness, triumph and tragedy; and if you can't talk about the things that are vital in this context, then where in God's name can you talk about it? I think the prophetic and the pastoral always go together.

The Preparation of the Sermon

Ricardo Norton (MJ 05)

Learning to prepare sermons is like learning to fly an airplane. Both sciences require precise knowledge and sound judgment. The similarities between sermon preparation and flying are especially enlightening to preachers who travel using aviation as a means of transportation. Pilots and preachers have the responsibility of taking the people safely to where they need to go. The sermon is like a short flight where the preacher elevates listeners to spiritual heights never experienced before.

Air travel and sermons have distinct transitions and phases. Sermons have an introduction, a body, and a conclusion. Similarly, aviation has peculiar parts, such as flight preparation, takeoff, destination, cruising altitude, and landing.

A good flight and good sermon begin with good preparation. For optimal performance, aviators and preachers need good physical and mental preparation for the journey. Fatigue and illness is often responsible for aviation accidents. This is why pilots should not fly when they are fatigued or ill. A preacher who is tired or sick can spoil a good sermon. Even such minor illnesses as the common cold can affect the tone of voice and normal breathing of preachers, undermining their communication skills.

The operational manual

Pilots are required to follow the instructions of the manufacturer's manual for the airplanes they fly. The Bible is the undisputed preaching manual for Christians. After all, God's command for his emissaries is to "preach the word" (2 Tim. 4:2). This word is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped" (2 Tim. 3:16-17). Competent preachers adopt the Bible as their operational handbook.

Food for the soul

The Bible is the source of food for the soul. Providing good and abundant food during flight was one of the airline industry's strategies, years ago, to attract and retain frequent travelers. Some airline companies even served coach passengers with cloth napkins and real silverware. Those were the "good old days." Because of financial constraints, food service in the airline business has decayed considerably. It has literally been reduced to peanuts. During a typical two-hour flight, most passengers are served only a soft drink and a small bag of peanuts or pretzels. The Bible is the main source of spiritual food. God has given it as a recipe book to feed spiritual passengers with the dishes of heaven. It should be served from the pulpit's table abundantly and attractively so new people are attracted to the church and continue to come for more food.

Plotting the course

Careful planning is the key to success in aviation. Prior to departure and before passengers enter the aircraft, aviators check the electronic and mechanical instruments of the plane and review the trajectory of the flight. Preparation is also necessary in preaching. "Preachers must be more than sermon disc jockeys playing other's creations." They need to compose new and attractive sermon compositions for their audiences when they preach.

Jack Graham (ND 02)

I give my mornings to study. By Sunday night on many weeks I'm already doing some light reading and preparation. Monday is light reading; I may get to the sermon and I may not. By Tuesday morning I want to be into sermon preparation. Tuesday, Wednesday, and Friday mornings are given to sermon preparation; if I'm not finished I'll go in Saturday morning.

The actual sermon preparation is to do my general reading on the text. The method many of us were taught is to bring your own ideas to the text first, then supplement it with commentaries and homiletic material, but for me it's always been best to read my way into the text. Typically I have a stack of books I'm working on on that particular passage,

and I just read myself full — I'm underlining and making notes. Then I sit down with a blank legal pad, and hopefully by that time I'm coming out with an outline.

My preaching style has been pretty much the same through the years — I look first to explain the text, then to apply the text, then to illustrate the text. I try to get my explanation and exegesis down where I understand the passage. The most challenging part is to apply and illustrate it; I spend a lot of time working on that.

Jerry Vines (JF 02)

I'm doing more planning than I used to. I used to get through with one series and get into the next one, but I am trying to contemplate ahead. I'm working generally three to six months out. What got me into it was the harder books. I found out I couldn't announce a series on Job and start studying it this week for next Sunday. So the harder books got me into doing a rough outline ahead, so when I get ready to start a book I've already done a rough outline and a lot of the commentary work. So I try to plan three to six months ahead. Then week-to-week, I try to stay two or three weeks ahead, because I've found that you have emergencies come up during the week, and if you lose two or three days there you can be in real trouble.

I divide my days into three parts. In the morning, I stay at home. I have my study at home, and I do my study there in the morning. In the afternoon, I come into the office for staff meetings, counseling appointments, anything I'm involved in there. At night, we don't have a lot of night meetings here; I do go visiting on Tuesday night. So I'm able to be home.

My mornings I plan very tightly. I schedule out the entire week, every hour of every day, in terms of study. I don't necessarily follow that every day, but at least I have something I can adjust. For instance, I may get started on my Sunday morning message on Monday morning and it's just really clicking. Where I was going to spend just an hour-and-a-half on the morning message and an hour-and-a-half on the evening message, I may spend the entire time on the morning message because it's just really producing for me. So I go ahead and finish out. I've got

a schedule to follow but I'm not rigid — but the fact that I have a schedule helps me get a lot done.

Preparation for Sunday morning, I'll spend about twenty hours. For Sunday evening, about ten. Wednesday night, probably about five. That's a lot of hours, but that includes everything — in the morning, at night.

James Emery White (JF 99)

I take an annual study break in the summer and I actually leave the state and go to a place about six weeks. It wasn't like that in the early days, but when you plant a church you can kind of go into that. But now it is right at six weeks. And I just go and I plow up ground for another year of teaching and leadership. Read books, map out stuff. I come back from a study break with the whole next year mapped out. Now, in reality it is only good for about eight or nine months. Then the focus I have starts getting fuzzy and I almost have to take it month by month for what we are going to do. But I pray about that, I strategize about that. I take everything I know about the church and culture and life and what we've done in the past and come up with these series. It really seems to click.

I take that to a creative development team of about eight or nine people that represent a lot of our program and ministries. Drama, music, multimedia, people who are just involved in producing our weekend services. I will lay these out and we will begin to pull together the services. We usually work as much as two to three, about three months in advance. So it goes through that process, which helps me enormously because when you pull in your creative team they start thinking about video, drama and music ideas about a topic and I have not even begun actually to write out the message. I've done some research in reading books. But it helps me enormously to sit around with seven or eight folks. That's the song you think of, or that's what you think of with guilt.

So there is a study break and throughout the year I have files on all these series. I'm collecting things as I read books. In my mind I know that I am doing these series. It is like a magnet pulling all of this stuff in. Then as it gets closer it goes through the whole creative team

developing process, so every week I'm going through a three hour meeting talking about these things. I tell you, it is so healthy to go through all those different levels.

When I actually have my writing day, which is the Tuesday before I speak, I pull all the stuff together and I actually write the message and I am just about to pop. You know it is wonderful — it has been thought out, it has been prayed for, prepared. I've been reflecting on it. I've got all this stuff. The privilege of this is that I'm the kind of person that finds working in advance like that is not difficult. For me, a panic attack would be doing a Saturday night special. I couldn't do that. If I did not know what I was going to be speaking on in three or four weeks, I would have an anxiety attack.

Tony Evans (ND 97)

I plan generally in six month intervals. For six months I know where I'm going and most of that is in series. Every year I try to present what I call a balanced diet. The balanced diet consists of a book study, a doctrinal or theological study, and then a topical or popular study. Every year I will rotate among those three. A typical series can go anywhere from six to sixteen weeks. Generally in that range.

Once I have decided on a series, about once a quarter I go away for three days, and then I will do all of my major exegesis for the whole series. So that week by week when I come back I'm putting the sermon together not starting from scratch at the beginning of each week. Because weeks have too many interruptions for me, and I may have it planned well but it keeps being inundated. So that way if I've got my exegesis done, then I can spend time on sermon preparation and also ministry to my thoughts during the sermon because I'm not just pressed on the content only.

Stephen F. Olford (JA 97)

When I was at Calvary Baptist Church, the first thing I ever did was to bring my core people together and tell them what is involved in preparing an expository sermon to nourish God's people. I said, "This

is what it involves” and then I’d proceed to say what I’m going to say right now. I have found both at Duke Street and at Calvary Baptist Church in New York City that the protection I was given by my people, contrary to what many pastors feel, was unbelievable. They were absolutely my guard.

Monday was my day with my wife. We called Sunday, King’s day and Monday Queen’s day. From Tuesday on, I was in my study every morning.

We had television, we had radio we had conference ministry, we had a lot of other things but nothing broke into my morning. My first order of duty very early in the morning was to have my quiet time to get my soul saturated in the word and in prayer, which is not study. It was meditation on God’s word. I have a little stool— an heirloom — which is my prayer stool. Then, I planned on Monday night the entire week, and when I lecture here, I talk about assignment, appointments, adjustments and assessments.

Appointments were what I jotted down on a paper, like a legal pad. But by Monday night, those assignments were scrutinized. Some had to be delegated — scrutinized honestly before God and translated into appointments. So I had appointments laid out. I learned this from John Stott who said at the time I talked to him about this that he had every 15 minutes of the day accounted for.

Those are followed by adjustments, which are inevitable if there’s a life and death situation that breaks into that. How do you deal with adjustments and get back on-line? Then Saturday night, before I go to bed, assessments. What did I set out to do? What did I achieve? What did I screw up completely? Lord have mercy on me. I want to go into the pulpit with a clear conscience.

Right at the top of my assignments were, of course, the preaching events of the week. And I would plan these in such a way that the intensity of final preparation was brought forward. Sunday’s there, but Wednesday’s here and I happened to have a Bible study here or a radio or a television program. So I began to work out how to keep those balls in the air all at the same time with relative intensity but time to breathe as well.

I found that my most fruitful times of ministry were when I actually did solid exposition through a book at a time. One time 52 messages in

Romans. I found that economy of effort and time because the spin-offs from consecutive teaching gave me all the material I needed for other things. The toughest preparation was when I started stone cold with a message for a seasonal event — Christmas, Father’s Day, what have you. Very often that would come out of a passage I had been dealing with. So I would come to it, after much prayer and try to do my basic work with my Hebrew and Greek — not calling on commentaries at that point to try and get what I call, as Dr. Scroggie would say, “What is the dominating theme?” Now there are many themes, but one has to be the one to preach on this week. Next year I may come back to it again.

Those three questions usually gave me the bare outlines. Then I’d begin to go into etymology, grammar, and so forth. I’d begin to pull down the commentaries and check my own thinking and to find out and to absorb some good stuff. Then, I begin to pull out my files on the illustrations. It’s been my practice — even though I might preach totally extemporaneously — to write out that sermon in full. One day it’ll be an article, a chapter in a book. But the most important thing was that when I had finished writing that out, closer to preaching time, I’d go through it with prayerful review and there I would eliminate all the bad symmetries, bad language, bad theology, bad exegesis, too many repetitions of a given word, and all that sort of stuff. Second, prayerful relationship of that message to my own heart — prayerfully reviewing. I believe in the glorious truth of John 1 that preaching is not redemptive unless it’s incarnational. It cannot be incarnational without the Holy Spirit overshadowing it all. That must relate to me. I am not going to preach to others what I haven’t preached to myself. So it has to come through incarnationally; then lastly, prayer. The manuscriptis pushed aside and I go through it and say, “Lord, here’s what I’ve got.”

