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## HOW TO COMMUNICATE TO CHANGE LIVES TEACHING AND PREACHING THAT MAKE A DIFFERENCE

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An issue that is vital to the health of your church...that is, your 'teaching style'. We all need to be better communicators. Would you agree with that? Every one of us. Now, we pastors are particularly sensitive about our preaching.

I heard about a young preacher preach his first sermon in a church and he was trying to be real honest and open about it. He said, "Now, listen, you guys, I really want to improve, and so, if you ever see anything wrong with my messages...Please feel free to tell me." He was an idiot. At the end of the first message, a deacon came up and said, "Pastor, I just want you to know that sermon stunk!" And so he is trying to be real open about it and says, "Well, be specific here. What 'specifically' did you not like about the message?" The deacon says, "Well, there were three things wrong with it." He says, "Number One, you read it. In the second place, you read it poorly. In the third place, it wasn't worth reading in the first place!"

I saw a cartoon recently and the pastor here says, "I ask my wife to look over my notes for today's sermon and mark out everything dull. So in conclusion..."

Now, would you agree that preaching could make or break your church? Poor preaching is killing thousands of churches all over America! On the other hand, the pulpit is the ultimate tool for church health and church growth. Where else do you get a half of an hour of undivided attention on a weekly basis? People will put up with a lot of things if the preaching is meeting their needs.

This Sunday, 55 million Americans will hear preachers preach over one billion words of sermons. When it has been all said and done, a lot more will have been said than done.

James 1:22 says:

*"Do not merely listen to the Word, and so deceive yourself. DO what it says!"* James 1:22

And...

*"The wise man's words are like goads that spur to action."* Eccl.12:11 (LB)

**Background:** Why I changed my preaching style. I threw out every single message I had written in 10 years except for two. I started over. I then developed a series of eight questions that we are going to look at in this session that changed my preaching. I committed myself to a life long quest of becoming a master communicator.

*"Intelligent people think before they speak; what they say is then more persuasive."*  
Prov. 16:23

## OUR PREACHING MODEL: JESUS CHRIST

Now, I believe, that Jesus ought to be our model for preaching, not John the Baptist, not Paul, not anybody else. The Bible says:

“The crowds were amazed at Jesus’ sermons.” Matthew 7:28

“The Father who sent me commanded me what to say AND how to say it.” John 12:49

Both the content and the delivery came from the Father. So, when I am preparing my messages, I ask myself eight questions. Two had to do with the content of the message, and six had to do with the delivery of the message. Let’s look at them.

### EIGHT QUESTIONS I ASK WHEN PREPARING MESSAGES

#### I. TO WHOM WILL I BE PREACHING?

*“Whatever a person is like, I try to find common ground with him so he will let me tell him about Christ and let Christ save him. I do this to get the Gospel to them...”*

1 Cor. 9:22-23 (LB)

Paul always started with his audience. So did Jesus. Look at this next one...

*“Jesus knew their thoughts...”* Luke 11:17

So the first I do when I am preparing a message is picture the people that I am going to be speaking to in my mind. I ask myself three questions. I think about the people who are going to be there next Sunday to hear me, and I ask:

- What are their NEEDS?
- What are their HURTS?
- What are their INTERESTS?

What are their needs, the problems, the stresses, and the challenges they are facing?

I ask, what are their hurts? I have learned that everybody is hurting somewhere.

I ask, what are their interests? What issues are THEY thinking about - not what I am thinking about. In fact, I take surveys and I find out what people are thinking about. You see, too often, we are answering questions that nobody is asking in our sermons.

I saw this cartoon recently. This guy is sitting there on the side of the bed, and his eyes are all bugged out and his hair is standing up and says, “My wife just left me, I lost my job, my spirits have hit rock bottom...Pastor, you have got to help me! Who are the Jebuzites?” Now, I hate to disappoint some of you, but the burning issue out in the street is not church history. They have deeper needs than that. And they are interested in those things, and we have to start with their needs, their hurts, and their interests.

Now, here is a fact: You would go crazy if you had to consciously respond to every stimuli, sight or sound, that bombards your mind every day. You are bombarded with thousands of stimuli- eyes, ears, touch, taste, smell- and you get all of these things. Fortunately, God put a filter in your brain. At the base of your brain, there is a filter that filters out unwanted material so that you don't have to consciously respond to everything. Now, this has tremendous implication for any communicator because only what gets through, that filter, gets your attention. Scientists have studied this for years and they have discovered that there are three things that get our attention. Three things get through the reticular activating system.

***Three Things Get Our Attention:***

1. Things we VALUE
2. Things that are UNUSUAL
3. Things that THREATEN US

Have you ever, for instance, bought a car and all of a sudden after you buy this new car, you see this model everywhere? Why? It has been there all along. They were always on the road. You just didn't see it because it wasn't of value to you.

Have you every decided that we need to buy a refrigerator, and all of a sudden you start seeing refrigerator ads in the newspaper? Why? They have been there all along - you just didn't notice it.

Fortunately, you don't have to tune in to every sound. If every plane that came overhead or every cough that happened in this room you heard...you'd go crazy! So God graciously put this filter in that allows us to respond to things that threaten us, things that are valuable, and things that are unusual.

Now, I happen to believe that only things that are valuable are the legitimate approach to presenting the gospel. You can be unusual, but do know what the problem with a gimmick is that next week you have to have a bigger gimmick. Then next week, a bigger gimmick, and bigger and bigger and then eventually you can't out-gimmick yourself!

I also don't think threats are a legitimate way to preach the good news! I really don't believe in the fear of Evangelism because I have discovered that it only lasts about as long as the fear does. Soon as the fear goes away, then, people fall away.

But I do believe that when somehow we relate to the Bible, something people value, then they are interested.

*“(Speak) only what is helpful for building other up according to their needs, that it may benefit who listen.”*  
Eph. 4:29

You might circle ‘according to their needs’. Not OUR needs. Many times, as pastors, I preach on what I need to hear, what I feel good about. But it says to only speak of things that THEY need to hear. So we begin with that.

Now, the goal of preaching is to move people from where they are to where you want them to be. But you have to start where they ARE. You cannot start with where you want them to be.

So, the reason why many pastors struggle with sermon preparations...every week they are asking, “what should I preach on...what should I preach on?” The reason why they struggle with this is because they are asking the wrong question. The wrong question is, “What shall I preach on?” The right question is “To whom will I be preaching? Who is going to be there to hear me?”

Now, I want to ask you a question, do you believe God is all knowing? That means that he already knows the future right? Yes. That means that God already knows who is going to be in your church next Sunday, right? Yes, he does.

Now, if God knows that and he knows that I am going to be speaking, why in the world would he give me a message totally irrelevant to the people he is planning on bringing? It doesn't make sense. So, what I need to do is say, “God, you know who is going to be there. Tell me what you want to say to them.” And you start with the needs, the hurts, and the interests of the people. I believe that people's needs are key to what God would have us say to them.

Now, let me ask you a question: Can something be true and irrelevant at the same time? Sure. Yes of course it can.

Let's say you go to a dentist, and you have an abscessed tooth. You are in pain and the dentist comes in and says, “I am so glad to have you here.” And he wants to talk about the history of the toothbrush. You say, “Well, that is all very interesting and true but I have an abscessed tooth”.

Or let's say that you have been in a car accident, and the paramedics rush you to the emergency ward and you are bleeding to death and the doctor comes in with a dissertation on the original Greek meaning of the word ‘stethoscope’. It's true but irrelevant.

Or a guy comes to your church and he says, “My teenage daughter is pregnant, my son is on drugs, my wife has just left me, and you are going to preach on who are the *Jebuzites*?” He says, “Give me something that is relevant to my needs!”

Now, if you want people's attention, you have to start with their hurts, you have to start with their needs and interests. Every communicator in the world except preachers practices this concept. Every good educator, every good teacher knows you start with a student not the curriculum. Every good manager knows you start with the employee's complaints, not your agenda. Every good salesman knows you start with a customer, not with the products. Only preachers think that we should get out and be able to talk about anything they want to and have people dramatically in tuned to everything and hang to every word that we say.

Now, if I spend the first part of my message doing Biblical background, explaining words, setting it up and finally I get to the application- by the time I get to the application, I have already lost all the un-churched! They have already checked out! They are not listening anymore.

Now, most of us as pastors eventually get to the application - what does it mean to my life? I am saying this: You need to start where you usually end up in you message! Start where you usually end up! Reverse the order! Start with the applications. Say, "Let's talk about ways to overcome worry out of Matthew 6" and you just deal with it. You don't go into all the facts about the Sermon on the Mount and where Jesus was, the size of the mountain, what kind of dirt in the mountain...you know? You just say, "Here is what Jesus said!" and you go right to the point.

You see, when Paul spoke to the Jews, he started with Jewish history. So when Paul spoke to pagans in Athens, he quoted a pagan prophet. He didn't quote any scriptures to those guys. He started with one of their pagan prophets who was a poet. So I first say, "Whom will I first be speaking to?"

The second question I ask is then, "What does the Bible say about their needs?"

