

## Preaching to the Unchurched

A wholistic ministry seeks to both evangelize pre-believers and edify believers. Paul tells us that the aim of his ministry includes both:

*He is the one we proclaim, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ. To this end I strenuously contend with all the energy Christ so powerfully works in me. (Colossians 1:28-29)*

The word translated ‘admonishing’ is the word *noutheteo*, a concept which can broadly be defined as “loving confrontation with the truth for the purpose of change.” The word is translated variously as *instruct*, *counsel*, or *warn*. In this context it probably has the emphasis of lovingly confronting unbelievers with the Gospel for the purpose of conversion. The Expositor’s Bible Commentary says: *Here it relates to non-Christians, the thought probably being that [we seek] to awaken each of them to his need of Christ.*

‘Teaching’ in Colossians 1:28 refers to instruction to believers in the way of Christ, building them up in the faith by the Word of God. Such teaching is to be done ‘with all wisdom’. That is, since wisdom is the application of knowledge, then our teaching will apply what we know about our hearers and their needs to the preaching task, *how* we go about it.

Both the admonishing and teaching will be done to ‘everyone’ God brings into our sphere of influence. The word *everyone* appears twice in the English translation, but three times in Greek. Instead of ‘admonishing and teaching everyone’ it’s “admonishing EVERYONE and teaching EVERYONE so that we may present EVERYONE fully mature in Christ.” There is no one who is to be left out of our evangelistic and edification efforts!

The word translated ‘proclaim’ is not the common Greek word for ‘preach,’ and so EBC says: *It perhaps has a wider significance than the more common word for “preach” (kerusso) in Paul’s writings.* So, this is communication of the Gospel in both formal and informal settings. But although it involves more than formal preaching, it is not less. Therefore, if we are to carry out the purposes of Colossians 1:28 then our formal preaching must include evangelism.

### I. A Forum for Addressing Pre-Believers

If we’re to preach to pre-believers then we need to take steps to have them in attendance. There was a time when the Sunday evening service was an evangelistic service. However, for most of our churches the Sunday evening service ceased to be evangelistic long ago. Further, many of our churches have not found a replacement. Willow Creek developed the ‘Seeker Service’ to address this need, but has done so at the wrong time (in effect, replacing worship) and in the wrong way (marketing, entertainment, etc.).<sup>1</sup> But it is still possible, and important, to consider having a regular time in our structure to address pre-believers, without the compromise of the Willow Creek model.

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<sup>1</sup> For a devastating critique of the Willow Creek model, see G.A. Pritchard, *Willow Creek Seeker Services* (Baker, 1996), pp. 187-287.

## A. The Biblical Pattern

Pritchard observes:

*We see in the Scriptures that Jesus regularly taught many people who were not yet his disciples. A good deal of his ministry was public teaching on hillsides and at street corners...*

*Likewise the apostle Paul regularly interacted with nonbelieving Jews and Greeks in whatever public forum was available. Acts 17:17 records that Paul “reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the God-fearing Greeks, as well as in the marketplace day by day with those who happened to be there.” In Ephesus, Paul had daily discussions in a public lecture hall for two years with the effect that “all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord.” Paul used a variety of public settings to proclaim and explain the gospel to his audiences.<sup>2</sup>*

## B. The Historical Precedent

*We see throughout church history the same willingness to use a variety of public settings to communicate the gospel. George Whitfield and John Wesley initiated open-air preaching in the eighteenth century as a useful public forum to communicate the gospel. Many individuals criticized them for this shocking method of preaching outside of churches. As Wesley explains, “I submitted to be more vile, and proclaimed in the highways the glad tidings of salvation.” This innovation proved to be very fruitful as tens of thousands came to hear and respond to the Gospel.<sup>3</sup>*

## C. Discovering God - A Contemporary Model

Having a regular time to communicate with pre-believers is a good idea. However, the worship service is the wrong time to do it because worship is for believers (unbelievers, by definition, cannot worship!). Given that, in our culture, most are inclined to consider spiritual matters on Sunday morning, we thought it wise to offer a service on Sunday morning, separate from worship, at which we could address pre-believers. The result is the *Discovering God* hour.