I don’t memorize. I memorize conceptually but I do not memorize in words verse by verse. I ask “Lord, are you pleased with this?” Until I got through that with a sense of conviction and the favor of God in my own spirit, I’d go back over it until I’m totally released to preach that message. Now in between all that, I had breaks for wider reading. At one time in New York, I read 6 books a week, and kept that up pretty accurately, along with magazines, journals, and that kind of thing. I’m

talking about studying, now. I'm not talking about committees and I'm not talking about seeing staff — I'm talking about study itself.

I learned from John Stott — but I think the Holy Spirit deepened it in my life — the integrity of discipline. I did not waste time. I couldn't be pictured as a pastor who spent two of his hours in his study putting balls on the carpet. I'd love to do that, but I was rigorous in my discipline. I think one of the greatest problems of preachers is to be disciplined in the study. The door is locked, your wife doesn't know what you're doing. Nobody knows what you're doing but God and yourself. I trust that I was honest before the Lord on that.

W.A. Criswell (MJ 95)

I studied! I tell preachers to make the announcement to your people that in the morning you want to be left alone with God. Don't you call me, don't come by to see me, don't expect me to be apart of any kind of committee or program. In the afternoon, I'll do any work of the church. In the evening, I'll attend meetings. It was important for me to have my mornings devoted to study.

I would always try to have the sermon prepared by Friday. Beginning Friday and Saturday I would be with God as I get it in my heart. I was just seventeen years old when I started my pastoral work. I got down on my knees before the Lord and said, "Lord, I am going to preach without notes and I am going to depend upon you to bless my memory, so that when I stand up there to preach I won't forget or stumble." I was terrified when I started doing that. What if I were right in the middle of the sermon and came to the third point and couldn't remember it, couldn't recall it? What would I do? It would be embarrassing beyond description. But I trusted God for it. And to this day I have never forgotten; I have never stumbled. Once in a great while, I might have a moment of difficulty in recalling that third or fourth point, but I just keep talking and in a moment or so it will come back to me.

Chuck Swindoll (ND93)

If I'm in a tough spot I will manuscript it because, again, writing makes an exact man. I think: if it doesn't make sense on paper, it's not

going to make sense verbally. The discipline of writing it down will help disentangle your thoughts. I learned a little piece years ago: “Thoughts disentangle themselves over the lips and through the fingertips.” Sometimes I will go down the hall to one of my friends on the staff and go into his study and say, “Can I have a few minutes? I want to talk this thing out. I want you to pick at the pieces or I want you to disagree with me. I want you to listen to this as if you were not a believer, you’re not a follower, tell me your reaction.” That’s always a good discipline; in fact, I don’t think I do that enough.

When we write messages out, when we prepare messages, we need to have the guy in mind who’s not in our camp. I’m going to say something Sunday that’s going to be a little startling so I want you to be startled right now. Tell me what your reaction is — it’ll be good, it’s a good exercise. Sometimes you’ll say, “Man, I don’t buy that for anything.” If I said it more, would you buy it? “No.” Well, would you listen? “Yeah, I’d listen but you’d leave me disagreeing.” I said that’s okay. It’s alright to disagree. Is it true to what it seems like the Scripture is teaching? “Yeah, but I’m not even sure I could agree with that right now.” And I’ll say, that’s good — just so I’m not far afield from what the Scripture is saying.

I’ll tell you where I get nervous on things like this: when I’m out of my field. My field is the Scriptures and theology, and when I get into medicine or when I get into the world of sewing, when I get into fields like psychology, when I get into realms where I’m disagreeing or picking at them, I need to have my homework very carefully done or I need to tread softly. I need to do a disclaimer on the front end. I’m not a medical doctor but as I understand the body, this is the way it functions. I did that when I was in a series on the church and we were doing analogies — the shepherd and the sheep, the vine and the branch, the head and the body — those word pictures. I got into the realm of the body and I realized I’m getting pretty deep here into cells and muscles and blood and organs. I needed to make sure so I talked about it with a medical doctor friend of mine. That helped. I would have made a couple of mistakes that would have been embarrassing. Legal things is another area where I need to be careful; financial things is another — I need to be careful that I’ve really thought it through. That’s a matter of accuracy; you need to be accurate with information.

Frank Harrington (JA 92)

We have all heard the line that the preacher is invisible during the week and incomprehensible on Sunday. That is nonsense. The preacher must prepare, as Karl Barth said, with the Bible in one hand and the newspaper in the other. There is a profound truth

16there. If you're not in constant touch with people, knowing their hurts, their hopes, their dreams, the rigors of reality in which they are living — you may find yourself in the pulpit answering questions no one is asking.

I prepare my preaching a year in advance — I know where I'm headed, I know what specific subject, topic and text that I'm going to be addressing on a given Sunday a year in advance. I actually write my sermon three months in advance so that I'm never operating under the pressure of next Sunday. That doesn't work for everybody, but I work best when I'm not under the deadline of next Sunday. It also preserves my availability to people. I know that come Sunday morning, a lot of people will be in that sanctuary ready for whatever it is I've got to say. So I arrange my schedule to write ahead of time so that I'm never under the pressure of next Sunday.

Now if something should come up — like the War in the Persian Gulf — of course I interrupt my announced schedule to address that reality. I preached three Sundays in a row on sermons I wrote each week as we were moving toward that war. The Sunday after we were, in fact, involved in combat, I spoke to the situation that was on everybody's mind. You have to do that from time to time. Events intrude upon any schedule. Human need knows no agenda.

I remember one tragic weekend in my second pastorate where two young men were killed under tragic circumstances and a third young man was critically injured and left with permanent disabilities. I knew that the entire family of faith that was represented in my church, their whole focus would be on those events. So, I changed my sermon that night and wrote a sermon on the great text, "Lord to whom shall we go, for thou hast the words of eternal life." Events interrupt our sermons. In preparation for preaching, I am away two months in the summer.

In preparation for planning I will write seventy-five to one hundred

people in this congregation and in the community—including people who I may have heard from through television—and ask them a simple question: “If you had the responsibility of standing in the pulpit of Peachtree Presbyterian Church 48 Sundays next year, what themes would you emphasize?” Then I print that letter on the front of the church bulletin a couple of times. Interestingly enough, when I first started that the responses just started trickling in. Now I get an avalanche of mail from a wide variety of people and sources, and I receive some most insightful ideas to develop.

John MacArthur (ND 91)

I generally preach through books of the Bible—with an emphasis on the New Testament. Early on, I felt that the Lord wanted me to focus on the New Testament, so I went to college and took four years of Greek and three more in seminary.

The goal I set for myself when I entered the ministry was to preach expository messages through the entire New Testament, which I am still trying to do. With this method, I always know where I am. I take up a unit of thought—a paragraph—and I know every week where I’m going to go. Through that process I will be introduced to themes in my study that will launch me off on a special series of topics, but they are almost always connected to the text. What I basically do is spend Wednesday, Thursday and Friday of every week in preparation, and I still do that. I did it in my early years, and I am still at it three days a week.

It takes a day and a half for the morning sermon and a day and a half for the evening message.

I start by reading the text. I know what is coming because I am preaching contextual messages. I have anticipated its content. I take the text and read it repeatedly so that I have it clearly in mind, and then I begin to view things through the text. When I hit Wednesday, I go to the original language and really dissect the text so I know what I am dealing with. I want to know what it says. That’s really what I am after: What does the text say?

I want to make sure that I have dealt with all the problems, all the

issues, all the grammar, all the syntax, all the word study or whatever is involved. Then I take an 8.5 by 14 inch pad of paper and copiously take down all that data. By then I really have a feel for that unit of Scripture in its context.

From that, the second step is for me to expose myself to commentaries — taking advantage of past illumination so that I don't reinvent the wheel. I enjoy commentaries because they give me a sense of how the text has been interpreted within a range of theological frameworks. These are helpful, whether they are coming from hardline Calvinism, all the way over to Arminian, sacramentalist, or other systems. I enjoy a breadth of exposure to commentaries because I get a feel for how other theological systems have interpreted the text.

I rarely read other books on a given text because I am looking for context, but once in a while I will. I might read through fifteen commentaries. Then, if I come across a special book or journal article on that text, I will get that as well. All of that data goes into the grist.

By the time I have framed a main idea — a main proposition that I will build the sermon around — the text begins to fall into a sequential pattern. That structural pattern — a series of points — is the third step in the process. That's when I refine it down to what I want to say. The last thing I do is to put in illustrations. I primarily use biblical illustrations — those which come directly from other biblical texts. I do this for several reasons: One, they not only add interest but bring authority. Two, they teach as they illustrate. Three, they continue to familiarize the congregation with texts throughout Scripture.

Fred Craddock (MA 88)

It seems to me that if the minister gives for study two hours every morning, he can do it, she can do it. This leaves for evening and other leisure hours other kinds of reading.

In this morning period I mean just the hard study, not a lot of fun, but the necessary heart of it. If you go from 7:30 to 9:30 or 8:00 to 10:00 every morning, the accumulated benefit of that will be enormous. You can pick up just where you left off. If it is a regular thing, it can become more study than some individuals committed during their

entire school experience.

The regularity is very important and gives you the maximized benefit of accumulated insight. I think if the preacher will do this, the preacher will know a great deal, share a great deal, and be well prepared.

Preaching And Story

Max Lucado (MA 06)

I think there is something about a story that is enduring. Stories take on a life of their own. What I may intend for a story to communicate and what a story ends up communicating could be two different things. And it could be an even more positive thing. The strength of a story is that it stays with people and it gives an opportunity for that story to connect with people where the Holy Spirit intends for it to do so.

In this post-modern culture in which we live -- where people question absolute truth -- they are resistant to platitudes; they're resistant to me making declarations of truth to them. A story can do that in kind of a Trojan-horse fashion. Truth can arrive within the story and ride latent -- a bit incognito -- within a story, and people are more prone to receive it. I think one reason is our society is just less open to platitudes, more open to stories.

We are such a sound-bite culture; people are so accustomed to flipping through their television so quickly that we only have just a few seconds to grab someone's attention. And a story does that: it will reach out and hook somebody and hold them for just a few moments while you unpack this story in their presence. I think it is an attention grabber. I think it's a truth conveyor. Those are two great features of a good story.

I think you can tilt too far to the side of the story where the message is just simply entertainment. So I think your goal has to be to craft in one sentence what the truth is you are trying to convey. And then you find or create a story that you wrap around that truth. You know, there are so many examples that come to mind of how Jesus did this. You know the Prodigal Son story is, I think, the greatest short-story ever written. It has such drama in it, such great characters, it's so clear and concise, and it's entertaining in the sense that everyone can relate to it. But you have no doubt what our Lord was trying to communicate in the

heart of that story. So the truth was not sacrificed on the altar of entertainment in that case. And it can be.