## **II. WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY ABOUT THEIR NEEDS?**

I searched through the Bible to find everything I could find on that subject. Now, I want to tell you that this can take days or even weeks if you are working on a long series. I once spent well over one month studying over one thousand verses before I preached the series called 'The Purpose Driven Life'. It took me weeks to gather all of the verses about that. I used every tool that I could get my hands on, concordances, translations, Bibles, life applications, and topical analyses of the Bible...but my favorite tool was a software program, called Quick Verse. It is a program that can find verses very rapidly and in different translations.

You are thinking, "Are you saying that it is okay to begin with an idea and then move and try to find a text instead of starting with the text to get an idea from it?" Of course it is okay to start with an idea as long as you legitimately deal with the text once you get there. So, you don't just use it as a jumping off point and really don't have anything much to say about it.

You see, preaching is this: You have man's views on one side, and you have God's truth on the other. And somehow, you have got to bring them together to what is called 'application'. I don't think God cares at all whether you start with the text and move it towards peoples' needs or start with needs and move it towards peoples' needs...as long as you get it together to come up with an application. But I will say that if you are talking to nonbelievers- the un-churched- who isn't motivated to listen, you better start with their needs!

Now study Jesus, if I say this 50 times in this lecture. Our model is Jesus - not Calvin, not Billy Graham, not Luther...only the Master Communicator, Jesus himself! When you study Jesus, you will find that he always started with a need, a hurt, or an interest. His messages often began with a question. He scratched where people itched.

He always started with a practical need. Now, in Jesus' very first sermon, he announced his preaching agenda. Notice that in Luke Chapter 4 he quotes from Isaiah and says this:

*“He has appointed me to preach Good News to the poor; he has sent me to heal the brokenhearted and to announce that captives shall be released, and the blind shall see, that the downtrodden shall be freed from their oppressors, and that God is ready to give blessings to all who come to him.”* Luke 4:18-19 (LB) (\*2)

Notice, how many times he talked about a personal benefit. You might circle all of the personal benefits in that verse. He says, my message, my preaching agenda is going to be need oriented. I am going to heal the brokenhearted, I am going to release the blind, release the captives, free those from their oppressors, and give blessings to everybody. He is saying, “My message is need oriented”.

Now, I believe that your understanding of the Bible will dramatically affect the kind of teaching you do. What is the purpose of the Bible? Well, 2 Timothy 3:16 says:

*“All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching the faith and correcting error, for resetting the direction of a man's life and training him in good living.”* 2 Tim. 3:16 (Ph)

See how practical that is? The ultimate purposes of the Bible are not to teach the history of Israel, and the ultimate purpose of the Bible is not even to teach doctrinal facts. The ultimate purpose of the Bible is to transform our character. Someone once said, “The Bible wasn't given to increase our knowledge. It was given to change our lives!” And that is what it is all about. That means that preaching must always be related to life. Even the most doctrinal passages in scripture need to be related to ‘what does this mean now?’

Now, don't misunderstand me. I am not saying that we make the Bible relevant. We do not have to make the Bible relevant. The Bible is relevant. What is irrelevant is the way we share it. We don't have to make the Bible relevant:

But we do have to SHOW its relevance by APPLYING it to today's needs.

I am being asked all of the time, “Which is more effective in preaching? Topical preaching or verse-by-verse teaching through books?” My answer is “You need both for a healthy church!”

I am absolutely convinced that the most effective kind of preaching to the un-churched is what I call verse-with-verse preaching which is topically when you take many verses from many parts of the Bible. And I convinced that the best way to help believers grow is verse-by-verse exposition through books of the Bible. Does that make sense?

We need two kinds of exposition: verse-with-verse topical, verse-by-verse book exposition. Now, let me just say this, there are many books out there today that will tell you, for instance, that verse-by-verse through books is the only way to preach. There is NO Biblical style of preaching!

What we do is we use verse-with-verse topical on Sunday mornings for seeks, and verse-by-verse Bible book studies on our midweek believers sermons.

- Weekend seeker services: Verse-WITH-verse (topical) exposition
- Midweek believer's service: Verse-BY-verse (book) exposition

But there is no Biblical style. Let me ask you this question: What do James, Jesus, Peter, and Paul all have in common? The answer is: None of them were verse-by-verse teachers. Not one. So, you should not glorify any one style of preaching. Just use any style that eventually gets people into the text.

Charles Finney said, "People have often said to me, why you don't preach! You just talk to people." He said, "A man in London went home from one of our meetings and was greatly convicted. He had been a skeptic and his wife seen him greatly excited and said to him, "Have you been hearing Mr. Finney preach?" He replied, "Oh, I have been to Mr. Finney's meetings. He doesn't preach. He explains what other people preach about." That is why he won hundreds of thousands of people to Christ. This is substance I have heard over and over again why they say that anybody could preach as you do. You just sit and talk to the people. You talk as if you sat in the parlor with them. Other of them said, "Why doesn't it seem like preaching but it seems as if Mr. Finney has taken me along and was talking to me face to face." Listen, my habit has always been to tell you the gospel in the best application of it. I go out among the people and I learn their wants and needs. Then, in light of the Holy Spirit, I pick a subject that I think will meet their present necessity. I think on it intensely, I pray much over it, and then I go out and prepare it."

That is why he is one of the greatest men ever used to win people over Christ in America.

Whom will I be preaching to? What will I say to them? I don't think God cares at all how the Bible is taught as long as the Bible is taught. Most doctrines can only be dealt with systematic topically. Do you know what they call topical preaching seminary – "systematic theology". That is what it is called.

Verse-with-verse teaching takes far more steps than verse-by-verse teaching. Believe me, I have done them both for years and there is no comparison. It is pretty easy when you are just going through a book to bring out a few commentaries, read what they say, throw in a few illustrations, work at it, and let the text work for itself.

But if someone comes to you and says, "Pastor, tell me what does the Bible say about time management." You have got a lot of research to do. What does the Bible say about abortions, since the word is not in the Bible? You have got a lot of research to do. What does the Bible say about managing stress? You are going to have to do a lot more research. So, it is not easy.

Once I have gathered all of the scriptures of the subject, I begin to focus in next on 'How To Deliver The Message'. Most of you pastors know how to prepare messages, but I would like to talk to you about your delivery. You see, in America, there are thousands and thousands of baseball pitchers and they all stand in exact same sixty feet six inches (60' 6") from the plate, and they all throw in the same two and three quarter inch (2 ¾") ball; but the difference between amateurs and pros is 'delivery'. So let's talk about how deliver messages that capture and keep the un-churched coming.

### III. WHAT IS THE MOST PRACTICAL WAY TO SAY IT?

*“Don’t only hear the message, but put it into practice, otherwise you are merely deluding yourselves.” James 1:22 (Ph)*

Jesus was always practical because his purpose was to change behavior.

Jesus speaking: “...Now go and do likewise.” Luke 10:37

Christianity is not a religion. Christianity is a lifestyle. Jesus said, “I have come so that you have **religion!**” Right? No! He said, “I come so that you might have life.” Therefore, it must be lived. Therefore, preaching is teaching people how to live the way Jesus wants us to live.

If the goal of preaching is changed lives, then APPLICATION is the primary task of preaching!

*“You must tell them the sort of character which should spring from sound teaching.” Titus 2:1 (Ph)*

Let me read it to you in the Jerusalem Bible, he said, “It is for you then to preach the behavior that goes with healthy doctrine.” The kind of preaching that we do is called behavioral preaching because we are trying to change behavior. We are trying to produce doers of the word and not hearers only.

It’s not enough just to interpret the text!

You must apply it. You say that I just leave the application to the Holy Spirit. That is a big mistake. Interpretation without application is unfinished business! You need them both.

When you study the Bible, particularly the New Testament, application is all to it. The New Testament letters are all application! Practical advise. The book of James is 100% application.

It took me two and half (2-½ years) in the believer’s sermons to go through Romans verse-by-verse. Even the most doctrinal books, eight (8) of those chapters are doctrinal but eight (8) of them are pure application.

Look at Ephesians, 50% application, and 50% doctrine. Other books, Galatians, same thing. Colossians, same thing.

What about Jesus, the Master teacher? What was the greatest sermon ever taught? Sermon on the Mount, 100% application! Jesus starts off by saying, “Hey, let me tell you eight ways to be happy.” That is how he started Sermon on the Mount. Let me tell you eight ways to be happy. Happy are you if you do this....happy are you if you do that...then, he says, “Let’s talk about relationships! You have been worry? Don’t do that! You been committing adultery? Don’t do that! You get angry? You get angry, you may as well kill somebody! You deal with worry and anger in relationships...”.

He gets to the end and says, “Now, if you listen and apply what I just told you, you have built your house on a rock. If you don’t do anything about it, you have built on the sand, and you are going to slide away.” At the end of the sermon it says that people were amazed at his teaching. Why? 100% application! The greatest sermon.

Let Jesus be your model in preaching! Jesus did not say, “I tell you that you might have information.” But in many churches people have said that week after week were taking notes on material totally unrelated to what is going to happen to their lives Monday morning.

### ***How to Make Your Preaching More Practical***

#### **A. Always aim for a SPECIFIC ACTION.**

What specifically do you want them to do?

*“...teach them to DO everything I have commanded you...” Matt. 28:20 (CEV)*

Not to think about it, not to believe it, but to do it. So, suggest specific projects. I often give people homework. I say, “Here is what I want you to do this week as a result of today’s message.” Nothing becomes dynamic until it becomes specific.