1. *Discovering God* begins at 11:00, contemporaneous with Sunday School
2. The setting is a classroom atmosphere.
3. The presentation is “guest sensitive”:
  - a. Care is taken to communicate in language the pre-believer can understand
  - b. The pre-believer is invited to come informally
  - c. No offering is taken
  - d. There is no music
  - e. Topics are chosen to address the pre-believer:

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 188. See Acts 14:1; 17:1-3; 18:4, 28; and 19:8-10.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

- *What's the Difference?* – An examination of the differences between world religions
- *What's the Difference?* – An examination of the differences between denominations
- *You Mean the Bible Teaches That?* – An examination of the Bible's teaching on ethical issues
- *Why You Can Trust the Bible?* – An examination of the origin and uniqueness of the Bible
- *Meant to Last* – An examination of the Bible's teaching on marriage
- *Parenting with Purpose* – An examination of the Bible's teaching on parenting
- *Big Bang or Big God?* – An examination of the competing views on origins – Creation versus Evolution
- *What's the World Coming To?* – An examination of the Bible's teaching on end times
- *Answering the Tough Ones* – An examination of the Bible's answer to common objections

These and other topics are addressed with a presuppositional approach that presses the antithesis between the pre-believer's worldview and that of Scripture. For instance, when evaluating the claims of competing world religions, the pre-believer is confronted with his relativistic approach to truth as Christ is proclaimed to be "the way, the truth, and the life." The *Meant to Last* course confronts the pre-believer with the fact that he's using the "stolen capital" of the biblical worldview by using God's institution for his own purposes. And, of course, Christ is presented as the remedy for these noetic and moral sins.

## II. Closing the Gaps

Because the message of Christ is, frankly, weird to the sinful mind, Paul says, "the preaching of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing" (1 Corinthians 1:18). It is beyond the ability of the preacher to make the king's message palatable - only the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit can do that. However, there are things we can and must do to ensure the message is given a hearing, and understood. There are several barriers to communication of Scripture that must be addressed by the preacher:

### A. The Language Gap

This involves the language of Scripture and that of the preacher in explaining it. For the former, a modern translation is invaluable. For the latter, the preacher must be careful in his choice of words, and ensure that he explains clearly.

### B. The Culture Gap

Effective communication requires that one know his audience. A good communicator will always ask, "To whom will I be speaking?" in order to determine what text/topic are appropriate for the occasion. Having identified the audience, a "passion to connect" requires that we eliminate all unnecessary barriers that prejudice the listener against giving *us* a hearing (Note: I'm here addressing the hearers' view of the messenger, not the message).

We should also, positively, do and say certain things to offset cultural prejudices. Below is a partial list of the known biases our culture has against Christians in general and preachers in particular:

- Many think that Bible-believers are *ignorant* of issues in disciplines such as science, philosophy, politics, etc.
- There is the perception that preachers are “Elmer Gantrys” looking to shake them down at the first opportunity.
- Christians are viewed as “holier than thou”.
- Pre-believers see us as being at war *with them*:

*A prerequisite to effective preaching to non-Christians is that we like them. If we don't, it's going to bleed through our preaching. Listen closely to sermons on the radio or on television, and often you'll hear remarks about “those worldly secular people.” Unintentionally, these speakers distance themselves from the non-Christian listener; it's us against them. I find myself wondering whether these preachers are convinced that lost people matter to God. It's not a merciful, “Let's tell them we love them,” but a ticked off, “They're going to get what's coming to them.” These preachers forfeit their opportunity to speak to non-Christians, because the unchurched person immediately senses, They don't like me.<sup>4</sup>*

While exegesis grants *authority* to our message, exposition/homiletics gives it *integrity*.