I think there is a time, if I can say this; there is a time in a message where you might just tell a story to give your audience a break. I've found great virtue in two-thirds of the way into the message; right before I'm really want to nail home a point, pausing to tell a joke or to tell a light-hearted story, because I know my audience has been working with me now for 20 or 25 minutes. And if I can get them to laugh, get oxygen into their system, it wakes up those who might be sleeping, so there's something about using a story to draw people back in right before you drive home your final point. In that case I think it's real legitimate just to use a story for story's sake.

I don't think I have ever created an entire fiction piece or followed a historical piece and made that into a sermon. I do think there is great strength, though, in starting a sermon with a story, then returning to that story at the end. That puts book ends to a sermon. It is a real simple technique that communicates to the audience that there is a sense of closure, that they have a package here, or we began and we closed with this. I think that's just a nice technique.

We have been known to even put a skit right in the middle of the sermon. I remember one time I did a sermon on sexuality and a friend of ours owns a cello that is an antique; it's worth \$50,000. And he let me use that cello. I didn't even touch it though. He set it up on the stage on the platform on its holder and I told the church about it, and I kind of got real close to it, but I didn't touch it. I said I wanted to help them see this is how valuable their life is to God. It is fragile, it is special, and it is valuable. And I just had it up there the whole time and I think that helped. So little creative things like that are very helpful in a lesson.

Preaching in Series

Rick Warren (JF 08)

I will always do a series, somehow, dealing with worship, a series on evangelism, a series on discipleship, a series on ministry, and a series on fellowship. I will cover those five things every year, because that is the purpose of the church in some way. Now I can do that with a book series, I can do it with a biographical series, I can do it with a topical, thematic approach. It doesn't matter the style, but I will balance the purposes. I will balance the difference between comfort and challenge — afflict the comfortable and comfort the afflicted — I will balance that. I like to balance Old Testament and New Testament. I like to balance a little biographical, a little didactic, a little doctrinal.

What I love to do is teach theology to non-believers without ever telling them it is theology or using theological terms. For instance, I once did an eight-week series on sanctification and never used the term. I did a four-week series on the incarnation and never used the term. I did a 12-week series on the attributes of God — the omniscience, omnipresence, omnipotence — and never used the terms. I just called it “Getting to Know God.”

I finish a series and then say, “Which one, Lord, do You want to do next?” We will pick it out, do it next, then we will ask, “Which one, Lord, do You want us to do next?” So there is planning and spontaneity at the same time. It allows God to move us in the middle of the year. I know some guys for whom it doesn't matter if it's Christmas, they are going to stay on that book! To me that's silly. If suddenly next week America was in war, does God have a word about it? Absolutely! We would stop and talk about what the Bible says about war.

I think the ideal series is four to six weeks. I often have stretched it to 10 weeks. Obviously the Ten Commandments are 10 weeks. I did a 10-week series on the doctrine of grace. But really, if you go more than four or six weeks on a series, people start wondering, “Does he know anything else?” There is a fatigue factor. One lady said, “My pastor has been in Daniel 70 weeks longer than Daniel!” So I think the best series would be a month series of four, 12 a year would be ideal.

Jerry Vines (JF 02)

My series are getting a little smaller. One of the reasons is people are more mobile than they used to be. We have quite a turnover in the city of Jacksonville. The second time I preached through the book of Romans I think I preached 81 messages. The last time I preached through Romans I did 43. Now I try to make it even shorter than that. Right now I'm doing a series from Proverbs — it's going to be called "Proverbs for Parents" — and there will be 12 messages. I'm doing a series called "A World in a Week" from Genesis 1 — I finished preaching through the book of Genesis, now I'm going back to Genesis 1 — and there are going to be 12 messages in that series. That's a little more in-depth on a smaller passage.

I'm cutting the length of them down. I have done a lot of verse-by-verse, and I am going back now on some that I have done and packaging it a little tighter. My tendency has been to be very content-oriented — that is, give them every *of*, *the*, *and* and *but*. But I have also found along the way — it's been a humbling experience— that they don't get it all. So I'm trying now just to get the real essence of the passage rather than all the details. I think you can get lost, sometimes, in the minutiae and miss the big picture. If it's germane to the understanding of the passage, then I'll deal with that prepositional phrase, but if it's not . . .

We're in a different day. People have a lot of things to do. I read the old Puritan writers, and I love them, but I think their folks didn't have a lot else to do!

Jack Graham (ND 02)

In Fort Lauderdale I preached through books of the Bible, but always in a contemporary thematic fashion. In Dallas, I've done a few books — I just did Philemon. The most well-received series I've done since I've been here was called "Moral Earthquakes and Secret Faults." Earthquakes don't just happen; they're preceded by faultlines that run underneath the surface. And moral earthquakes don't just happen; they're preceded by secret faults — little cracks in character that occur sometimes years before. We think they're not very big things. I preached

about eight messages related to that. That wasn't from a single book; it was arranged thematically. I dealt with temptation, with other issues.

I usually plan my preaching during the summers. For many years I would read *Preaching and Preachers* by Martyn Lloyd-Jones every summer; another book that really formulated my early preaching ministry was John Stott's little book, *Portrait of a Preacher*—especially that chapter on we being stewards of His gospel. I read and then I plan my preaching during the summer.

When I'm preaching through a book, for example, before I preach the first sermon I've pretty much outlined the sermons I'm going to do. I've determined the titles, the object, the basic theme of each one. I stay in every morning to study; I don't come in the office until 11 or 11:30. I've always done that. I'm an early riser; I get up about 5:30 or 6:00 in the morning and study in my home. I spend every morning studying, then I read at night.

I never get away from it. This is one of the things that's impossible for people to understand — how a pastor who is serious lives with it every day of his life. It never gets away from us, it hovers over us constantly, it's a part of us all the time. It's something that we live with.

James Emery White (JF 99)

(I am) always in a series. There are several reasons. First, it is very hard to do a topic in one session with integrity, at least to the people I address. They would pick up on a real superficiality if I said, O.K. here is how to have a good marriage in a one-day talk. You know, they are going to say, "Maybe *your* marriage, buddy!" There is no way you can treat that with integrity. So those are the series that are six or seven weeks. You build credibility that way and you can really address it with legitimacy. You are going to have a series on marriage. OK, one week: Here's how to have a fair fight. Here's how to lay a spiritual foundation. Here's one whole talk on gender differences. Here is the thing on communication. People are sitting there and saying, "Now, this I can use. This I can grab on to."

One criticism of seeker-targeted churches is it is all topical messages. Actually, it is more strategic than that. You have occasional messages on

topics like marriage and family and parenting relationships. Then you will also have series that might be nothing but a section of scripture. We've done a whole series on the Ten Commandments. We've done a whole series on the Sermon on the Mount. Sometimes it is a theological series. We did five whole weeks on the problem of evil and suffering called, "When God doesn't make sense." So you do strike on theological issues and ethical issues. Sometimes you'll do nothing but a doctrine studies on the character of God. So, it is more of a variety.

Even when you do these topical studies, it's more of a biblical theology. It may be pulling together a lot of verses instead of walking through one particular chapter of the Bible, although it can be one particular chapter. But it is doing it with great theological and biblical integrity.

The best biblical theologies pull together the wide range of verses and passages and scriptures. The best way to interpret scripture is through scripture itself. Sometimes if you take just one small passage on a subject you can actually almost do more harm than if you pull together everything that the Bible has to say to get a well-rounded view. So I think if you are a good topical speaker you are doing good biblical theology.

A typical series length (is) a month. In other words if there are four weeks in the month, I'll do a four-week series. If there are five weeks in a month, I'll do a five-week series. That is typical for me. A couple reasons. One, short attention spans. Two, most topics you can get in and out of if you do your homework at that level.

Three, it keeps variety going every month. There is a new topic and you can switch gears. There are some topics that could use ten weeks. But, people are dying by the eighth week. You know, "Can we please move on!"

Chuck Swindoll (ND 93)

I think that the Spirit of God is doing many things He never gets credit for. To start with I think He prompts ideas and prepares the soil of our souls for certain subjects. I felt that was true —definitely true —

in my series on grace that led to *The Grace Awakening*. There were some things that we'd gone through in some growing feelings — churnings within. We all have what I call a “churning place.” That's not an original thought with me but I have used those words which I got from another. I think He churns us — He prompts us — and in that process I believe He begins to build the steam in our areas of motivation and growing a sense of passion. That's a word I've learned to really appreciate. In fact the subtitle for the book I'm doing is *A Passion for the Holy Spirit*.

I think in this growing sense of passion we get direction for how we want to build a series of sermons. I haven't always thought through every message before I get going on it. So a series kind of shapes itself as I'm going along, like some novelists talk about doing a book. I begin with several things in mind I want to do but often it takes a new direction in the middle of the series.

For that reason I don't really do a full preaching calendar. Some people go on their vacations, or for six weeks away, and while they're away they do this shaping of the next year. I used to do that only to have it changed by the third or fourth week I was back. I thought, “Well, I don't need to do that again.” It took me a couple of years to say, “I'm not going to spend all that time if it's going to be changing anyway.” However, I do believe in planning and thinking things through and I think that's where the Spirit of God is at work.

Warren Wiersbe (MJ 92)

In the first church I pastored (when I was a seminary student and pastor at the same time), I had no system. I should have had one, but no one told me exactly how to do it. When I was at Calvary Baptist in Covington, Kentucky, I always preached a series of sermons. I would work my way through a book. The mistake I made at Calvary was to let the series run too long. This was the thing you were supposed to do — to be able to say to your pastor friends, “I just finished two years in Philippians!” Spurgeon talked about the man who spent eight years in Hebrews. The preacher got to the closing chapter where it says “suffer this word of exhortation,” and Spurgeon said, “They suffered.” That's

what I am afraid I was doing.

While I was at Moody Church, I learned that the attention span in the big city is not quite that long. So I limited a series to perhaps three months and then a break. When I did Acts, for example, I preached from Acts for three months, then took a break. Without telling people, I often followed the Christian church calendar. I recommend this. I didn't announce it; it would have scared some of them! But I watched the calendar so that I was always ready for a break in my series at the Lenton season. I wanted to have the church prepared for Good Friday and Easter. I would prepare for the advent season in the same way.

In planning a series, I would try to say to myself, "What is it that excites me?" because I can do my best with that which excites me. Where is the state of the church? Do we need the outreach emphasis with Acts? Do we need the faith emphasis of Hebrews 11? What does this church need at this point? This is where pastoral work comes in. We must know our people. We should also listen to the people.

When I was at the Moody Church, I came to a point one year where I was stymied. I didn't know what to plan for the fall messages, and I always tried to plan six months in advance so that the staff knew where we were going. At an elders meeting, I confessed my perplexity. I said, "Brethren, I've been here several years now — I don't know what to do." One of the elders spoke up and said, "Have you ever considered doing a series on suffering?" I said, "No, but I know that a lot of our people are going through difficulty." He said, "Pray about it." So I did and the Lord gave me seven messages on suffering which were greatly used by God to help both the church and the pastor. The series eventually developed into my book, *Why Us? When Bad Things Happen to God's People*. In that situation, the series idea grew out of the eldership.