#### **B. Tell them WHY**

Why should I make this specific change in my life? What will it do for me? You need to explain the benefits of change. You don’t scare people into change. You show the positive benefits of changing.

#### **C. Show them HOW**

This is what the Bible tells us that people really need. Our people don’t need deeper interpretation. What they need is clearer application. The Bible is a whole lot more understandable than we give credit for. There are certain scholars and theologians that have made it seem like only a brilliant PhD. could understand this. Remember, the New Testament was written in common Greek. That is not classical Greek. Common Greek was the street language of the day. It was written in the language of the common man. It is very simple. All you need to do is use a modern translation.

Now, I know why some preachers like to use the King James because it gives them something to explain. They read a new NIV and all you say is, “Here is how to apply it.” You get right to the point.

A lot of preaching of verses is really self-explanatory. They just need application. For instance, love your neighbor as yourself. I don’t need that interpreted. I just need somebody to say, “Here are five ways to love your neighbor as yourself.” Or “Forgive others as Christ has forgiven you.” I don’t need an interpretation on that. I just need, “Here are six situations this week you might need to probably forgive people the way Christ has forgiven you.” Do all things without murmuring and grumbling. I don’t need to interpret that. I just need to say, “Where am I most likely to grumble this week? Where are you most likely to complain?”

Let's work on those four areas." Just go right to the application. It is a lot more understandable. If you want a good example of this, look at Peter's sermon in Acts chapter 2 where he preached the Pentecost because when he preached that sermon, it began with people's questions. They said, "What does this mean?" They saw all of the stuff going on, the signs and wonders and then it ended with 'What should we do?'

*"The words of Peter moved them deeply, and they said to him...What should we do?" Acts 2:37 (LB)*

Unfortunately, after many of our sermons, people are still asking, "What does it mean?"

Give people a step-by-step procedure. When you look at today's best sellers, what are they? They are 'How to...' books. 'How to Overcome Worry...How To Your Family Together While Everybody Else's Is Falling Apart...How To Raise Your Kids In A Good Moral Atmosphere...' About half of my sermon titles begin with "How to..." Why? That is what people are looking for. Sermons that teach people how to live will never lack an audience because people are frantically looking for answers. They move from fad to fad to therapy to seminars to tapes or books looking for answers. We have got it. We have got the answers.

Unfortunately, instead of that, in most of our churches, we have a lot of what I call "ain't-it-awful" type of preaching. "Ain't-it-Awful" preaching is one that is long on diagnoses, but short of remedy. It says, "Well, it looks so bad - the world is falling apart. It's so bad that this is happening. It's so bad..." and all it does is just point out all of the wrongs in the world, which doesn't help anybody.

When I go to the doctor, I want remedy not just diagnosis. When I go to the doctor, I say, "Hey doc, I am really feeling bad." He says, "Oh yeah you are feeling bad...you're overweight, you're overstressed, you don't exercise, you don't take care of yourself, and you are not feeling good as a result! Seventy-five dollars please!" Wait a minute! Timeout here! I didn't come here for you to tell me about all of the bad in my life! I KNOW the bad in my life. What I need you to do is for you to tell me how to change.

That is why people don't come to church. Why should I go to that church and hear a guy tell me what I already know- I'm lousy? What I need is someone to try to come along and tell me how in the world can I change.

As I used to take message notes, I would write out to the side of my Bible "YBH", which stands for "Yes But How". Because some preachers never get to that part. "We need to be Godly men!" Yes, but HOW? "We need to have strong faith!" Yes, but HOW? "We need to strong with the spirit!" Yes, but HOW? "We need to be strong witnesses!" Yes, but HOW? "We need to have strong families!" Yes, but HOW? "We need to be filled with the Spirit!" Yes, but HOW? All of my life, I was taught, "You need to study the Bible. You can't be a strong Christian unless you study the Bible." And not one person taught me methods of Bible study. Finally, I went out started reading every book in press on Bible study methods. Ninety percent of the said, "You need to study the Bible!" and never said anything about how to do it. The other ten percent where so technical that you needed a PhD just to understand them!

Don't ever tell your people to study the Bible if you don't ever offer a class on how to do it. I used to go home and I would pick up my Bible and read it a little while. I would make some notes and after three or four days of being confused, I would just give up. Exhortation without illustration and instruction leads to frustration. Now, we have a lot of frustrated people because we tell them what to do but we are not telling them how to do it.

**We need less “OUGHT-to” preaching and more “HOW-to” preaching!**

#### **IV. WHAT IS THE MOST POSITIVE WAY TO SAY IT? (\*3)**

*“A wise, mature person is known for his understanding. The more pleasant his words, the more persuasive he is.” Prov. 16:21 (GN)*

Did you get that? *“The more pleasant his words, the more persuasive he is.”* You know what he is saying there? He is saying, “When I am abrasive, I am never persuasive.” If you want to preach to change lives you have got to treat people nice. Nobody changes by being scolded.

Now, it is sad to me that today the gospel has such a negative image because it has been communicated in such negative terms. Isn't it true that today church are known more for what they are against instead of what they are for? We are known for what we are against. Have you ever thought about this? Every time people in the world use the word ‘preacher’ or ‘sermon’, it is always in a negative context. Don't preach at me! Don't give me a sermon!

I believe that a constant diet of negative messages is detrimental to the health of the church. I really believe that. When you have a constant diet of negative, negative, negative...and the most destructive messages are those where the pastor just kind of gets up and releases his pent-up emotion and he is frustrated so he gets up and spiritually vomits on everybody. He has had a tough week and he is mad at his sister, so he just gets up and goes, “BLAH!” He goes home feeling good, but all the rest of us feel a little sticky.

**Negative sermons fill a church with: NEGATIVE MEMBERS.**

You will attract what you preach! Have you ever wondered why so many churches are filled with goofy people? I have been to some churches that are havens for neurotics. You walk in and go, “Where does this collection of odd balls come from?” All you have to do is look at the diet that they have been given.

If you preach a constant diet of positive messages, negative people can't handle it and leave! They won't stay around. They want you to be a whipping boy, and there are some neurotics who have felt like they have not worshipped unless they have been beaten with a Biblical Bible, run over with a bulldozer, and whipped into submission-then, they come out and say, “Oh, that was a great message, Pastor! It made me feel so bad.”

Folks, that's sick! Some pastors are always negative from the pulpit. It's like it is sin of the week. What are we going to be against this week? They train their people to be negative.

Here is what happens to some pastors: They say, “I had a business meeting and had this great idea planned, and you know what? They were all against it!” You set yourself up! You trained them to be against it! You trained them to be negative with a constant diet of negative messages. When you come up with a God-given Holy Spirit idea, guess what they are going to do? Vote it down!

*“Be tactful with those who are not Christians...Talk to them agreeably...” Col. 4:5-6 (JB)*

I am saying that the idea of being seeker sensitive is not something I thought up. It is something that is in the Bible. He says, “talk to them agreeably...” You see, you don’t lift people up by putting them down!

Jesus never called anybody a sinner. Not once. He never called an unbeliever or anybody else for that matter a sinner. Now, he did call the Pharisees, ‘white washed graves’, ‘Snakes and vipers’! He comforted the afflicted and afflicted the comfortable. But when it came to the un-churched, he never called anyone a sinner.

**Jesus never tried to convert anyone with: ANGER.**

Not once. He even said this, *“I didn’t come to condemn the world, I came to save it.”* You know what? I want to have a Christ-like ministry. I want to be like Jesus. It means, “It’s not my job to condemn the world! I want to help save it.”

Now, let me ask you this? Does nagging work for you at home? No, it doesn’t work at all! Let me tell you something...it doesn’t work on the pulpit either!

**Our basic message to the un-churched: GOOD NEWS.**

That is what the gospel is all about!

When preparing a message ask:

**1. Is the MESSAGE Good News?**

You know, there is so much bad news in the world. The last thing people want is to come to church and hear more bad news. They need to come and hear good news.

**2. Does my TITLE imply Good News?**

Now, if your title doesn’t imply good news, why even give it a title? I don’t understand why some pastors put titles in the paper because they have absolutely no attraction to unbelievers. For instance, here is a recent addition of the L.A. Times. Let me just read you some of these titles. You tell me if you were an un-churched person if you would want to come hear them.

“The Gathering Storm, God’s Chosen Ones” Sounds like a church fight to me. “Walking Instructions” No thanks, I had that one years ago. “No Longer Walking On The Other Side Of The Road”. Maybe that is on the sin of jay walking.

“On the Road To Jericho” What are all of these road sermons? Is Bob Hope preaching or something? Here is one: “Becoming a Titis” Or maybe it is “titus” What is a Titis? “Give Me A Gape” Maybe agape. Maybe it is a misprint for “give me a grape”. I don’t know. “The Ministry of Cracked Pots” I bet that is a ceramics class. “A God Forsaken True Believer And A Benevolent Heretic.” It is probably about Rush Limbaugh and Howard Stern.

Now, sometimes we are pastors put questions on our sermons to create interests like “Are You Pushing And Pulling?” “Are We Having Any Fun Yet?” NO! We are not! Why waste money on an ad when you don’t have a title that says good news?