### C. The Relevancy Gap

A sermon without application is simply a lecture. People may applaud our delivery, diligent study, erudition, etc., but if they fail to appropriate the truth in their daily living then we've failed in our objective. I noted above that our purpose is to communicate the truth. But the truth is, we must live in obedience to the Word of God! In other words, the truth is not only doctrine, but also application. In fact, much of the Word of God is devoted to the application of doctrinal truth. For instance, Romans is without doubt the most doctrinally-laden book in the NT. Yet Romans is 50% application! The most famous passage in the Bible regarding Scripture itself is found in 2 Timothy 3:16-17:

*All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.*

Note that the *purpose* of Scripture is NOT doctrine! Rather, doctrine serves the purposes of Scripture namely, *so that* [purpose clause] *the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work*.

Therefore, we will seek to teach and preach to effect change. For the unbeliever we will seek to effect a change in their perception of Christ, Christians, and Christianity. For believers, we will seek to effect change in their understanding of the Christian walk

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<sup>4</sup> Bill Hybels in *Mastering Contemporary Preaching*, p. 30

## Cultivating Your Pulpit Presence

The following is from my mentor, Pastor Steve Thomas, who offers words of great wisdom to frame our treatment of this important subject. The following is an email he sent to a seminary professor:

*I think that the major obstacle to good preaching for the seminary graduates that I have heard is self-consciousness in the pulpit. I believe that this comes from a sense of dis-ease which inevitably leads a young man to view the preaching event as a collection of components (gestures, transitional statements, the big idea, colorful speech, etc.) that must be mastered mechanically. Consequently, they become performance oriented rather than communication oriented (by performance I do not mean that they are acting, but rather they are inordinately concerned about doing this or that as they were taught). It seems to me that there are two possible resolutions to this sense of dis-ease (excluding, of course, the actor who masters techniques for the purpose of manipulating an audience). First, some men become merely comfortable in the pulpit because of the sheer repetition of the preaching event. They are no longer self-conscious, but neither do they use the pulpit with maximum potency. The other possible resolution, it seems to me, is to take charge of the pulpit with a "passion to connect." It is a shift in focus from performance to communication, from the speaker to the audience. It is my opinion that such a transformation in the attitude of the preacher comes about when he moves beyond the mechanics of exegesis and homiletics (as indispensable as they are) and sifts his own worldview through the truth that he has just exegeted. Such "devotional" reflection on the text as God's truth strengthens the preacher's faith (giving greater authority to his communication), transforms the preacher's life (giving greater credibility to his communication), and deepens the preacher's worship (giving greater fervor to his communication). Put more simply, the sermon needs to become an occasion when the preacher says, in essence, "I have been with God and found his truth life changing. I can't wait to point you to his glory."*

*Now, I readily recognize that this could be interpreted to mean that the weak preacher has deficiency in personal worship. I certainly do not mean that. But I do contend that self-consciousness in the pulpit cannot appropriately be resolved without an interaction with the text (and the God of the text) that produces a passion to connect with our hearers.*

*I am not sure that this can be taught in the traditional sense of the word. Neither am I certain that merely modeling good preaching can instill this in a new generation, since impersonal exposure to preaching provides nothing more than a flat snapshot of technique. I suspect that personal interaction—mentoring—is the key. If this is so, then the local church is the only forum for producing the final product in the training process—and I think that only local churches in which the pastor can spend time with the students will be able to get the job done.*

That superb summary needs to be read and assimilated many times, and it is hard to improve on its substance. So, what follows is an attempt to provide some practical instruction to move away from self-consciousness and performance to God-consciousness and pastoral preaching.