I've always tried to balance the series. If I'm doing the Old Testament in the morning, I want to do something from the New Testament at night. I always felt that the evening service should not be a duplication of the morning service. We always had more music, more participation and a different kind of a message.

When I started out my ministry in Florida, I don't think I did any series that I can remember. What I did preach was out of my devotional life. I would read through the Bible, and — as I read — every time I would hit a verse that spoke to me I would take out a sheet of paper and I would write down the topic and what it meant to me. I must have squirreled away 400 or 500 of those sheets still untouched but my preaching emerged out of that. Then I realized the danger of that approach was that I was preaching only on the things that were hitting me, and that was purely topical preaching.

I did some short series on the family when I got to Pittsburgh, and realized that I wanted to deepen in terms of some word studies occasionally. In this church, I am probably half of the time in series, maybe a little bit more than that. A series can be anything from a three to five-week series up to a better part of the year. Last spring, I asked our people what topics they would like their pastor to address — abortion, authority, money, evolution, suffering — and I did a series on them in the fall: what the Bible says and doesn't say about these topics.

The thing I want to be sure of is that I don't just jump around in topics. I have preached eighteen messages about Joshua. The people are very helpful to me in planning for a series.

I think what I get out of a series is the opportunity to take people a little bit deeper in Scripture. If I had only six more weeks to preach, I would not do a series — I would preach on the Resurrection and other definitive topics of biblical faith. If you preach topically for fifty years, the danger is that you will lose some of the richness and depth that are possible in a series.

Relational Preaching

Rod Casey (MJ 10)

Too many preachers fail to ask themselves what every successful fisherman asks. They fail to ask what bait will hook their listeners. Preachers may think that because their seminary training only needed an open Bible and syllabus notes to learn effectively that the same should be true for their learners, as well.

This line of thinking assumes that what was good enough for the preacher's training in discipleship should be sufficient for everyone else. "My Bible teachers didn't cater to me, and I learned the material presented just fine," the preacher may think. This thinking assumes more motivation than is typically true for many who are listening to a sermon.

The learner is more motivated to engage the sermon's subject when it addresses life crises the learner is experiencing. These crises may be obvious, such as an impending divorce or the death of a friend. Other life crises are less dramatic to the outside observer but equally intense for the person experiencing them. Examples include relational conflict with an employee, worry about a child's schooling or the security of the world post-September 11. The learner is highly motivated to engage the proposition proposed when the preacher speaks to the concerns that are on the hearts of the hearers and does so from a theological perspective. These same preachers actively look for opportunities to address problems as they surface in the text.

When preachers speak to the crises that hold learners hostage, the learners are motivated to engage the sermon's content. Identifying common themes that constitute inner crises will help the preacher identify issues the sermons should address. The internal conflict of people in the pew may include an unsatisfied longing, unresolved rationality, moral dilemmas, relational alienation and an impending fear of human mortality.

"Less assumptive" preaching won't assume the listener is interested. After a busy week and a relational conflict at home, the listener needs

the preacher to create the "crisis" that demands the listener's attention.

Every preacher should force him or herself to ask, "Do I care more about being helpful than about sounding smart?" Too often the preacher assumes more about the biblical and theological literacy of the congregation than is justified. Just because many know who killed Goliath doesn't mean everyone does. "Turn in your Bible to..." without qualification is another reminder that "this isn't the church for a guy like me."

Instead, assume that a listener may be opening the Bible for the first time. Assume the listener doesn't know who killed Goliath. Assume those gathered can't believe this biblical account more than one of Dr. Seuss' tales.

"Less assumptive" preaching won't assume the listener is theologically and biblically literate. They put divine revelation on the bottom shelf so everyone can reach it.

Jim Henry (SO 99)

In my preaching I can sometimes see the faces of those in pain, those who are dying, the disappointment of people who have had a husband or wife to walk off, or a Sunday School teacher who has let them down because of infidelity. The joy of celebration, the emotions, the funny things that happen in life that people tell me about. I've got 35 minutes or so on Sunday to try to connect that up. I try, I really pray and I ask when I pray, "Holy Spirit illuminate me to find the truth in what you are saying so on Sunday it will be real to the people sitting out there."

One other thing I do on Sunday morning: I just go and sit in the sanctuary. Nearly every Sunday morning, I walk through the worship center and I pray. I just try to imagine the people sitting up here in the balcony, sitting down here, people slipping in the back — they may have lost somebody or they have been disappointed and they don't want to get too close to the front because they think they may start crying. Here is somebody that just got bad news about a medical report. Somebody got fired. Here's somebody that their son has graduated top honors — you know joy is going to be there, too. So I just pray over the lost, others who will be there. I say, "Lord, you know all of these needs,"

and as I am praying and walking I touch the pews. I can't touch them all because it is so big. But I pray over sections and ask the Lord to connect the preparation, the Word of God with the guys and gals sitting in the pews.

John Maxwell (JF 98)

As I look at communicators with different styles, different methods, they all have one thing in common. I've seen this, I've watched it, I've observed it. All great communicators have the ability to connect. They can connect with their audience. You know, when I was a kid, I used to love to go down to the railroad tracks and watch them switch train cars. They back the engine up and you know how they bang the cars and they have a little ripple effect if there are seven or eight cars. But I learned early just because you bang the cars, it didn't mean you couple with it. You could bang a car and that old engine could pull out without the cars; you had to couple it.

A lot of preaching is banging with the people. You're banging them and you are hitting them. A lot of pastors think when they have done that then they have communicated — I've told them, I've told them. But they never connected with it. They never had that relational, emotional, spiritual connection with it. All great communicators, regardless of style or method, understand the connecting principle; they have the ability to connect with people, know where they are and connect there.

In leadership I do a lesson called the five levels of leadership. It is a very interesting lesson. It talks about the different levels that a leader is on with the organization which he or she leads. Very simply, the bottom level is what I call the position level — you come to a church, you have a title, you have an office, you have a job, you have a senior pastor. But, it's the lowest level of connecting or relating. The second level is the permission level. On that level, you not only have a position, or a title, but they begin to like you, and they begin to give you permission to enter into their lives and enter into their walk with God.

Then there is the production level. The permission level is built on the relationships, while the production level is built on results. And after you have been effective with the people for a period of time they will say,

“well, you know I was saved under his ministry or I came to Christ or I was baptised in that church while he was there.” And that is a whole different level, then there is another level which is a reproduction level, as you reproduce yourself in the lives of the people, you develop people; it is a personal development type of level. You have people in your church on all five of these levels. So, therefore when they hear me speak, they relate to my message, not on what I said but based on what level they are on. That’s why pastors will go out and preach a message and one person will shake your hand and say, “greatest message I’ve ever heard, pastor; changed my life. We’re going to help you support the building program” or whatever. Somebody else walks out, and they are not coming back. “All the guy wants is money.”

They received the same message by the same man, the same time, the same words, the same place. What happened? Different levels. In communication, in preaching, it is very important for the communicator to understand when he or she walks up in front of people that they have these different stations in life. So in my communication as a pastor I always made sure that I had levels of communication based on where the people were so that I could connect with every person there, based not on where I was or where the message was but where the people were.

Steve Brown (ND 92)

Be the personification of what you preach. When I say that, I don’t mean in the old sense of model holiness. I’m talking about the kind of vulnerability and honesty that you appreciate in others— be that in the pulpit. The pulpit grants us a place to pontificate, to play games, and to look down arrogant noses at the poor peasant sin the pew.

In the church that I served, I came from the congregation to preach. I had a petition put on my desk by a number of people in the church who wanted me to sit up front behind the pulpit the way one always did. I tore it up because I realized the reason they wanted me to sit there said something really bad about them and about preachers. So I would sit in the congregation and when it was my time to teach the Bible, I walked up to the pulpit — well, we didn’t have a pulpit. I usually sat on a bar

stool and taught. It was a statement: “Guys, as I teach you this stuff, you need to know that I’m placing myself under the authority of God’s Word, too. I’ve worked through some of this, I’ll be honest when I’m not living it. I’ll tell you where I am living it. I’ll tell you what’s helped me and made the difference. But above all, this is revealed propositional truth and we don’t have the freedom to change it.”

That’s the kind of modeling that I think is good for a pastor. I think there were days in the past when pastors and preachers could pontificate — Beecher was one of those, I think Harold John Ockenga was one of those, Fosdick was one. I think our day and age has forced us to take the armor off, and the preacher who doesn’t will die.

Value of Expository Preaching

David Jeremiah (MA 03)

I'm an expository preacher in an age when expository preaching is viewed by most architects of the church as no longer relevant. If you look at the church-growth movement and the seeker-sensitive models, expository preaching is not even in the vocabulary. I do not say for a minute these guys are all wrong; I listen to some of them on tape, because many of them have a tremendous heart for God and a love for reaching this culture. But I fear the long-term absence of the value that's involved in the expository preaching and teaching of the Word of God.

I've been doing this now for thirty years, and I do not see any waning in the power of expository preaching. What I see is a lot of guys I know who started out with that passion, now giving into the cultural pressure of being relevant and cute and very topical, to the point where sometimes there's not enough Bible in the message to know it's a sermon.

I really believe with all my heart that if those of us who are committed to the application-centered preaching of the Word of God — if we will just hang in there, then people will come back. They'll realize they can't live with anything other than the bread of God's Word.

The challenge for people who do what I do is to make sure we are committed to it enough to withstand the pressure that's put on us by the culture — by the religious culture even — to change and move in a different direction.

Walter Kaiser (SO 98)

At one of our sister institutions I led a doctor of ministry class about four years ago. I had seventeen different denominational groups in there and I began the first lecture by saying how important this is; this is what we really need. I was trying to say that expository preaching is that form of preaching in which the text guides both the shape of the message

and the content of the message. Most people say expository preaching actually is one in which the direct content ought to come out of the immediate context that you are looking at rather than sort of looking up verses all over the Bible. I'm arguing not only the content but the very shape of the message should in some way be determined by the teaching passage that we have there in front of us. I'm trying to get this across at a one-hour lecture and we broke for lunch. We went to the cafeteria and I heard a man four up from me in line — he came from another non-traditional kind of evangelical group — I heard him say quite clearly, "You know, I think I'm going to enjoy this course. This suppository preaching is something that is brand new to me." When he said the word suppository, I said to myself, there is a man that needs a lot of preparation! It was a brand new term he had never heard before.

I really think that what has helped me so much is an attempt to go through a book and say, first, what's the main idea of this book? G. Campbell Morgan said he never preached the book until he read it through 50 times. Answer the two questions: number 1, "What is the purpose of this book?" and number 2, "Where do the divisions of the book come, where are the main sections?"