Now, sometimes a morning sermon is ruined by the evening sermon. For instance, “AM: The Preacher Preaches” - PM: What The Fool Said” “AM: Short Beds And Narrow Blankets - PM: Great Expectations” Here is my favorite one: “Morning: 10 Virgins In A Crisis - PM: I Am Only One Man, So What!”

*“Do not use harmful words in talking but only helpful words, the kind that build up...”* Eph. 4:29 (GN)

### **How to preach against sin in a positive way:**

You promote the positive alternative. You preach for the right things instead of always against the wrong things. In other words, I don’t preach against adultery as much as I preach for faithfulness. Promote the positive alternative. I don’t preach against dishonesty as much as I preach for integrity. I don’t preach against sin as much as I preach for righteousness. Does that make sense? You preach a positive alternative, and that turns it around! Sometimes it is just a simple change in the words.

When people come to you and say, “Preacher, I want you to preach against sin.” What they really mean is: Preach on all those sins I don’t commit so that I will feel morally superior to those human nasty people out in the world! They don’t want you to preach on *their* sin. They don’t want you to preach on gossip.

Preaching on sin is not preaching the Good News. You don’t have to make people feel guilty, they already are! That is why they don’t want to come to church. Let’s say if I was a bad driver and I had 52 parking violation tickets as a driver and I woke up on Sunday morning and said, “Honey, let’s go down to the judge and show him all of my tickets and let him tell us what lousy drivers we are!” Well, wouldn’t that be a great way to spend Sunday morning! No, what I want is somebody to come and teach me how to be a better driver. That is what I NEED.

The Good News is not all about sin. The Good News is that you can be forgiven. That is the Good News. Jesus said, “I love you this much,” when he died on the cross. “You can be forgiven.”

“So, do you ever preach against repentance?” Of course, I preach against repentance. That is the basic message of the New Testament. But what is repentance? Metanoia means, “to change your mind”. That is what it means. Repent means to change my mind about God, about Satan, about Life, about Earth, and about Myself. It is a changing of my mind.

Now, when I repented, I turned from darkness to light. I turned from guilt to forgiveness. I turned from hopelessness to hope. I turned from no purpose to meaning in life. I turned from loneliness to a Christian family. I turned from the spare to hope. It was the most positive change in my life! The day I repented was the happiest day of my life! If I had understood what it meant, I would have done it years sooner.

Repentance brings relief, and yet we make it sound like repentance is something like pulling out your teeth! When people understand the benefits of repentance, folks, they'd jump at the chance! Would you like to all of your sins forgiven, given a new purpose in life, have your past forgiven, given a purpose for now, and eternal security in heaven? "No thanks, I don't want that." Then, it hasn't been clearly presented.

How do you motivate people to repent? Not by yelling at them, but by presenting the benefits of it. It is the most positive & exciting change you could possibly make!

When you preach on a negative passage you are confessing that 'I have fallen short too'. You change the pronouns from 'you' to 'we'.

In fact, a while back I was talking about the sins of the tongue. I said, "You know, instead of telling everybody how bad they were, it really bothers me that sometimes, in fact often, I say the most hurtful or hateful things to the people I love the most." That bothers me. Doesn't that bother any of you? Everybody is saying, "yeah" in their minds.

Now, that is a whole lot more effective than me saying, "You guys need to clean up your mouth." You say, 'we' instead of 'you'. When you preach about Hell, you preach about Hell with a broken heart not with a smile on your face. I mean, how would you imagine if Jesus would quote Romans 3:23. You think He would say it harshly? You think He would say it in anger? You think he would say, "All of you sin! All come short of the glory of God!" I don't think so. I really don't. I think He would say it like this with an appropriate heart, "You know all of us has sinned. Everybody has blown it. Everybody comes short at God's glory."

It is a fact of life folks. I don't measure up to my own standards, much less God's..." and now they are tuning in. What is the most positive way to say it?

### **How to preach on negative passages:**

You know, I love to preach on negative passages in the most positive way because I find it to be an intellectual challenge. I once preached to the book of Ecclesiastes on Sunday mornings. We had to stop reading the scripture readings before the message because people were slitting their wrists before they got to the message. I once did a message on the seven deadly sins to seekers. Have you ever done that?

One time I did a sermon and said, "What is the most negative passage of scripture? They said, "The Ten Commandments". Thou shall not, thou shall not, thou shall not... So, I did this series called "The Ten Steps To the Good Life". Here were the titles I gave them: (1) How set your priorities - Don't ever have any other God before me; (2) How to know the real God - No greater image; (3) Don't take the Lord's name in vain -How to take God seriously; (4) Remember the Sabbath and keep it holy - I called that How to prevent burnout. Why?

Jesus said, “Man wasn’t made for the Sabbath, but the Sabbath was made for Man”. God put it into the books, he said, “Every six days, you take a day off” Why? So you don’t burn out. “By the way Pastor, are you taking a day off? Sundays are obviously not your Sabbath.” No, I take Mondays off. I don’t like to take Mondays off because I don’t like feeling that bad on my day off. Let me say this, rest and recreation is so important that God put in the big pin right up there with ‘don’t do adultery’. That is how important it is.

I talk about “How To Make Peace With Your Parents”. That is the title “Honor Your Father and Mother.” You say, “How can I honor my father? He abused me.” We talked about how to make peace with your parents.

We talked about “Thou Shall Not Kill”. Jesus said, “If you get angry in your hearts just like murderers...” I called it, “How To Tame Your Temper.”

“Thou Shall Not Commit Adultery.” I talked about, “How To Affair Proof Your Marriage.”

“Thou Shall Not Steal.” I talked about, “How To Prosper With A Clear Conscience.” There are legitimate ways to make money and illegitimate ways to make money.

The point is that you take these passages and you talk about them in positive terms on how to obey them, how to follow them. The way you say it is the way it will be received. If you say it offensively, it will be received defensively. I beg you to become more positive in your preaching because the world is hungry for Good News.

It takes character to be positive. Any fool can be negative. Just read the papers. One benefit of being positive in your preaching - your sermons get shorter. You know why? I used to spend the first 25 minutes trying to work up guilt and then the last 10 minutes showing them the answer.

That is like walking up to somebody who is fishing in the lake, pushing him into the water, and then offering him a hand to get out and expecting him to thank you for it! You are the guy who knocked him in. I used to say, “We worry, we worry this way, we worry that way, we worry as a society, and we are worried as families...” I don’t do that anymore. I say, “Folks, isn’t it the fact that we all worry.” They say, “yeah”. “Let’s look at the five ways to overcome it out of Matthew 6.” You get right to the point. A sermon does not have to be eternal to be immortal.

## V. WHAT IS THE MOST ENCOURAGING WAY TO SAY IT?

*“A word of encouragement does wonders!”* Prov. 12:25 (LB)

We all need encouragement.

*“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.”*

Rom. 15:4

### Three Fundamental Needs of People

(\*4)

- To have their faith reinforced
- To have their hope renewed
- To have their love restored

When you stand before your congregation and you speak, you need to realize most people there have had a tough week. Isn't that true? Everybody is having a tough time, and your job is to encourage them to *not* give up. My job is to effuse people with new hope. If you preach to broken hearts, you will always be relevant.

We need encouragement. We need affirmations. People always feel stronger through encouragement than through criticism. When you look at the Jesus method of preaching you will find that he always brought out the best in people. You don't bring people up by putting people down.

It's not a sin to help people feel good!

Now, what is the key to personal change?

**The Key to Encouraging Personal Change: Don't tell it like it is. Tell it LIKE IT COULD BE!**

That is teaching through faith. That is what brings about change. If somebody comes and says, "You are a lousy father!" My tendency is to say, "Yeah, you are right. Look at what a lousy father I really am!" We tend to live up to the expectations that others have of us. When you label somebody, it just reinforces it. "You're lazy. You're no good. You're always late." Labeling only reinforces it. It never changes people in parenting or pasturing.

Instead, tell it like it could be. "This is what you could become." Offer a better idea. Some of you say, "I am called to be a prophet." When you say that you mean that you like to criticize and condemn. Study your Old Testament. You'll discover that the prophets did as much comforting as they did comforting. They afflicted the comfortable and the comfortable afflicted.

#### **DEFINITION OF PROPHECY:**

*"Everyone who prophesies speaks to men for their strengthening, encouragement, and comfort." 1Cor. 14:3*

That means a genuine prophet builds up, holds up, and fires up! You build up strengthening. You fire up encouragement. You hold up in comfort. A lot of so-called courageous preachers are just very obnoxious at preaching. You could share the truth with conviction, but you can say it in a courteous way! When you study the ministry of Jesus, he reserved his harshest words for whom? The Pharisees. Why? Look at Matthew 23:4:

*"(Pharisees) pile up back-breaking burdens and lay them on other men's shoulders."  
Matt. 23:4 (Ph)*

## VI. WHAT IS THE SIMPLEST WAY TO SAY IT?

*“When I came to you, it was not with any show of oratory or philosophy, but simply to tell you what God has guaranteed.” 1Cor. 2:1 (LB)*

*“My preaching was very plain, not with a lot of oratory...” 1Cor. 2:4 (LB)*

Circle the word, ORATORY. Now, what is oratory? Oratory is simply “dramatically stating what people already agree with.” That is what it is. It is used to reinforce commonly held beliefs that everybody already agree with. It is the old fashioned way of communicating.