## I. The Preacher's Task

If you were on your deathbed and had a final instruction to leave to your successor, what would it be? 2 Timothy 4 is the last chapter of the last letter we have from Paul in the New Testament. Paul speaks of his impending execution in verses 6-8:

*For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time has come for my departure. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing. (2 Timothy 4:6-8)*

His final apostolic directive to his young protégé' Timothy is found in verses 1-2:

*In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge: Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction. (2 Timothy 4:1-2)*

See also Romans 10:13-17 and 1 Corinthians 1:18-31 on the necessity of preaching.

The primary word that is translated “preach” in our NT means “to herald, proclaim, declare the message of another”. It was used of the king’s ambassador who would deliver the king’s message to a foreign land. The message to be delivered was that of the king, not the messenger! Since it is the “Word” that is to be preached, then the preacher must engage in *exegesis* of Scripture. The preacher should first ask “what does this text say?” before asking “what can I say about this text?” Exegesis refers to the process of “drawing out” the meaning of the biblical text and, as mentioned above, will give the message *authority*.

This all means, among other things, that:

- The preacher’s primary audience is not the congregation, but God.
- He comports himself accordingly - not as an entertainer, motivational speaker, or comedian.
- He prepares and so carries himself as one who is ready for his task – he gets right to it, no small talk, and little levity.

## II. The Preacher's (Secondary) Audience

Models for pastoral ministry abound in our day. Some see the pastoral role as that of CEO, others as a military general, still others the detached Bible scholar whose only responsibility is to deliver the Word each Sunday. This latter view, that of pastor-as-expositor-only, finds expression in the title “preacher.” While a term of endearment on the lips of most, it nevertheless indicates an understanding of the pastoral role.

Among those of us committed to a high view of Scripture, the Bible expositor/preacher model has held special sway, for very good reason – see above. And no less than G. Campbell Morgan, marvelous man of God, expositor, and homiletician, said the ideal pastorate has “a beaten path from the study to the pulpit.” Nevertheless, our preaching task must be thought of in the context of our *pastoral* calling.

Scripture tells us that pastors will one day “give an account” of their stewardship of those entrusted to their care: *Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you* (Hebrews 13:17). The comments in EBC are helpful in showing the relevance of this passage to the pastoral role:

*The pronoun autoi puts some emphasis on the subject: “They and no one else.” The verb “keep watch” (agrypneo) means literally “keep oneself awake, be awake” (BAG, s.v.). There is the imagery of the leaders keeping awake nights in their concern for their people.*

*“They keep watch over you” is more literally “they keep watch for your souls,” ... [and] it may well be that we are to see here a reference to spiritual well-being. The leaders are concerned for the deep needs of their people, not simply for what lies on the surface.*

Therefore, to know our audience is to have an understanding of the people in our congregation, especially their spiritual status.

We see the sort of personal interaction that allows one to know the needs of his flock in the example of Paul and his ministry in Thessalonica. Although he spent a relatively short time with the Thessalonians (2-3 months), an extremely deep bond developed as described in 1 Thessalonians 2:17-20:

*...we were torn away from you for a short time (in person, not in thought), out of our intense longing we made every effort to see you. For we wanted to come to you — certainly I, Paul, did, again and again — but Satan stopped us. For what is our hope, our joy, or the crown in which we will glory in the presence of our Lord Jesus when he comes? Is it not you? Indeed, you are our glory and joy.*

This means that pastoral ministry is more than preaching. There should be a symbiotic relationship between preaching and personal ministry. In fact, one’s preaching will be more effective as he engages in personal ministry to the flock. **To be better preachers, we need to be better pastors.** Paul understood this vital relationship and therefore we often find him reminding his readers of the personal ministry he had among them. One such powerful example is found in Acts 20:17-38, where Paul bids farewell to the Ephesians:

*From Miletus, Paul sent to Ephesus for the elders of the church. When they arrived, he said to them: “You know how I lived the whole time I was with you, from the first day I came into the province of Asia. I served the Lord with great humility and with tears, although I was severely tested by the plots of the Jews. You know that I have not hesitated to preach anything that would be helpful to you but have taught you publicly and from house to house.*