If you are going to take something apart, you have to know where the scenes are. So he would trace both purpose and the scenes. After you get the purpose and the scenes, then I ask what are the teaching blocks. Now I tend to take a larger block of text — something closer to a chapter. For expository preaching that means probably you have more like a 45-minute sermon rather than a 25 or 30-minute one. If you really have 30 minutes, then you've got to be highly selective and know that passage extremely well.

Then I ask for narrative passages: where are the scenes? I think each scene then becomes a major idea, which then should be listed as a major point in our message.

Stephen F. Olford (JA 97)

In the first place, my training imparted to me the conviction that my only authority for speaking the Word of God was to speak the Word of God. "When the Bible speaks," said St. Augustine, "God speaks." After

the teaching of Dr. Graham Scroggie, who was my mentor, it was part of my Christian heritage to be shown the duties, wonders, power, and mostly, the authority of preaching the Word. Of course, I'm convinced that the Holy Spirit only answers to the Word. Therefore, if I wanted the anointing of the Spirit upon my preaching, it must be the Word. So number one was my training.

Number two was my experience in church work because, like many young preachers when I first started, I tried all the novelties of preaching. Always trying to go ahead of God, I found that ultimately it produced no lasting fruit — that only those whose faith was solidly inculcated with the Word of God stood and became true disciples.

The third reason is that with the passing of years, I've come to the conclusion we've got to treat the Bible as God's self-revelation in Christ. God has chosen in His wisdom and sovereignty to take language, time, and space in order to reveal Himself. Therefore, the only way in which my preaching can become the voice of God is to speak as accurately as I possibly can the voice of God in the Word. I have a little definition here that I use at the institute:

Expository preaching is the Spirit-empowered explanation and proclamation of the text of God's word with due regard to the historical, contextual, grammatical and doctrinal significance of the given message or given passage, with the specific object of invoking a Christ-transforming response.

Really it's the outworking of that that we use right here in our institute. I feel there are three essential questions. First, "What does the Scripture say?" Second, "What does the Scripture mean?" Then, third, "what does the Scripture have to say to my heart and to my people?"

Michael Quicke (ND 96)

I believe we have to rediscover the power of biblical preaching, which really listens to the text for the people today. I believe that because the Word of God is so sharp it is always going to make entrance into the culture when you don't expect it. We're being driven back to listen to the

Word and with eyes wide open, in our context, to dare to speak the Word in new ways. I believe the unpredictability of preaching is part of the Spirit's work. This is why a new generation is going to hear the old truths but with a fresh urgency and a new sharpness.

There's a tremendous mission field of people to hear the authentic Word, but we as preachers have got to make sure that we don't think we know what it's about, but that we let the Word do its thing — which is always unpredicable — so that Jesus is heard again. An illustration is my church in Cambridge. When we rediscovered the gospel for the poor — it is a city center church, with the homeless in the street and all the rest — in the end it was really the Word of God that challenged us.

I'm hopeful for powerful expository preaching in Britain which relates the gospel, so that people say, "That really is critiquing what I'm doing, and making a difference, because it's empowering."

I believe expository preaching remains powerfully evident. My own definition of expository preaching is that as the Word of God is first discovered and explored by a gifted and anointed preacher, then shared, the listener walks in that discovery with the preacher. I believe the most powerful expository preaching is not prescriptive — in the sense that it's closed off its ends, in a neat package — which in some ways it's been parodied as: a series of steps, almost a commentary, an outline by the time you're finished.

If you look at the best expository preaching, such as that of Lloyd-Jones, there's an extraordinarily relevant edge, always cutting through at every stage. I also think that Lloyd-Jones is the most significant British preacher of this century, and his inheritance is still being worked out. He was far ahead of his time.

Expository preaching is alive and well. In most cities it is evidenced, though it may not be as traditional in its shaping structurally.

Jerry Vines (JF 92)

I would encourage (expository preaching) for several reasons. One reason is what it will do for you personally. I cannot tell you what it has done in my personal life just to go through books of the Bible — just

the study itself. Paul said to young Timothy, “Take heed to thyself and to the doctrine.” Just the study of scripture to preach in an expository fashion is invaluable to your own personal spiritual life and growth.

Then what it will do to the people. It will give the people a well-balanced meal of the bread of life. You don’t get hung up on one hobby horse, you don’t neglect areas. It gives a total picture, which I’m a little concerned about today with the trend toward more need-oriented preaching. I think you should do need-oriented preaching, but if you’re not very careful you’ll avoid certain things. I’m preparing to preach from Galatians 3 — one of the tragedies in today’s preaching is we take people straight to Jesus without getting them to Moses, and I think you’ve got to meet Moses before you’re really ready to meet Jesus. You’ve got to see yourself as a sinner. Because even if you can come to Christ without seeing yourself as a sinner — which I’m not sure about — you won’t have that overwhelming appreciation and gratitude for what Christ has delivered you from.

John MacArthur (ND 91)

The key to my preaching (is) I keep them ever in the text. I have found that it’s much easier for the congregation to follow me if I stay in the text than if I walk around it.

It is also vitally important that they have a sense of adventure. There is a sense in which they must know that I cannot tell them everything about this text. They must expect the text to unfold and explode in their own minds at some point. With every text they should know that there is something beyond the obvious. If the hearers are not really in the text, they will not be able to see it. I am not going to berate what is obvious. I’m not going to hammer away at what they can read for themselves.

You know, the average “expository” preacher I hear reads the text, states the obvious, and tells stories about it. But the text holds some truths and meaning that the average layperson does not have the tools or the time to draw out. I need to unfold those things in away that will excite the hearer — at least that’s the goal. I keep them in the text with the promise that something is going to unfold — something very, very

important that they will miss unless they are with me in the text.

I set the address repeatedly. That is, I refer time and again to chapter and verse. I also repeat where we have been. “Now remember, we said this, and then we said this, and now we are saying this. The persons sitting in the congregation tune in and tune out — that is a part of the hearing process. If they tune back in and can’t find where we are in the text, they become frustrated because they have lost the context. So I repeat where we are throughout the sermon, hopefully enough times to pull them back in again and get them back into the flow . . .

The biblical world is exceedingly foreign to southern California — and America as a whole. There is no religious tradition. People would say to me: “You know, you are completely unrealistic in attempting to do expository preaching in a southern California context. Everybody’s into relationships, into making their world more comfortable, and you are completely out of touch!”

Our experience at Grace Community Church has proven that advice to be absolutely opposite to the truth. The more faithfully we exposit the Word of God, the more powerful our ministry becomes — and we watch that happen week after week after week.

We have a baptism service every Sunday night and we baptize from five to twenty people each week. Some of this comes from listening to expository preaching but most of it is due to the fact that our people are strong in the Word and in the Lord so they reproduce themselves. We believe that the church is gathered together for worship and then scatters to evangelize.

In truth, I am not attempting to preach to the unregenerate southern Californian; I’m working to build up a church and let the church multiply. Unbelievers come to Christ every week.

John Stott (MA 89)

I believe that to preach or to expound the scripture is to open up the inspired text with such faithfulness and sensitivity that God’s voice is heard and His people obey Him. I gave that definition at the Congress on Biblical Exposition and I stand by it, but let me expand a moment.

My definition deliberately includes several implications concerning

the scripture. First, it is a uniquely inspired text. Second, the scripture must be opened up. It comes to us partially closed, with problems which must be opened up.

Beyond this, we must expound it with faithfulness and sensitivity. Faithfulness relates to the scripture itself. Sensitivity relates to the modern world. The preacher must give careful attention to both.

We must always be faithful to the text, and yet ever sensitive to the modern world and its concerns and needs. When this happens the preacher can come with two expectations. First, that God's voice is heard because He speaks through what He has spoken. Second, that His people will obey Him — that they will respond to His Word as it is preached.

Application in Preaching

Rick Warren (JF 08)

The big thing is building a bridge between then and now. You have interpretation on one side, you have personalization on the other side, and in the middle you have the implication. The key is always finding the implication of the text. The interpretation — commentators tend to live in that world. Personalization — communicators tend to live in this world. It's a fine line, and you can fall off on either side. It is easy to be biblical without being contemporary or relevant. It is easy to be relevant without being biblical. The test is right there in the middle, walking that fine line.

We don't have to make the Bible relevant — it is — but we have to show its relevance. What is irrelevant, in my opinion, is our style of communicating it. We are tending still to use the style from 50 years back that doesn't match who we are trying to reach today.

When I start with an application, I first start with personal application. Nearly 20 years ago, I wrote a book on Bible study methods, on how to apply the Bible. It sold a couple hundred thousand copies. In fact, Billy Graham picked it up and gave it to every evangelist in Amsterdam. In it, I talk about a dozen different ways to apply Scripture, so you start with your own life and you make applications there. A lot of it is just simple stuff like: Is there a sin to confess, a promise to claim, an attitude to change, a command to obey, an example to follow, a prayer to pray, an error to avoid, the truth to believe. Is there something to praise God for? So, I start looking at it like that.

I also go back to the paradigm of 2 Timothy 3:16. Doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness is basically these four things: What do I need to believe as a result of this text? What do I not need to believe as a result of this text? What do I need to do as a result of this text? What do I need not to do as a result of this text? That is doctrine for reproof, correction, and instruction of righteousness. So, I use that format. Start with personal application, then you go for

the implication — what people need in their lives.

The biggest thing I would say about application is that every pastor eventually gets to application. I'm just saying he needs to start with it, not end with it. A lot of guys need to start where they end their sermon. They will do about 80 to 90 percent explanation and interpretation in background study, and then at the end there is a little 10-minute application. Now, that is OK if you have a highly motivated group of people who just love Bible knowledge, but the Bible says there are a couple of problems with Bible knowledge. In the first place, it says knowledge puffs up but love builds up, and the Bible says increased knowledge without application leads to pride. Some of the most cantankerous Christians I know are veritable storehouses of Bible knowledge, but they have not applied what they know. They can give you facts and quotes, and they can argue doctrine, but they're angry, very ugly people. The Bible says knowledge without application increases judgment. To him that knows to do good and does it not, it is sin. So, really, to give people knowledge and not get the application is a very dangerous thing.

David Jeremiah (MA 03)

As I look back over my preaching career, when I first got out of seminary I worked very, very diligently at the interpretation and the exposition of the text. I still do. But I work far harder now in how that is applied to people than I did in the beginning. I realize that there has to be a balance between what the Word of God says and what it means to the people. I work very diligently to find out what it says, and I work just as diligently to figure out what it means to the people.

The question of “so what?” is so important today. I don't think expository preaching suffers because it's the wrong method. I think it suffers because it's not done very well by some people who attempt it. They make it dry and boring. If that happens, it's unforgivable — how can you make the living Word of God dry and boring?

In my situation, if it's a matter of getting one more point in the message that comes from the Word of God, or illustrating the points I've already done better, I'll choose the latter, because I want the

people to walk away with something that's going to work in their lives. I think if we don't do that then we ought not be preaching. It becomes more of a lecture. People don't need a better set of notes— they need to know how the Word of God is going to work in their lives.