**“Oratory” only works on people who are ALREADY CONVINCED.**

In fact, the only place you hear oratory today is at pastor’s conferences. It never says anything different. It never says anything new. It just states in a dramatic way what everybody already agrees with. Preaching to the choir.

You know, as well as I do, that at any denominational meeting, there are code words in every denomination...that if you say those code words with oratory, there is a shout that comes from the camp! “The Blood, The Book, and The Blessed Hope!” In my denomination you have to use the word inerrancy in a message. Then you are okay.

Now, you have got to keep it simple. Why should my message be simple?

*“Your speech should be unaffected and logical so that your opponents may feel ashamed at finding nothing in which to pick holes.” Titus 2:8 (Ph)*

You know, he says, “keep it simple”. You know one of things I love about Jesus:

**Jesus taught profound truths in SIMPLE WAYS**

We do the exact opposite. We teach simple truths in profound ways. A lot of times, we think we are being deep, but we are just being muddy. Folks, it is easy to complicate the gospel. It is really an ego trip. I could come in here and use all kinds of fancy words. I have had my five (5) years of Greek and five (5) years of Hebrew, but my job is not to impress. My job is to influence. So, you keep it as simple as possible. Look at Jesus in Mark, it says:

*“...the common people heard him gladly.” Mark 12:37 (KJV)*

Is that true in your case? Spurgeon once said, “A sermon is like a well, if there is anything in it...it appears bright and reflecting. But if there is nothing in it...it is deep, dark, and mysterious.” And he said, “You know, a lot of preachers are just empty preaching...they are just an empty well with a dead cat or two thrown into it.” It is easy to complicate the gospel! It takes a lot of work to be simple. It takes me hours to simplify a message.

*“You don’t really understand something unless you can explain it in a simple way.”  
Albert Einstein*

Your message may be brilliant, but if you can't say it in a simple way, then it is not worth much at all.

### **SIMPLE DOESN'T MEAN SHALLOW!**

Simple doesn't mean superficial! Simple does not mean simplistic. Let me give you a difference. Simple means, "This is the day that the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad." That is simple. Simplistic is "Have a nice day." See the difference? Simple is not simplistic or shallow.

*"I fear...(Satan) will corrupt you from the simplicity that is in Christ." 2 Cor. 11:3 (KJV)*

Never be afraid of being called a simple preacher...it is a complement. You know, I used to try to be a profound preacher, I really did. I am not. I am not a profound preacher. I am simple. I find that the simpler I get, the more God blesses me. The L.A. Times is written in a fourth grade level. So make it simple. The Christian message is very simple. It is awfully simple or simply awful! Satan would love for you to complicate the message. He wants to detour us from the obvious. He wants us to keep it from being simple.

### **PART 2: I want to give you some suggestions on "How To Simplify Your Messages".**

One of the greatest reasons why you want to keep your messages simple is because we forget 95% of what we hear within 72 hours! Now, if you want a statistic that depresses the average pastor, that's it folks! That means, by the time you get to Wednesday, they have already forgotten 95% of what you said. *You* have forgotten 95% of what you had said! Unless you give them outlines and notes, they are going to forget the vast majority of what you tell them. So the simplified message has the best opportunity of being remembered.

### **HOW TO SIMPLIFY YOUR MESSAGES**

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#### **1. Condense the message into A SINGLE SENTENCE.**

If I can't say it in a single sentence, then I really don't know where I am going. If I don't know where I am going with the message, how can anybody follow me? It is true that the fewer words you use in a particular message, you usually create a greater impact.

For instance, the Lord's Prayer uses 56 words. The Gettysburg Address used 267 words (obviously that one had an impact). The Declaration of Independence uses 1,322 words! A recent government reports regulating the sale of cabbage 26,901 words! Tell me what has the most impact!!! Keep it in a sentence. If you can't say it in a sentence, you need to keep working on the message.

#### **2. Avoid using RELIGIOUS TERMS.**

I am talking about propitiation, sanctification, sacerdotal, eschatology...many pastors speak in an unknown tongue and are not even charismatic! I have discovered that people who have to use big words often have a big insecurity.

They are just trying to impress you. Aren't you impressed? What you need to do is keep it simple! Let me by the way say that too many messages that I hear today are simply Greek word studies. I hate to disappoint you seminary graduates. But nobody cares about the Greek like you do!

I saw this cartoon once recently. This guy is speaking to an empty church and everybody is falling asleep and he says, "Interestingly enough, the Greek word for tapioca is...." Well who gives a rip! Using a lot of Greek in a message is really just showing off. You are trying to educate people with your education.

Using too many words studies in a message discourages the confidence in English text. I believe that is because what it says to people subtly is, "you will never know what the real meaning of this if it weren't for me", and that is not true!

There are many good Bible translations out today that you don't need to have all the Greek in. You just take it right from the study. People don't talk in religious terms anymore. Realize that. They talk in psychological terms, not religious terms. They say, "I am falling apart! I am coming unglued! I am at the end of my rope! I am stressed out! I am going under for the third time! My life is a mess!" They don't say, "I am experiencing total moral depravity."

Now, they are experiencing total moral depravity, but they don't call it in those terms. You know I love to teach theology to the un-churched without every use in theological terms and without ever telling them it is theology. I have done a service on sanctification and never once used the term in eight weeks. I called it, 'God's Part and My Part in Changing Me'. I did a series on 'The Attributes of God' but never used the terms. I have done series on justification. I have done series on sanctification and on the Incarnation but without using the terms.

If you will study church history, you will discovery that every time there has been a major revival or awakening because somebody put the messages of the Bible and put it in a common language of ordinary people.

For instance, even things that we accept like, 'Jesus is Lord'. What does that mean? Folks, we live in a democracy not a futile system. We don't have Lord and Ladies, Kings and Queens, and Knights and Counts. We don't have a King of America. We have a President. So, when you say, 'Lord', that is not a word that is familiar like it was in futile days. So, today, when I talk about Lordship of Christ, I say, "You know what, Jesus Christ wants to be the CEO of your life. He wants to call the shots. He wants to be boss. He doesn't want to be resident, he wants to be President."

When you become a believer, you put on a sign that says, 'UNDER NEW MANAGEMENT'. Now, businessmen understand that a whole lot better than saying, "Jesus is Lord". Translate the words into modern words. We live in a television generation that permanently alters the way people think.

### 3. Keep you outline **SIMPLE**.

One study shows that if people are interested in a topic, they can remember about seven bits of information. On the other hand, if they are not interested, they only remember about two bits of information. So, what I am saying is that too much of anything reduces its value. You get too much wheat crop and the prices go down. You get too much corn and the corn prices go down. You get too many words to the message and the value goes down.

The strongest messages usually have the shortest or the fewest points. Let me explain this to you. I call it 'preaching on the bias'. When you were at the seminary or when you went to a Bible school, you were taught to do a message like this, that is, you make a major point and then you put it under an A. or B. then you have a 1. or a 2. sub points under that...then maybe a small little a. or b.... then another Roman numeral...you know what I am talking about? That's pretty cool. So in so is preaching on the bias because it goes from the upper left hand side of the paper to the lower right hand side of the paper. You keep going sideways...now, that looks really cool. You know what? You can't preach like that! Nobody can preach like that.

Let me show you how this sounds: Here is the big point! (*A lot of emphasis*) Here is a medium point. (*Somewhat less of emphasis*) Here is a little point.... (*Very little emphasis*)

Now, let me tell you something. Jesus never preached that way! That has more to do with Aristotle than Jesus. I suggest that you get your preaching style from Jesus not Aristotle! People cannot understand sub points unless they are given an outline because they can only remember major points. The more elaborate and the more alliterated your message becomes, the more confusing it is. If you want to grow a church, you got to have messages that people can follow that they are not confused by with all of these sub points and sub points.

### 4. Make your applications the **POINT OF YOUR OUTLINE**.

Put a verb in each point!

If I were going to preach a message on faith, I would ask myself, "How do you preach a message on Faith? I would start it like this, "You know, all of us really deep in our heart want to please God, but how do you do that? Do you run around chanting, "Hare Krishna", and ringing bells? Do you put on a short-sleeve white shirt and ride a bicycle around? What is it that is pleasing to God? Do you go and light candles?"