*I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus.*

*“And now, compelled by the Spirit, I am going to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there. I only know that in every city the Holy Spirit warns me that prison and hardships are facing me. However, I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me — the task of testifying to the gospel of God’s grace. “Now I know that none of you among whom I have gone about preaching the kingdom will ever see me again ... Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears....*

*“Now I commit you to God and to the word of his grace, which can build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified. I have not coveted anyone’s silver or gold or clothing. You yourselves know that these hands of mine have supplied my own needs and the needs of my companions. In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’” When he had said this, he knelt down with all of them and prayed. They all wept as they embraced him and kissed him. What grieved them most was his statement that they would never see his face again. Then they accompanied him to the ship.*

While I am genuinely grateful for solid Bible conferences, Bible colleges, and seminaries, there is a potential hazard in them for the preacher namely, we can get the impression that there is a gift of ‘special speaker’. That is, we can come to believe that preaching is done by someone detached from the audience, and therefore his appeal is strictly due to his rhetorical gifts and presentation. While some of us will speak outside our congregation from time to time, the vast majority of our preaching will be done to the congregations God has graciously entrusted to us, and what we say, and how we say it, should flow from our relationship with our local assembly.

This all means, among other things, that:

- The pastor will feed the flock, and smell like sheep.
- The congregation will know and (presumably) appreciate their pastor, so that in hearing his words they also hear his heart.
- The pastor will be content where he is, and not pine for influence beyond his flock.
- The pastor will see his people as his ministry, rather than merely a necessary step to ‘real’ ministry.

### **III. The Preacher’s Character**

If you’re criticized for your preaching, it may help to know that you are in very good company. It’s amazing how much of Paul’s letters is devoted to defense of his ministry, and in some cases specifically, his preaching. Duane Litfin has written helpfully regarding Paul’s problem with his detractors:



*To grasp Paul's argument in this crucial passage (1 Corinthians 1-4) we must first come to grips with the challenge Paul was facing in Corinth. To be sure, that challenge was multifaceted, but at its core lay criticisms of Paul's preaching. Paul simply did not measure up to the rhetorical standards the Corinthians had come to expect. They were used to the polished eloquence of the orators of the day, in comparison to which Paul's preaching was found lacking. He was, as he himself admitted in 2 Corinthians 11:6, only a "layman" when it came to public speaking.*

*It is important to see that the difficulty for the Corinthians here was not a theological one. They had embraced the gospel Paul preached and were not, like the Galatians, in any apparent danger of abandoning it. Their problem was that due to their worldliness they were measuring Paul by the wrong yardstick. They wanted him to speak impressively, like the other speakers who regularly paraded before them. Instead, what they got was not Greek eloquence, but the relatively homely, straightforward proclamation of the herald. In status-conscious Corinth, Paul thus became an embarrassment to them, and they did not mind criticizing him for it.<sup>5</sup>*

The title of Litfin's article is "An Analysis of the Church Growth Movement" because he sees in the attitude of the Corinthians the modern-day desire for entertainment, and notes that Paul steadfastly refused to indulge their worldly desires. To the contrary, Paul said famously in 1 Corinthians 2:1-5:

*When I came to you, I did not come with eloquence or human wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. I came to you in weakness with great fear and trembling. My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on human wisdom, but on God's power.*

This important passage has received all too little attention in discussions of preaching, and style of preaching. This is one of the few places in Scripture that both the message AND method ("my message and my preaching") are emphasized. It is not enough to say that as long as someone gets the message right, it does not matter what vehicle is used to deliver it. Paul here indicates that were he to use the Corinthians' desired method, he would in fact detract from the central message.