Bill Hybels (JF 92)

I work very hard on application. I think the instructional part is the easier part of preaching; the points of application are exceedingly difficult to be relevant with. I strive to keep it practical, to keep it applicable, to present Scripture in a way that believers walk away saying, “I know what the main emphasis was and I even have three or four ways I can put it into effect in my life tomorrow.

I find myself asking the famous two word question all throughout my sermon preparation process, which is the phrase “So what? So what? So what?” Why is this important to the guy who just spent twelve hours in the loop of Chicago banging his head in the financial markets? He raced to the commuter train, his wife picked him up at the station, and he ate a sandwich in the car on the way out to the church. Why does he need to know what I'm saying? Of what importance is this to him? I work very hard on that so that people really drive away saying, “It was good to be in the house of the Lord and to sit under the Word because I got something I could put in my life.”

I think what helps in the application part of my preaching ministry is that I am in close relational contact with persons in my accountability group — couples that Lynne and I fellowship with. I am very tuned in to what most men and women in our community are wrestling with.

When I'm giving a message in my “Parenthood” series, for instance, one of my closest friends has three preschool children and he is at the end of his rope most of the time because of the frustration of knowing how to bring the proper balance between love and discipline. In preaching on that subject I kept him and his family in mind during the whole preparation process so that others who would fall into that same category would benefit from the instruction and application I was making to him and his family.

Most of the time in my preaching I'm really thinking of a few

individuals that I know need instruction and application in the specific realm of information that I'm talking about that day. In the "Age of Rage" series, there are some people in my immediate world that are being consumed with anger, and I knew that when I gave the practical steps out — how do you move from anger to resolve and do it authentically and biblically? — I knew they'd be all ears. I had to do my homework carefully, I had to make sure my application was biblical and in general agreement with sound Christian psychological laws and so forth.

John Stott (MA 89)

I began with a very strong commitment to Scripture, a very high view of its authority and inspiration. I have always loved the Word of God — ever since I was converted. Therefore, I have always sought to exercise an expository or exegetical ministry.

In my early days I used to think that my business was to expound and exegete the text; I am afraid I left the application to the Holy Spirit. It is amazing how you can conceal your laziness with a little pious phraseology! The Holy Spirit certainly can and does apply the Word for the people. But it is wrong to deny our own responsibility in the application of the Word.

All great preachers understand this. They focus on the conclusion, on the application of the text. This is what the Puritans called "preaching through to the heart." This is how my own preaching has changed. I have learned to add application to exposition — and this is the bridgebuilding across the chasm.

Preaching to Secular Culture

Harry R. Jackson, Jr. (JA 06)

One of the real problems I find we have in 21st century Christianity is that the younger generations aren't taking us very seriously because they think we are all word with no works. That's really the cutting edge of having our faith in action; I think that is why I'm concerned about it.

My oldest daughter worked with Habitat for Humanity quite a bit on the weekends when she was in college and helped to build houses for the poor and this kind of thing. I see that in that age group there's this social involvement aspect that they are very, very keen on. If we are going to reach subsequent, successive generations, we are going to need to be more involved in what I'm going to call real life and real world. So we need to come from the Word to the world, from words to work.

I was just having a discussion with someone, and they were talking about the immorality that has slipped into some of the churches. And I think that also is an issue: we have all these lofty things we preach, but the bottom line is many people have problems interpreting or translating those words into action. Specifically, let me talk about the breakdown of the black family. You've got nearly 50 percent of the African American adults are church goers and — by George Barna's definition are born again — and then somehow we've got this amazing family decline among people who say that they are born again. The problem is there is a disconnect between the words and a clear-cut plan of action.

So, on the individual level that's a real problem, on the church level it's a problem, and corporately I believe our affecting the culture is a problem of our being unable to apply the Word.

Bill Self (ND 03)

I preach to a highly culturalized congregation. We have a bedrock of the old Chamblee church, who are the dearest people you could ever

meet and understand the faith. Then on top of that we have the corporate migrant, the young adults in this neighborhood here — many of whom have no clue what it's about. They are highly influenced by the culture. For instance when a three or four-day holiday comes around, they're out of here. It's just a given that they're going to be gone. We're going to take a hit.

They're very interested in getting religious services delivered as you would get lawn services or household services. They're very concerned about "please serve me, what's in it for me?" and they don't trust churches. They don't have the facility to really test out doctrine, and since they don't know doctrine they don't trust churches. Then they read stuff in the paper that increases their anxiety. We have had people who have placed their children in our nursery for worship service, then get up and go back to the nursery to check on the child two or three times during the service because they don't know if the worker is going to take care of the child. One of them went to the worker the second visit back to the nursery and said, "Can you tell me which child is mine?" I mean they don't understand a thing about churches.

Also they're very immediate. There is no patience with their processing of the gospel or processing of ideas. It's "say it and understand it or I won't use it because it's not immediately usable." They know more about movies, television, and the general media than they know about the gospel. They know every movie that's out there. Most of them have three car garages full of adult toys. They have boats, all kinds of bicycles, skateboards. You can drive through our neighborhood and see that third garage over there full of all these toys they've bought. That's a secular influence. They wouldn't dare be caught with out the latest indulgence, fad, toy or whatever. Their children are the same way.

They're into suburban soccer, basketball, that sort of thing. Our basketball program here at the church: only 40% of the children go to our church; the rest of them don't go anywhere. Same with soccer. Some of them want to know why they can't have their soccer matches on Sunday morning out on the soccer field. I had a neighbor who informed me they did not go to church except when they needed it. They didn't go the whole time we lived next to each other. But every Sunday

morning at seven o'clock she got up and took her son to a soccer match. The high school here has play practice, senior play practice at ten o'clock on Sunday mornings. The local swim club takes them off to swim matches on Sunday. Cheerleading is a big thing; it is for girls what football is for boys. They practice on Sunday. So the culture just blows in our face.

O.S. Hawkins (FJ 96)

This is an ecotonic world in which we're living. An ecotone is that place where two ecosystems come together. I pastored down in Fort Lauderdale where that salt water from the ocean comes into the intercoastal waterway and meets the fresh water from the river. Where they blend together and merge together is called an ecotone and it's a place of tremendous possibility. Fish lay their eggs there. It's also a place of tremendous danger because certain things happen environmentally there.

That's the world we're called to preach to. We have an incredible opportunity. We are meshing and blending right now our modern world with a postmodern world. The world I was educated in, the world you were educated in, most everybody reading this article were educated in is history — it's over. I just read the other day that all the accumulated knowledge in world history is going to double in the next five years. We are already in a postmodern world, and it's a time of great possibility for those of us who can translate the gospel in a contemporary way. It's a time of horrible problems for those who are still locked in a time warp in the 1950's or 60's, trying to translate the Gospel in that manner.

We have little children who are growing up — before they even get to school — with three-dimensional computer graphics and they're going into some Sunday School classes with flannelgraphs! So we're not connecting with them there . . .

The very culture in which we're living is a pagan culture not unlike the one the apostles penetrated. More and more so. For us it may be even more difficult because so much of our culture is gospel-hardened already, where theirs wasn't. Theirs was more like Fort Lauderdale; the gospel was new to many people down there. But in much of where

preaching is taking place in America, people think they know it all, though they don't.

You mentioned apostolic preaching — there's a common thread running through it. Study Peter's first recorded sermon, at Pentecost in Acts 2, then study Paul's first recorded sermon, at Pisidian Antioch in Acts 13, and you'll find something very common to both. You find what Paul said in 2 Timothy 3:16, that all scripture is given by inspiration of God, and it's profitable for four things: doctrine, reproof, correction, instruction in righteousness. When you study the apostolic sermons you find a balance in their preaching, and they did those four things: they taught doctrine, they reproved sin, they corrected false paths, they instructed in righteousness . . .

The apostles were engaging the same kind of culture we are — a godless, pagan culture. That's what America is. And they weren't trying to be cute about it. They went in, and the power of God came on them, and the power of God is what brought all of this about. When we return to that and bring back a balance into our preaching, we can see something happen.

Ed Young, Sr. (ND 94)

I think apologetic preaching has to be the mode if we're going to get serious about reaching the secular person. I can stand up and say I believe this is what the Bible says — I believe it's the inerrant, authoritative Word of God — but by the same token, there'll be thousands of people out there in my congregation who don't automatically share that view. For example, on any given Sunday we'll have over a thousand people in one of our three worship services who are not Christians and not members of our church — that many will be there every Sunday. Now if these people are going to hear and are going to listen, a lot of them would say, "You know, I don't know if I believe in God or not. I don't know if the Bible is really true." The purpose of preaching is to nurture and train the family of God — whose who are already Christians — but I think relevant preaching that is evangelistic is going to have to be apologetic.

About 25 or 30 percent of the preaching I do in my pulpit is

apologetic — for those who don't believe.

You approach that in an entirely different way. For example, I'd say, "Do you believe there is evil in the world?" Here's someone having trouble with God, for example. And they'd say, "Yeah, there's evil in the world."

I'd say, "Well, logically if there's evil in the world, there's also good. So you believe that there's evil and there's good?"

"Well, yes."

"So, you believe there's moral law in the world?"

"Yeah, if there's good and evil, there's moral law."

"Well, do you believe there's a moral law giver? Here's an effect, it has to have a cause."

"Yeah, there's a moral law giver." All of a sudden they've bumped head-on into God! Particularly on great days like Christmas and Easter, when you have so many people who just come with family and friends, I take an apologetic approach. This approach is going to be relevant and alive and reaching people in the twenty-first century.

We have a marketplace ministry. We have a lot of support groups in my church for those who are HIV-positive. We call them the "Positive Christians." Our support groups are for those who have AIDS, those who are cancer victims, those who've lost children, those who have terminal illnesses. We have twenty-five to thirty support groups in our church. You can come from any part of Houston and, when you walk in, there will be somebody who'll say, "I'm ready to listen to you; I'm ready to love you." We listen and help.

We've forgotten several things about the characteristics of Jesus. Get in an average church and ask, "Name all the characteristics of Jesus." They'll say He was lovely; He was kind. One thing they'll often forget is He was a friend of sinners. We've forgotten that: how to be a friend to sinners. If you minister to people where they hurt, you don't have to worry about a chance to introduce them to Christ; they're going to ask you about coming to know Christ. They'll want to go to church with you. But you can't befriend them in some superficial way and "hang a scalp" on your wall. So, I think the church needs to be there to minister, to love and nurture, and when people come in they find what the world's looking for: *life!*

We've seen almost 2,000 people a year, from all walks of life, make their way up the aisles of our church. Part of the genius of that is my church family, not me — I'm the teacher/pastor and we've got a wonderful team. Preaching is a part of that, but worship is where we begin. Look at all these ministries out there that are non-threatening. I hope we are always there with a cup of cold water or an activity that will make a difference.

A young Jewish lawyer in the largest law firm in Houston came to our electric light parade with his four-year-old son. We had a float, and the guy waved at him and the boy said, "Daddy, who's that?" He said, "I think that's Joseph." "Who's Joseph?" "I think he's the father of Jesus." "Who's Jesus, Daddy?"