I'd say, "Did you know that in the bible it says that there is only one way to please God? Did you know that?" All of a sudden, I have everybody's interest. In fact, there is a whole chapter in the Bible about it. It called Hebrews Chapter 11. Then, I would say, "Let's look at our outline and read Hebrews 11:6 and let's read it together. "Without Faith, it is impossible to please God because anyone who comes to Him must believe that he exists and that He rewards those who earnestly seek Him." I'd say, "You see what that says there. It is impossible to please God without faith. So, is there anybody here interested in knowing what faith really is? Yeah. So what is faith? Let me give you the six ways to have faith in God:

1. Faith is believing when I don't see it. Hebrews 11:1 says, "*Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.*" I would explain that and talk about it a bit. Then I would say:
2. Faith is obeying when I don't understand it. I would give the example of Abraham in verse 8, "*It was by faith Abraham obeyed God when God said, 'go out to a country'. God had promised him, he left his own country without knowing where he was going.*" Would you do that? If God said, "I want you to leave everything you've got in a foreign country and I want you to follow me to a new promise land." Abraham says, "How long is this going to take?" God says, "Don't worry." He says, "What will I take with me?" He says, "Don't worry." "How will I know when I get there?" "I will tell you." Would you do it? Faith is obeying when I don't understand it.
3. Faith is giving when I don't have it. By faith, Abraham was commended as a righteous man when God spoke well of his offerings. Then, I would explain all of that and use as a back up verse, 2 Cor. 8: "*...out of extreme poverty willed up great generosity, they gave as much as they were able and even beyond their abilities...*" How do you get beyond your abilities when you don't have it? That is faith. Faith is giving in advance.
4. Faith is persisting when I don't feel like it. It was by faith that Moses left Egypt and was not afraid of the King's anger. He held to his purpose like a man who could see the invisible. It talks about how Moses was the most patient man in the Old Testament. He just kept on going. He would not give up.
5. Faith is thanking God before I receive it. It says, "*...By faith, the walls of Jericho fell out. The people marched around them for seven days.*" I would explain that when they marched around, they were thanking God in advance. If you wait to thank God after you have a prayer answered, is that faith? No. That is gratitude. Faith is thanking God before you get it. Gratitude is thanking God after you get it.  
  
Notice in Mark 11, "*...when you pray and ask for something, believe that you have received it and you will be given what you ask for...*" I have to believe that I have got before I receive it? Yeah. That is what faith is.
6. We don't talk about this much in church. Faith is trusting if I don't get it. It says, "*They were all commended for their faith yet none of them received what had been promised. God has planned something better.*" There were people who did not get their prayers answered in the Bible. Faith is trusting when I don't get it.

See what I have done? I have put it all in verb form so people could say, "Well, how do I live by faith this week?" Say, "hang these notes up on your refrigerator or up on a wall and think about, 'Do I need to obey when I don't understand? Do I need to persist when I don't feel like it? Do I need to thank God before I receive it? Do I need to trust if I don't get it?'" It is simple. It is short, and it has a verb in each point.

Now, see what I have done? That is a sermon that helps people be doers of the Word, not just hearers only. You say, "Can I work on this?" Sure. That is a practical application.

I am saying is put a verb in every point. What I am trying to teach you is the difference between what I call a content outline and a communication outline. The purpose of a content outline is to teach Bible history. The purpose of a communication outline is to change lives.

## CONTENT OUTLINES VS. COMMUNICATION OUTLINES

**If you want to change lives- use an outline that communicates the APPLICATION of the text instead of one that just describes the CONTENT of the text.**

Let's take the Book of Jonah. It's a good book. Its got four chapters so you can have a point for each chapter and you can summaries the book in a message. Now, if I were teaching a traditional message of Jonah, I would do it like this: What happens in Jonah Chapter 1? In Jonah Chapter 1, we see him trying to get a way from everybody. It says that he runs down to the docks, he runs down to the ship, he gets onboard of the ship and then the ship takes off and heads off for Spain. And there would be my outline! 1. See Jonah running.

What happens in Jonah Chapter 2? In Jonah Chapter 2, we see him swallowed up by the great fish taken to the bottom of the ocean and there he prays and says, "God I blew it!" "Yes, you did!" He turns around and says, "Please forgive me." So, Jonah Chapter 2 we see Jonah repenting. So we have him running in chapter 1, we have him repenting in chapter 2.

What happens in Chapter 3? One of my favorite verses in the Bible...by the way, Jonah 2:6 says, "...and when I had lost all hope, I once again turned my thoughts to the Lord..." Isn't that a good verse? So, then in Jonah 3:1, it says, "...and the Word of the Lord came unto Jonah a second time..." Aren't you grateful for that verse? Aren't you grateful we serve a God that gives a second chance? God gave a second chance. So, Jonah jumps out of the ground with all his glory, hits the ground running and and we see Jonah returning.

So, we spend the next three and a half hours trying to find the fourth "R". What happens in Jonah Chapter 4? Jonah has got ahead of the game. So what happened was, he gone out, hid underneath the tree, the boy grew up and then it died. He preached and then the entire city got saved and said, "God, I knew you were going to do that. I knew you were going to save them. I didn't want you to save them because I hate their guts." So we find Jonah *ranting and raving*.

That is a typical little outline. That is a content outline of Jonah. But is that what you really want people to remember? That is merely a cute little illustration on the life of Jonah. No! That doesn't change lives. They aren't even going to remember it. What changes lives is the application of the text.

Let me give these to you one at a time. What is the message of Jonah in chapter 1? Well, it is this, you can run but you can't hide. That is the message. You can run but you can't hide. Because he was running away from God, he went to a seaport on the coast of Spain, which was the exact opposite. God had said to go east and he went as far west as he possibly go. You can run but you can't hide.

The message of Jonah chapter 2 is when you hit bottom, look up. Don't just lie around and wallow. Pray to God.

The message of Jonah chapter 3 is that God loves to give people a second chance.

The message of Jonah chapter 4 is that God loves everybody and he wants them to know it.

Now, which of those two outlines are more likely to change a life? The second. You are now talking about the application of the message not the simple outline of the message. Tell me which of these outlines you like best, 1 or 2, and I will tell you whether you are a commentator or a communicator. That is the difference. A commentator will simply explain the text. A communicator is interested in changing lives.

A lot of preaching really ends up being history lesson. So, what you have to do is build the application bridge. The application bridge is where you take the message of yesterday and apply it today. You have to go from then to now. The way you get from then to now - that bridge is the timeless principal. You look at the text and you say, "What is the principal behind this?"

For instance, it asks when they were asking at the Jerusalem counsel, "Can Gentiles become Christians without becoming Jews?" They finally said "yes" but then they said, "Don't let them eat any meat offered to idols." Well I don't know how many of you are doing those sins today but I don't think that is common. But is there a principal beneath that? The principal is don't do something that causes other believers to stumble' and that can be applied in many ways in today's world. So, you look at what did it mean then? What are the needs of the people now? Find the timeless principals and you go from interpretation to personalization of what needs to be done.

So you say, "What about alliterations?" Well it is more important to be clear than it is to be cute. Alliterations are okay. Sometimes I have had five points to a message and four started with "R" and the fifth one didn't...SO WHAT! It is more important to be clear than it is to be cute.

**The Bible should determine the SUBSTANCE of your message.**

**People's needs should determine the STRUCTURE of your message.**

### ***A BASIC COMMUNICATION OUTLINE***

1. Establish a Need
2. Give Personal Examples
3. Present a Plan
4. Offer Hope
5. Call for Commitment
6. Expect Results

Do not underestimate that little outline I look at that as I prepare my messages. First, I establish a need. Why am I going to talk about this today? Second, you give personal examples. Third, you present a plan. Here is a step-by-step how to deal with this. Then you offer hope. You know, “I believe you can do this too!” Then you call for commitment. Finally, you expect results. I know you are going to do this and you are going to do it right now. That is how you build an outline for communication.

## VII. WHAT IS THE MOST PERSONAL WAY TO SAY IT?

Now, I used to ask this question, “What is the most powerful way to say it?” but I since learned that the most personal way to say IS the most powerful way to say it! Look at these verses of Paul.

*“We have spoken frankly to you, we have opened our hearts wide.” 2 Cor. 6:11 (GN)*

*“We were delighted to share with you, not only the gospel of God but our own lives as well.”*  
1 Thess. 2:8

That is the secret of powerful communication. Sharing personally has tremendous impact. You are far more effective as a witness than as an orator.

You know the most powerful form of advertising is personal testimony. “I tried Tide, you ought to try it too!” Now why do they do that? Because it works. The most powerful form of communication is the personal testimony. Sharing from experience.

That is the difference between the Apostles and the Pharisees. The Apostles spoke from personal testimony. “I was blind but now I see!” The Pharisees spoke in footnotes. “Gamaliel said this...The prophets said this...”

The disciples come along and say, “This is what happened to me...” Now you tell me which one has greater impact. You might want to write this one down, 1 Cor. 4:6 says, “Now brothers I have applied these things to myself and to Apollos for your benefit.” Paul talked about personal application. What was the most personal way to say it?

In preaching, ideas have to become personal to become dynamic. Let me give you an example. Here are three words. You tell me if these really make an impact in your life. The first word is PHOTOSENSITIVITY. The second word is THERMODYNAMIC HEAT TRANSFER. The third word is HYDRAULIC PRESSURE. Doesn't that just put a quiver in your liver? Doesn't that just really say something to you?

Now, I am going to take those same three principals and I am going to personalize them. It was dark, her hand felt warm, his pulse was rising. Tell me which one you can imagine better? The most personal way is the most powerful way of saying it! Now, why is this?

**Effect of TV: People are more SKEPTICAL.**

**(\*6)**

Would you agree with that? You know, we used to be able to write out in our sermon notes 'weak point (yell here)'. But impact is no longer a matter of volume. Some pastors try to YELL it like it is! Are you more receptive to the loud sale or the soft sale?

If you go out to buy a car and somebody comes up to you and goes, "HI, I'M CAL OVERTON...I'VE GOT...!" I am going, "I am not going to buy anything from this guy." But if somebody walks up to me and says, "Hi, this is my first day on the job and I am not a very good salesman. If there is something you like, ok...." That is the guy I want to deal with. I am telling you...listen...the hard sale does not work anymore in America because television has made everybody skeptical of hard sale salesmen.