So how can we evaluate our method/style to avoid succumbing to the ever-present pull to please the crowd, and in so doing, displace Christ? James Denney (1856–1917), Scottish theologian and preacher, said: "No man can give the impression that he himself is clever and that Christ is mighty to save." Convicting, no? John Piper offers some helpful thoughts on how we can use our words and manner in a careful, even artful way, but still exalt the Lord rather than ourselves:

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<sup>5</sup> "An Analysis of the Church Growth Movement" in *Reformation and Revival*, Volume 7, Number 1, Winter 1998, pp. 59-60.

*Paul gives us a two-prong strategy for avoiding the wrong kind of eloquence in preaching.*

*Consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. (1 Corinthians 1:26–29)*

### ***First Prong: Self-Humiliation***

*God’s design both in the cross and in election is “that no human being might boast in the presence of God.” That is the first prong of our criterion to distinguish good and bad eloquence: Does it feed boasting? Does it come from an ego in search of exaltation through clever speech? If so, Paul rejects it. Then he continues, “And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, so that, as it is written, ‘Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord’” (1 Corinthians 1:30–31).*

### ***Second Prong: Christ-Exaltation***

*The second design of God, not only in the cross and in election, but also in the sovereign grace of regeneration (verse 30, “Because of him you are in Christ Jesus”), is that all boasting be boasting in the Lord Jesus — the one who was crucified and raised. “Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord” (1 Corinthians 1:31).*

*Therefore, the second prong of our criterion for distinguishing good and bad eloquence is: Does it exalt Christ — especially the crucified Christ?*

*The point of both prongs is this: pride-sustaining, self-exalting use of words for a show of human wisdom is incompatible with finding your life and your glory in the cross of Christ. So, let your use of words be governed by this double criteria: self-humiliation and Christ-exaltation.<sup>6</sup>*

This all means, among other things, that:

- We will conduct ourselves in a way consistent with the desire that “He must become greater; I must become less” (John 3:30).
- We will use our personality to convey the message, but never eclipse it.
- We will seek to avoid distraction, but not be the attraction.

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/not-with-lofty-speech>, accessed 8/4/19.

## Preaching for a Lifetime

In keeping with the principle that the best preaching is pastoral, our selection of material should be driven by the pastoral task. If our desire is to “present everyone fully mature in Christ” (Colossians 1:28), then we will preach to disciple, over the long haul, and choose what to preach based on the spiritual needs of the flock. This is similar to how the New Testament letters themselves were produced, as ‘occasional documents’ written to meet the needs of first-century congregations.<sup>7</sup>

Another factor in preaching over many years is the recognition of how relatively little time we have available. Even if one preaches three times a week, it will take many years to cover the biblical corpus, and that assumes we have our people for all of those years, in all of those services. The reality is, we cannot be the main, and certainly not the only, source of feeding for our people. This means we must develop ‘self-feeders’ and also structure our churches in a way that our preaching supplements what they are being taught at other times. This will minimize the pressure we sometimes feel to try to cover everything for everyone.

With those matters in mind, developing a long-term preaching plan will be helpful to both pastor and people. For pastors it removes the burden of figuring out what to preach on a month to month or even week to week basis. For the congregation it provides confidence that we know where we’re going, and gives the opportunity to read through and prepare for the next book series.

### I. Plan Your Preaching Year.

I’ve found the suggestion of my friend, Pastor Larry Rogier, to be helpful. He says:

I have concluded that a good approach to creating a calendar follows these general guidelines with respect to categories of preaching as it relates to the text.

**Twenty-five to thirty weeks a year** should be devoted to expository book-study (whether or one or multiple books). This helps both the preacher and the people come face to face with the Scripture in its literary context, seeing and hearing the Scripture as God gave it. It enables the people to see the progress of a book in its theme and argument, and it enables them to plan ahead by reading and studying on their own. It also forces the preacher to deal with everything in the text, rather than skipping or avoiding the hard texts, or the ones that might seem awkward. It minimizes the temptation to be unduly creative, and instead relies on the message of God as he has revealed it to us. The books should be selected to ensure that all genres are being covered.