The little boy kept urging, "Daddy, let's go back there where Joseph waved at me during that parade. Let's go back there." A parade, of all things! This young man and his wife have come to Christ and been saved in the last few months. It all started at Christmas when their little boy said "Joseph waved at me" and he began to ask questions.

Too many churches spend all their time, I'm afraid, looking at their own navels — high steeple, few people churches. In our church, our people minister to one another because we seek to call forth their spiritual gifts. I'm just exercising my gift to get out of the way and let God do what He wants to do.

Gardner C. Taylor (JF 94)

I think many preachers are overpowered by this society. When I went to New York, the *Times* on Monday would carry excerpts from Sunday sermons. There has been this draining out of religion from American life, unless it has an angle to it or is off-center. Uncertainty about the structures of the society seems to be clear and powerful — but here we are. Yet this is what Jesus said to His disciples: "I have sent you forth, sheep in the midst of wolves." When those disciples looked at the magnificence of Herod's temple, they oohed and said "aah." Preachers are not to scorn the culture; there are notable and wonderful things about it. They are to realize that culture is human, temporal, passing. We are to address our culture as a part of it and yet not a part of it, and to

address it with that kind of authority — not arrogance — that comes to one who believes that he or she is an emissary of a kingdom that will outlast all kingdoms.

There's a great hurting among pastors. Owen Cooper lived in Yazoo City, Mississippi: a remarkable man. He was one of the few lay persons who was president of the Southern Baptist Convention. Cooper sent an open letter to Southern Baptist laymen urging them — pleading with them, really — to allow their pastors to preach to them the whole dimension of the Bible. For whatever reason, many of us are afraid to deal with the whole sweep of the Gospel. I'm not just talking about race now. I'm talking also about greed. I'm talking about the private and public immorality of corruption in our public life. This has something to do with the moral health of the nation, and by the living God I believe the Gospel has something to say to it. I'm not talking about any partisan issue; I'm talking about the spiritual welfare of a nation, and therefore, the spiritual welfare of individuals. I'm talking about setting our human lives within the light of the Gospel; that's what I'm doing.

Max Lucado (MA 93)

I really think that the questions people are asking are so different now than they were when I was growing up. When I was growing up, the question people asked was, “Which church?” Today the question people are asking is, “Why church? Why go to church at all?” No longer can we afford the luxury of thinking that the people who are sitting in our pews are going to be there every Sunday. We have to arrest their attention. We have to use every device possible to reach them and to teach them, and we need not be so apologetic about entertaining them. I mean, they've been entertained all week long, every time they turn around. I have no apology for putting a good singer in front of them to entertain them if they're not Christians; you've got to do something to reach them . . .

If you're up there speaking about where they live, about failures, about death and about futility, you're going to connect with some of them.

(What are some of the methods you find yourself using in trying to arrest their attention?)

I'm a big storyteller. Just yesterday in our church, I told the whole sermon as a story. I wrote a fable, a fable about a wise man named Shaddai who had a village full of orphans and an orphan named Palladin who discovered that the fence surrounding the village that protected them from the wilderness had a hole in it. He discovers after he tells Shaddai about the hole that Shaddai put the hole in and so Palladin has to decide now; he's giving me the choice. I can either go out or I can stay. Palladin leaves and Shaddai goes in search for him. That's a one-minute summary of what took me thirty minutes to tell. The whole thing was a story and, you know, people listened.

They love a story, they love to be captured. They're expecting me to get up and say point one, point two, point three. They're expecting all my words to rhyme and they're expecting some cute little stories — and I do that. I do that probably more than I don't do that. Every so often it's great for me if I can come in and just surprise the socks off my people, just like yesterday. I sat there in a big chair, moved the pulpit out of the way, just sat in the chair, had the opened story on my lap and just talked about it. I love stories.

It's always impressed me that Jesus told stories and didn't explain them. He'd give a parable and not explain it, with the exception of the parable of the sower and two or three others. He just told the story and left the interpretation up to the audience. Maybe he knew something more about the Holy Spirit than we do and if the Holy Spirit will make that connection with the people. There are times when our task is just to blow the dandelion into the air and let the seeds fall where they may, and storytelling is a great method to do that.

Leith Anderson (MA 92)

A sermon must be biblical, but the preacher must present the biblical material in an interesting way. Baby Boomers do not like to be bored. If they are bored, they will tune you out, and stay tuned out. The sermon must be perceived by Baby Boomers as relevant, so that they hear the biblical text and say, "That's my story — it has something to

do with *my* life.”

With that in mind, when I step into the pulpit I may do any number of things. I may use a first-person monologue. I might take a rather academic approach if the text and the issue demands it. I may use any combination of models to fit both the audience and the message.

How Preaching is Changing

Warren Wiersbe (MJ 92)

Narrative preaching must not be simply retelling an old story in modern dress. Preaching is not just story, it's *image*. Paul in his epistles used dozens of images of the church. Peter did the same thing. Instead of giving a long speech about separation, Peter says, "You are pilgrims and aliens in this world." Symbolism has a way of growing. You take an image: it applies to my age, it applied to the age Peter wrote to, it will apply to the church fifty years from now. So imagery has a way of giving truth prominence of expression, but freedom to expand.

Narrative is good, but some preachers have made the mistake of thinking, "All you do is tell a story," and you become an evangelical Garrison Keillor, for example. Keillor is a master at telling stories, but I think preaching is much more than that.

Leith Anderson (MA 92)

The sermon itself is a powerful agent of change. If the sermon is truth mediated through personality, the truth is understood to be unchanging, but it should focus on the change which must take place in my life and in the life of the community. The truth does not change, but the audience does, and so my presentation of the sermon must also change.

People are looking for a communicator who is much more conversational than the traditional styles allowed. The preacher must be more relational if communication is really to take place. And add this: It must be intellectually credible as well as emotionally vibrant.

In many churches, the intellectual credibility has been at stake, and the problem was addressed. I think the relational aspect is now the most pressing issue in the communication of the sermon. The times have changed.

Influence of Media on Preaching

Jerry Falwell

Being a media minister helps you to say more with few words because it's usually only the first two or three sentences, the sound bite as they call it, that the public is accustomed to capture. You will have others who will get it all, you will have many who will get a good bit of it, but most only get the sound bites. So it is important that your first paragraph is attention getting. It is important that at various points of the message where you want to drive home a truth, there's something that will recapture their attention. It is important that the way you end is a memorable ending because two weeks from now they won't be able to remember the topic they have heard so much since then.

I try very hard to think of what I am doing at the pulpit as though I were on *Face the Nation* or one of the talk shows when you are across from an opponent. You don't get the chance to go into all of your rationale. You will be shouted down or talked over. You've got to have two or three sentences that go right through. For example, Friday night I was debating on *Hardball*. I had said in a *60 Minutes* interview, when asked about comparing Moses and Jesus and Mohammad, I said that Jesus and Moses were great models for love, peace, truth, faith and family. Mohammad was a man of war and violence. And then he asked, "Well, why do you think Mohammad was a bad example." I said I think Mohammad was a terrorist and I think that he got his kicks out of killing and assassinating people. That is if the Muslim biographers are to be believed.

And so I am on *Hardball* and this guy says, "You bigot, why would you say such a thing?" He was screaming at me. I said, "Abraham, now settle down, don't have a stroke. Let me ask you something: You have read the biographies, the Muslim biographies. Did Mohammad kill innocent people?" "What's that have to do...?" "It's a yes or no question, did he kill innocent people?" He wouldn't answer me. I said, "Your refusal to answer does answer it. The answer was, he did. And

that is what a terrorist does.” And I said, “Now most of you out there have not read a biography of Mohammed and never will. Go to falwell.com — I’ve printed one out for you there to summarize it.” So you’ve got to say it quickly. We’ve gotten 82,000 hits since Friday night reading the copy.

So that translates into preaching. The shorter the sermon you’re going to bring — and I bring 30-minute sermons — the shorter the sermon, the better prepared you’ve got to be. In today’s world with everybody seeking instant gratification, everything’s instant, everything — you’ve got to be able to say it quickly, say it well, prick their minds, drive them to further research and tell them where to get it, simply. Really, the preachers of the next generation have got to be smarter than the preachers of our generation. They’ve got to say it better, quicker, with greater support. People no longer can say as we once did, ‘this is the way it is.’ Because they want to know why is that the way it is. You’ve got to build that in and then give them the resources to get the rest. Kids are wide open today but you can’t fool them as once churches could.

Power of Preaching

Bill Self (ND 03)

I think that preaching should explode inside the preacher — the text comes in and explodes in the preacher. Preach about David and Bathsheba so they are alive to the congregation. If you're preaching about the disciples of Jesus, bring them alive in there. I try to think of ways to make these people live, not with artistry, but I think there is a mystical dimension where they get loose and live among the congregation during that time. You preach about Jesus and it's more than just describing Jesus on the cross. That happens in there — it's not because the preacher has the words to make it happen, but somehow they come alive.

Sometimes in my prayer I ask God to let that happen, to let that living event happen when I'm preaching and it gets beyond me and beyond them and it just happens to us. It's a mystical thing. To over analyze it is to destroy the mystery because you can't really put handles on some things that happen. Then sometimes they don't come alive, sometimes it doesn't happen and it's the hardest work for you. But when it does you would die for it. When it happens, when you've finished and you hear the applause of nail-scarred hands — I'll put up with all the stuff that I've put up with to get there. It's a mystery.

Jack Graham (ND 02)

I've always believed in the impact of preaching — that it truly does make a difference. It really is an audacious thing. I wish I had known even 20, 30 years ago what a huge difference preaching can make in people's lives. I believed it then, but I believe it even more now. Preaching truly is God's way of fleshing out the message in the lives and personalities of His people. I've never been more eager to preach.

John Maxwell (JF 98)

Preaching to me is not an end in itself. I believe that for the great communicators, their whole perspective of communicating is to change lives and to move people from one point to the other with the assistance of God. People that are speakers, their goal is to look good. There is a world of difference between those two. A speaker, when he or she is done, their whole issue is: how did I sound, did people like me? A communicator preacher, their whole perspective is: did it change a life? Communicators are other focused, speakers are inward focused.

And I think because of that, the results are totally different, too. If you preach to change lives, the odds are there will be lives changed. If you preach to impress people the odds are you will impress people. So what are you in there for?

William Willimon (SO 93)

I think that one of the greatest things preachers can do is to take their miserable little lives and make them cosmic — make them large and give dignity to what they're doing. I sometimes say it at my place: "You know, I'm sorry, boys and girls, you couldn't have heard this anywhere else but here. You had to put on a coat and tie and get all dressed up and come down here on a Sunday morning at an inconvenient hour to hear this. This is stuff they ain't talking about anywhere else — it's just for you." In a way I want to try to say, "Being Christian is not to be boring and bourgeois and middle-class with a station wagon — being Christian is an adventure."