Now, a number of years ago, a man named Flavil Yeakley did his doctrinal dissertation and he discovered three different types of evangelistic communicators. This is very important for you to understand. He studied different types of preachers and teachers and finally categorized them in three categories:

### **Three Types of Evangelistic Communicators:**

1. "Manipulative Monologue" (salesman preacher) hard sell, heavy persuasion, pressure
2. "Information Transmission" (teaching Preacher) emphasize Bible knowledge and information, understanding certain facts/doctrines
3. "Non-Manipulative Dialogue" (friend/relational preacher)

### ***Yeakley then studied over 1,000 churches: RESULTS***

#### **Regarding Evangelism**

- In High Growth Churches ALL% pastors were #3 (Non-Manipulative dialogue). They were the relational preachers that maintained a conversation like I am talking to you in their delivery.
- In Medium Growth Churches 94% pastors were #1 (Salesman monologue). In other words, you can go through the hard sell pressure in a medium growth, but not high growth.
- In Low Growth Churches 87% were #2 (Information transmitters). Preach just to increase your knowledge.

#### **Regarding Preaching Style**

- High Growth- 97% pastors were perceived as positive in their preaching.
- Medium Growth- 81% pastors were perceived as negative in their preaching.
- Low Growth- 75% pastors were perceived as negative in their preaching.

So for high growth, you needed to be positive and non-manipulative.

## HOW TO PREACH WITH IMPACT

### 1. Honestly share your OWN STRUGGLES AND WEAKNESSES.

Don't try to hide them. Be transparent. This is called confessional preaching. It lends credibility because it encourages people when they are tempted to give up.

*"I want you to know about the hard times we went through in Asia. We were really crushed and overwhelmed and feared we would never live through it." 2 Cor. 1:8 (LB)*

Would you ever say that to your congregation? Paul says, "I was so depressed that I was ready to kick the bucket." That is laying it on the line.

If I speak on marriage I have to tell my own story: Where do you go when you are a pastor and have marriage problems? Who do you talk to? I remember I was making \$800 a month and we finally humbled ourselves and found a Christian counselor who cost us \$100 a week. I racked up a \$1500 counseling bill on my MasterCard. I often thought that I should do a MasterCard commercial..."MasterCard saved my marriage." We went and we worked on those problems and God began to turn things around. She is my favorite person to talk to. You ask, "Was it worth it?" I say, "Are you kidding?" What is your happiness worth? I would pay a million bucks for what I've got today. I really would. Some people say that they cannot afford counseling. How much is your happiness worth? Who are you kidding? I don't care if it takes you ten years to pay off the bill. Get some help!

I talk about the struggles we have gone through and are going through in different times in our marriage, it gets everybody's attention. It got yours. Do you notice how quiet it got when I started talking about marriage problems? Why? Name me a marriage that hasn't had problems. If you have never had problems in your marriage, there is a word for you – "liar". Let me tell you something...you married a sinner! And she married a bigger one!

Does it help people for me to get up and say, "Thank God, I don't have a problem in my marriage. Too bad about you." Does that encourage anybody? No. Sharing personally is the most powerful way to say it. You know the secret to effective communication, when you really think about it, is the ability to drop the mask, to quit pretending, and be yourself. You make an impact in people's lives. Not by yelling at them but by drawing them close to you. Letting them see exactly how you feel. Open up your heart. "This is what I feel. This is what I am doing." That has impact. The most personal way is the most powerful way to share it.

### 2. Honestly share where you are MAKING PROGRESS

You see, people grow best by models. I used to read these versus by Paul where he says, "Follow me because I follow Christ." I would say, "Good night, I would never say that to our church." Can you imagine saying that? But then I realized Paul just understood human behavior. We always grow best by models. I am not perfect, but folks, I would rather have people follow me than some rock star. At least I am making an effort to live for Jesus. I am not perfect but at least I am making the effort. So, I don't have any qualms about saying, "Follow me as I follow Christ." I am not perfect but people grow to model.

Almost everything you learn growing up, you learn from a model. What I am saying is this...the longer I am in ministry, the more I am absolutely convinced that the message is the minister and the minister is the message. Every week I get up week after week and I say, "Folks, Here are the struggles I am going through. Here is what is happening to me." The minister is the message. If your life does not match the message, get out of the ministry until you have got it cleared up! Your primary calling is to model the message.

*"When we brought you the Good News, it was not just meaningless chatter to you; no, you listened with great interest. What we told you produced a powerful effect upon you. You know how our very lives were further proof to you of the truth of our message."*  
1 Th 1:5 (LB)

Hebrews 13:7: *"Remember your leaders who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith."*

You need to understand something. Because of television, the rules are changed, and for the un-churched a message is validated, not by the text, but the person speaking it. What validates the message is not the text...is it believable? But, Is the messenger believable?

If you are not believable, they don't care what the Bible says because they have seen too many people on television that weren't believable quoting the Bible. If you are not believable, you may as well check out.

### **3. Share what you are CURRENTLY LEARNING**

Impact is caused by conviction. Conviction is contagious. Conviction changes the world. If something grabs me, it is going to grab everybody else. So, I try to pass on what I am currently learning. On the other hand, if it doesn't interest me, if it is boring to me...guess what? I am going to bore everybody else.

*"Our gospel came to you...with deep conviction."* 1 Thess. 1:5a

I have a real simple: if I don't feel it, I don't preach it. I just say, "God, obviously I don't feel any conviction about this and so you obviously don't want me to talk about it because why would you have me to talk about something I have no conviction over."

**MY RULE: If I don't feel it, I DON'T PREACH IT** (\*7)

### **VIII. WHAT IS THE MOST INTERESTING WAY TO SAY IT?**

*"Be wise in the way you act toward unbelievers...your speech should always be pleasant and interesting..."* Col. 4:5-6

Paul is advising that we be good-humored people when we deal with the un-churched. He said to be "pleasant and interesting".

*"When wise people speak, they make knowledge attractive."* Prov. 15:2 (GN)

Do you do that? It may be the truth but do you make it attractive?

*“For the Preacher was not only a wise man but a good teacher; he not only taught what he knew to the people, but taught them in an interesting manner.” Eccl. 12:10 (LB)*

He said that interesting teachers are wise teachers and that it is dumb to bore people. Now, I am going to read you a definition here.

**“Capturing and holding the attention for an extended period of time.”  
That is the definition of ENTERTAINMENT.**

To entertain is to capture and hold the attention for an extended period of time. Now, a sermon does not have to be a comedy club but it doesn't have to be dry to be spiritual either. We should never be afraid of being interesting. I have actually heard of pastors stand up and proudly proclaim, “We are not here to entertain!” Well, obviously they are doing a pretty good job of it because according to The Gallup Poll they consider church the most boring place to be. So we are doing a great job of not entertaining.

**In today' culture, dull preaching is: UNFORGIVABLE**

The cardinal sin of any preacher or any speaker or teacher is to be boring. If you don't hit oil after 20 minutes, stop boring.

I believe it is a sin to bore people with the Bible. I really believe that. I tell you why...because if you bore people with the Bible, unbelievers don't think you are boring, they think God is boring. It is an insult to the character of God. I don't know how we do it. We take the most exciting book in the world and bore people to tears with it! That takes a lot of effort! I mean if I couldn't preach in a practical, relevant, interesting way, I'd become a denominational worker! Just kidding! How do you keep it interesting? Let me give you some tips here.

## **HOW TO KEEP IT INTERESTING**

### **1. Vary YOUR DELIVERY**

I am talking about speed. I am talking about volume. The difference between a good message and a great message is delivery. Now listen, I preach the same message multiple times every Sunday...and believe me, delivery makes a difference. I could deliver

the exact same content in four different services and get four different results depending on how I delivered it. It makes all the difference in the world. Nothing is more boring than a monotone preacher who gets on a note and he stays there. You don't know if he is ever going to come up for a breath. He just keeps singing on and on, and you wonder, “Oh no.” He gets stuck on Johnny one note.

Some men speak so...so...it's like Chinese...walker...torture...drip...drip...drip. The average speaker speaks 150 words a minute but the average person can listen to 500 words a minute which leaves 350 words per minute boredom factor. That is why they can listen to you and think about the pot roast at home at the same time or the ball game or anything else!

Some of you need to speed it up. On the other hand, some talks so fast, YELLS OUT...some pastors are still copying a style of communication from the 1940's!

When you use a microphone, you don't have to shout anymore. Sometimes the most traumatic thing is silence. The dramatic pause. If ever you are preaching and everybody goes to sleep...you know what you do? Let me give you a little tip. When they start falling asleep on you...you just stop. Everybody will look up and go, "What happened! What happened! The rapture?" Then, you can start talking again.

I want to tell you. Timing is everything in communication. You learn timing by listening to great communicators.

University studies have discovered that only 7% of the speakers impact us from content, 38% from audio quality (voice sounds, voice tone, speed, articulation, pauses), 55% is visual (how you look, facial expressions, gestures).

## **2. Never make a point without A PICTURE**

For every exhortation you provide illustration. A picture is always better than a definition. If you can't illustrate a point then either a) it's not true or b) you don't understand it. You always give an illustration.