**Eight to twelve weeks a year** should be devoted to topical series – theological / doctrinal / catechetical; ethical / pastoral / topical; biographical; apologetic; evangelistic. These series cause the pastor to ascertain what kinds of questions are being asked, or should be being asked, by the people in his context of ministry so that he can bring those questions to the Bible for an answer. These messages can be expository, textual, or topical ... While

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<sup>7</sup> Fee and Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All It's Worth*, p. 60 (Kindle edition).

contemporary life may shape the topics of these messages, the preacher must make sure that the text of Scripture is shaping the message content so that the answers are derived from the Scripture itself. Biblical topical preaching must avoid proof-texting without regard for contextual and theological meaning.

**Eight to twelve weeks a year should be devoted to doctrinal or catechetical preaching**, using the major categories of systematic theology as a template. Some of these doctrinal messages will be a part of an expository or doctrinal series; others will be standalone messages. Pastors should attempt to devote at least one message a year to the doctrines of systematic theology. If these messages are part of an expository series, they will be expository in nature. In preaching these messages, the pastor must make sure that the doctrine is being shown to affect the way that we live, not just the things that we know.

**Several weeks a year should be devoted to high-altitude preaching**, covering a book of the Bible, or even a genre of the Bible in just a few messages. High-altitude preaching can cover a single book in one message, or it can cover a longer book in larger sections (e.g., Matthew in five messages or Isaiah in seven messages). These messages will be expository in the main, bringing out the key message or themes of a book without digging deep into the details.

**Throughout the year, standalone messages can be incorporated as needed for special days**, or in accordance with particular burdens and workings of the Spirit in the pastor's heart. From year to year, the number of weeks devoted to each category may adjust as needed. However, following this general pattern is a good way to ensure that the congregation is hearing from the variety of God's rich revelation in different ways.

## II. Plan Your Preparation.

A. Delegate most other ministry.

1. Create an 'every member ministry' mindset.
2. Retain only essential pastoral functions

B. Structure your week around your priority.

1. Plan your series months in advance.
  - a. Know what you're going to preach several months ahead.
  - b. Begin preparing several months ahead.
    - Purchase reading material – commentaries and related books
    - Read through the book several times
    - Outline the book into sermonic units

- c. Create a file for collection of illustrations and ideas
2. Prepare your preaching weeks in advance.<sup>8</sup>
  - “Attack early, attack daily”
    - ***Try*** to work on three sermons each week:
      - On Tuesday morning (assuming Monday off), do exegesis for the passage to be preached in three weeks. That’s all you do for that passage on that week.
      - That afternoon, do commentary and parallel passage work on the message to be preached in two Sundays. Work on that sermon all week, until you have an appropriate outline.
      - On Wednesday or Thursday, tighten the message with illustrations, conclusion, words, and phrases
      - Put finishing touches on the message to produce manuscript or full preaching outline
  - “Early exegesis helps prevent late eisegesis.”
- C. Get to the point of the passage as quickly as possible.
  1. Look for the *Fallen Condition Focus* of the passage.

*Everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.*  
(Romans 15:4)

The *Fallen Condition Focus* is the mutual human condition that contemporary believers share with those to whom, or for whom, the text was written that requires the grace of the passage.

Since everything written in Scripture has the purpose of giving us hope in our fallen condition, all Scripture has a *Fallen Condition Focus*.<sup>9</sup>

2. Implications of the Fallen Condition Focus (the “why” that reveals and delivers meaning).
  - a. Until we have determined *why* a text was written, we do not know *what* it means (even if we can say many true things about it).
  - b. We are not ready to say *what* a passage means until we have determined *why* the Holy Spirit included the text in Scripture.

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<sup>8</sup> From Bruce Mawhinney, *Preaching With Freshness* (Kregel, 1997), pp. 34-49.

<sup>9</sup> Paraphrased from Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon* (Baker, 2005)