I remember the great evangelical madman Tony Campolo preached for us one Sunday. He preached forty-five minutes; he screamed, he danced, and then we had the Duke Dance Ensemble come and portray the Psalm with their bodies, and somebody had a tympani drum and started beating on it for the anthem — this weird contemporary anthem. We just kind of walked out reeling and shaking. This kid told me, "I invited a friend of mine who had been to church as a kid but he hadn't come in a long time. I'd been on him for a long time, 'Come to church with me,' and so I brought him to church. I was so proud

because as he walked from the church he said, 'Wow, what was that?' I lied; I said it was a typical Sunday; that that's what we do when we get together." I think what I heard that kid saying was, "I was really proud to be a Christian; it was interesting, it was challenging, it was big."

One thing that really concerns me about a lot of preaching that I hear called evangelical is they act as if the goal is to make the Gospel as small as possible. We used to tell an old joke about the evangelist saying "Come down to the altar and accept Jesus as your savior." Nobody comes. He tries again, "If you want to lead a better life, come down to the altar." Nobody comes. Again he tries, "If you love your mother, come down to the altar." And it has kind of that quality — you know, get it down to a bumper sticker, or what you can put on a sign in front of the church.

Then I say no, maybe the best evangelism is that which is larger — it's just big — where people come forward and say, "Gosh, I have my college degree and I'm a very intelligent person, and I've never heard anything like this before, and I'm having difficulty with what you just said." I'd love a race of preachers who take that as a high compliment and say, "Of course, as if you could possibly understand after visiting only one time. How much are you willing to pay for this? Are you interested? We do have a class."

To me, that would be fairer to the Gospel than bragging "I am proud to say I have never ever confused anybody in a sermon. I have gotten it down now to where they'll sit there and say, 'Gosh, that's what I've always thought. Yeah, thank you for helping me name that'." By the way, that's liberal Protestantism, which has bled in now to the church growth movement in some of its aspects, and I think it's ugly. I think that's cheap because it's not fair to the Gospel. The Gospel is not what you've always thought.

John Stott (MA 89)

I still believe that preaching is the key to the renewal of the church. I am an impenitent believer in the power of preaching.

I know all the arguments against it: that the television age has rendered it useless; that we are a spectator generation; that people are

bored with the spoken word, disenchanted with any communication by spoken words alone. All these things are said these days.

Nevertheless, when a man of God stands before the people of God with the Word of God in his hand and the Spirit of God in his heart, you have a unique opportunity for communication.

I fully agree with Martyn Lloyd-Jones that the decadent periods in the history of the church have always been those periods marked by preaching in decline. That is a negative statement. The positive counterpart is that churches grow to maturity when the Word of God is faithfully and sensitively expounded to them.

If it is true that a human being cannot live by bread only, but by every word which proceeds out of the mouth of God, then it also is true of churches. Churches live, grow, and thrive in response to the Word of God. I have seen congregations come alive by the faithful and systematic unfolding of the Word of God.

Future of Preaching

Fred Craddock (MJ 03)

I think I can see two things. One is what I call a minimizing of the sermon in a larger and livelier context of worship. The whole context of worship with a range of presentations, visual and verbal and all that, is in a sense of time going to reduce the sermon. The minister in many churches is going to be more like an emcee with various acts of worship introduced, and in the midst of that an almost devotional-sized, homily-sized sermon — a verse of scripture, a few analogies from the news or something in the paper. And those churches will flourish for a time, though I fear for the memory of those churches. Will they have a good memory of the Word?

On the other hand, I think there's going to be more exegetical work done in the pulpit. Some people will call it expository work. You can see the beginnings of it now in some ministers just opening the Bible, read some verses and talk about it, read some verses and talk about it. There is a going to that extreme in what I think is a healthy shift, that is to the content of the sermon, but that's going so far as to neglect what constitutes good communication. But I appreciate the fact that they feel here's a hunger, an appetite, an emptiness that needs to be filled, so let's just read scripture and talk about it. That becomes sort of walking through the woods and notching every tree, and the minister does not provide enough discernment between major importance and lesser importance in a text.

I think, I hope in the future there will be an increase in the dealing with biblical content in the sermon. Some people will find that antiquated or quaint, but the fact of the matter is we live out of the reservoir of the well of the scripture. You can't get people talking about it if they don't know what it says. I think there will be an increase in the preacher teaching texts he preaches on, she preaches on. I try to do that here, and have for the last few years. If I'm invited to a church to

preach, I ask, “Can I have the adult classes together during the Sunday School hour?” and I teach the text that I’m going to preach, on the assumption that if they get familiar enough with it they’ll start thinking about it, they won’t be intimidated by it, they won’t feel put down because they didn’t know it. They’ll be partners in the preaching process.

I think we’re going to have more of the minister as a teaching preacher in the future. All of that is saying what I said earlier, which is an accent on the content. I hope that’s true.

James Earl Massey (SO 92)

Preaching as God intended it will never lose its power nor its reason for being. Human concern will shift with every generation, but God’s means of addressing human need will never change. So, to find out how God has moved in history and to be open to follow that path is to remain relevant. Outside of that path, there is no relevance, even if there is, for a time, attractiveness.

The only path of success in God’s eye is for us to follow what He has mandated for us to do. And that mandate, as spoken through His servant Paul, is to preach the Word, in season and out of season.

Frank Harrington (JA 92)

My own judgment is that we are going to move into a tremendous era of renewal in preaching. I have on my desk right now five folders, several letters there from churches writing me, asking me to recommend them a minister. And those churches range in membership from about 350 to 3,800. All of them have one central issue: recommend someone who is an effective preacher. I think if you can create a caring environment in an uplifting worship environment and have standing at the center of that a person who can articulate the truth of God in relevant terminology, you would be hard-pressed to have a building big enough to hold the people.

You have to constantly maintain that time for preparation, and if the minister ever gets to the point where he or she is relying on what they did five years ago they will dry up spiritually. We must be constantly digging and grappling with the central questions, because that's what causes us to grow and in our growth we can help our people grow.

Bill Hybels (JF 92)

At Willow Creek we have transitioned to a team-teaching format. We're in five services a week and we're just moving into six now. We have two midweek services, Wednesday night and Thursday night. Now this fall we're moving to two Saturday night and two Sunday morning services. I hit the wall a couple of years ago trying to do them all, so now we have a rotation where I quarterback a team of four teachers, and try to lead the rotation to play to the strengths of the teachers yet keep the directional momentum to the preaching menu of the church.

I believe that more churches are going to move toward that as pastors find out that they will tend to either preach well or lead their church well; but if they're trying to do both, something's going to suffer, and sometimes everybody suffers. So maybe we'll be a prototype for the team-teaching approach.

The advantage to the congregation is they hear the voice of God through different voice boxes. They discern the wisdom of God through different personalities and gift mixes. The other advantage is that the teachers get more preparation time so that what they bring to the congregation can be better researched, more thoroughly prayed through, and applied to their own lives. A lot of us pastors preach what we have not yet applied in our own lives because by the time we're trying to apply truth to ourselves we're already in preparation for the next time up. That often leads to some forms of hypocrisy — it's unintentional but it's almost inevitable.

I really believe that the church ought to be led by leaders and taught by teachers — plural — and administrated by administrators, etc. We're heading in that direction, and I think that's exciting.

In the course of the year, I'll probably speak for 26 weekend services, but also maybe eight or nine of our midweek services. It's important to

me to nourish and feed the core of the church at our midweek services and it's important for me to be a consistent communicator to the non-churched community in our area.

Again, we make those decisions more by gift-mix. Two of us on the teaching team have very strong evangelism gifts with our preaching gifts, so we would tend to do more of the weekend services. The other two tend to be a little stronger toward the midweek services, so we would play to the strengths. One of the four of us is a pure communicator who can really speak in either place effectively — that's not me, by the way!

The Preachers

Leith Anderson has served since 1977 as Senior Pastor of Wooddale Church in Eden Prairie, MN. He is currently President of the National Association of Evangelicals.

Steve Brown is Professor of Preaching at Reformed Theological Seminary in Orlando, FL, and is speaker for the Key Life Network radio broadcast.

Rod Casey is Senior Associate Pastor at Woodcrest Chapel in Jefferson City, Mo., and an adjunct professor for A.W. Tozer Theological Seminary.

Fred Craddock served for many years as Professor of Preaching and New Testament at Candler Divinity School of Emory University in Atlanta, GA. At the time of this interview he was serving as Pastor of Cherry Log Christian Church in Cherry Log, GA; he has since retired.

W.A. Criswell served a half-century as Senior Pastor of First Baptist Church in Dallas, TX. He died in 2002.

Tony Evans is Senior Pastor of Oak Cliff Bible Fellowship in Dallas, TX, president of The Urban Alternative, and speaker on the radio broadcast “The Alternative with Tony Evans.”

Jerry Falwell was Senior Pastor of Thomas Road Baptist Church in Lynchburg, VA, and Chancellor of Liberty University. He died in 2007.

Jack Graham is Senior Pastor of Prestonwood Baptist Church in Plano, TX.

W. Frank Harrington served for 27 years as Senior Pastor of Peachtree Presbyterian Church in Atlanta, GA. He died in 1999.

O.S. Hawkins is President of Guidestone Financial Resources, an agency of the Southern Baptist Convention. At the time of this interview, he served as Senior Pastor of First Baptist Church in Dallas, TX.

Jim Henry served as Senior Pastor of First Baptist Church, Orlando, FL, from 1977 to 2006, when he retired.

John Huffman retired in 2009 as Senior Pastor of St. Andrews Presbyterian Church, Newport Beach, CA.

Bill Hybels is Senior Pastor of Willow Creek Community Church in South Barrington, IL.

Harry R. Jackson, Jr. is Senior Pastor of Hope Christian Church in Bowie, Maryland.

David Jeremiah is Senior Pastor of Shadow Mountain Community Church in El Cajon, CA, and Chancellor of Christian Heritage College.

Walter Kaiser is President Emeritus and Coleman M. Mockler Distinguished Professor of Old Testament Emeritus of Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in Hamilton, MA.

Max Lucado is Minister of Preaching for the Oak Hills Church in San Antonio, TX.

John MacArthur is pastor-teacher of Grace Community Church in Sun Valley, CA, president of The Master's College and Seminary, and featured teacher on the Grace to You radio broadcast.

James Earl Massey is retired as Dean of the Anderson School of Theology in Anderson, IN. He now makes his home in Greensboro, AL.

John Maxwell is founder of the InJoy Group in Atlanta, GA, and previously served as Senior Pastor of the Skyline Wesleyan Church in San Diego, CA. His books have sold more than 13 million copies.

Calvin Miller is Professor of Preaching at the Beeson Divinity School in Birmingham, AL.

R. Albert Mohler, Jr. is President of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, KY.

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Stephen F. Olford founded the Stephen Olford Center for Biblical Preaching in Memphis, TN, which he led until his death in 2004. Billy Graham called him “the man who most influenced my ministry.”

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