I like to say that you give people a point for their head and a picture for their heart. Abstractions become obstructions without illustrations.

Again, study the ministries of Jesus. On the Sermon on the Mount Jesus didn't discuss the Hebrew history of the Greek word for worry. He talked about birds and lilies and houses built on sand. He told stories.

When you give illustrations, you need to be specific. Don't say, "Recently a friend of mine went to a certain city in a nearby town." People will go, "What is this guy a part of the CIA?" Say, "Joe went to Phoenix and he went into Penny's." Tell them.

The purpose for illustration is to relate truth to people where they are at in every day life! Now for that reason, I don't read a lot of poetry. I don't use a lot of classical novels. I don't use a lot of plays. Why? Not one of my people are reading or listening to those things. They are watching TV.

Don't quote Shakespeare. Quote Jerry Seinfeld. Quote Larry King not King Edward. On the TV show, Home improvement...Tim is driving his car and is supposed to go to a wedding and they get lost and is he going to stop and ask for directions? NO! The whole illustration is how he missed the wedding because he refuses to ask for directions. Everybody has seen that episode when it came out a couple of years ago! When I got up and told that story, I said, "Now why is it that when we are lost, we don't admit it?" Made the point.

### 3. Tell HUMAN INTEREST STORIES

Jesus told stories about people. He was the master storyteller. He said, “Hey, did you hear the story about...” and then he would use a real life example. It always cracked me up when I was in seminary and my preaching professor would say, “Now, gentlemen don’t tell stories. When you get up to preach, just preach the Word!” I would sit back and laugh because he was denying the very tool the Master Communicator used! In fact, the Bible says “...*and without a parable he spoke not unto them...*” Jesus always told stories. He knows the most entertaining and effective way to teach.

*“Jesus constantly used these illustrations when speaking to the crowds. In fact...he never spoke to them without at least one illustration.”* Matt. 13:34-35

Dress your principles in personalities!

What are the most popular magazines out today? The People magazines, right? God put Peoples magazines because we have a sensational appetite to hear stories about people. I was in the grocery store a while back, and I am checking out. I got my grocery cart pushing along and they had the National Inquire up there and you got to admit that some of those headlines are captivating! I am pushing along and it says something like, “Woman gives birth to two-headed baby who looks like a dog.”

I am trying to look over my shoulder and not appear like I am reading it. We have an appetite to hear stories. Have you ever noticed this when you are preaching...you stand up and everybody is sleeping and you start telling a story and everybody wakes up! Use stories!

### 4. Use HUMOR

*“Talk to (unbelievers) agreeably and with a flavor of wit, and try to fit your answers to the needs of each one.”* Col. 4:6 (JB)

Jesus used humor in teaching. You know the problem that we don’t realize is that Jesus was funny. He really was! The reason why we don’t understand this is because we don’t understand Hebrew humor. Hebrew humor is humor by exaggeration. Elton Trueblood wrote a whole book on it called, “The Humor of Jesus”.

Did you know that there is a lot of laugh lines in The Sermon on the Mount? There are! When Jesus said, “Hey guys, why don’t you get the speck of sawdust out of your own eyes before you get the telephone pole out of the other guy’s eyes!” (ROAR) That was a good one! You’re too much Jesus! “Hey guys, did you know that it is easier for a camel to go through an eye of a needle than for a rich man to get into Heaven?” (ROAR) “Whoa you are too much Lord!” You know what those Pharisees do, they strain at a gnat and they swallow a camel!” (ROAR) Oh no, Lord stop, stop! You’re killing me!

Then we get together and say, “Now, the Greek word for that is...” We missed the whole point! Right over our heads...

*“The large crowd listened to Jesus with delight.”* Mark 12:37

He was interesting, he was appealing, and was delightful in his preaching. Now, how do you do that?

### **SOME OF THE BENEFITS OF HUMOR**

(\*8)

- It **RELAXES** people.

It really does. It relaxes people. they don't expect it. The unchurched do not expect to laugh when they come to church. It disarms people when you tell jokes, when you make fun of yourself.

By the way, the quickest way to disarm a hostile audience...like let's say you have to do a Bible study for a Hell's Angels' group...or you have been asked to do prison ministry on death row...what you do is tell the joke on yourself and everybody goes, "This guy doesn't think he is anybody hot, he is just one of us..." The quickest way to disarm a hostile audience is to tell a joke on yourself.

- It makes **PAINFUL TRUTH** more palatable.

You know, a surgeon would use anesthetics before he cuts you open...and there is an old Proverb that says "When you got to shoot an arrow of truth, dip it in honey first." Getting people to laugh at themselves is a far more effective way of changing them than scolding them.

Folks, sin is stupid. When you show in a humorous way how stupid sin is, people not only laugh which relaxes them but also opens them up more to hearing it...saying, "Yeah, that really is dumb." It works a whole lot better than nagging on them. So you expose sin by pointing out how stupid it is. Use humor in discussing sensitive areas.

For instance, I like to deal constantly with materialism because we live in a very materialistic area. That is why I tell about the yuppie driving out here on Ortega Road in his BMW and as he went around the corner, he cut too short and the car went off the cliff. He dove out just in time but as he dove out just in time, he cut off his right arm. He is lying there on the side of the road and a trucker comes along and stops to help him. The guy gets up and he is going, "My new BMW!" The trucker goes, "Are you nuts? You could have lost your life. You lost your right arm!" He goes, "Not my Rolex too!"

Sin is dumb. You know my funniest messages are messages on stewardship particularly the excuses for not tithing because that is a very sensitive issue. So I make them really funny. What I do is I tell all these jokes about tithing and get them laughing and I got 'em! Got em.

- It creates **POSITIVE EMOTIONS**.

There are great emotions like joy, happiness, laughter, and cheer. The Bible says that there is a therapeutic value in laughter. A cheerful heart is good medicine. Most everybody is having a tough time and laughter lightens the load. It is not a sin to help people feel good.

Now, humor is a seasoning in preaching. It is not the main course. It is not the meat, but it makes the meat tastier. It enhances the flavor. It makes difficult chews easier to swallow. By the way, the funniest things are not jokes, but they are the true-to-life humorous stories that we have all been through.

### **THE MOST IMPORANT KEY TO EFFECTIVE PREACHING:**

#### **YOU MUST LOVE PEOPLE**

We must love people to the Lord. I hear pastors all the time say, “Oh I just love to preach.” That doesn’t impress me one bit. You may just be a ham. You may just like the rush of adrenaline that comes when you speak. You may just like the attention of being on stage. I am not impressed with people who say, “I just love to preach.” I want to know ‘do you love the people you preach to?’

You know, my people would follow me anywhere. I say that humbly, but that really would. They would follow me anywhere because they know that I love them. The Bible says that a good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep. I have given years of my life to them. Lord willing, I intend to give the rest of my life to church. I do it willingly gladly. The good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep. People will follow you when they know you love them.

Now, you can fake love for maybe a year or two, but you can’t fake it decade after decade. You either do or you don’t. Before every message every Sunday, I pray the same thing in my mind. I come out and I look at the people and say, “God, I love these people, and I love you, and you love me, and you love these people and these people and I love the people and they love me. There is no fear in love.” Perfect love casts out all fear.

The Bible says:

*“If I have no love, my speech is no more then a noisy gong or a clanging bell.”* 1 Cor. 13:1 (GN)

It says that if I don’t have love, I am wasting my breath.

#### **The No. 1 Factor in Communication: LIKABILITY**

If people like you, they will listen to you. If they don’t like you, it doesn’t matter how much you have got to say, they are not going to listen to you. How do you get people to like you? It is real simple. Love them. The church desperately needs great communicators who genuinely love the people they are talking to!

*“Concentrate...on being a workman with nothing to be ashamed of, and who knows how to use the Word of truth to the best advantage.”* 2 Tim. 2:15 (Ph)

**MY CHALLENGE TO YOU: COMMIT THE REST OF YOUR LIFE TO LEARNING TO BECOME A MASTER COMMUNICATOR!**

That means you are going to have to read some books regularly. It means that you are going to need to maybe attend some seminars. Probably the most important thing is that you are going to have to LISTEN to great communicators whether on the radio, tapes, or whatever.

**You become a good communicator by LISTENING to good communicators!**

Not being reading their books. Why?

The value of listening to sermons on tapes: Tapes are far more better investment than books for preaching because when I read - I only get the preacher's content - but, when I listen, I get his content and his delivery. Timing is everything and you learn good timing by listening to the pros. So find somebody who is a good model for you and subscribe to their tapes.

Pastor Rick Warren has said this many, many times:

“Folks, we have got to help each other out. If you get a good message, let me know about it and I will buy your tape. If I have got a good tape that could help you, buy my tape and use it. You don't have to ask permission to use any of my sermons. Only do a better job of doing it than I did! When we all get to heaven, we will rejoice over what the people say and for the lives that have been saved!”

***Let's Pray:***

Father, your Word is so important. We admit that it is a shame to deliver it with the 'take it or leave it' attitude. I thank You that you use every kind of personality and every kind of background to deliver your Word. Thank you God that we are not all clones. But, help us to learn from each other. I pray that some of the things that I have shared in this session will help us all be more like you. We want to preach and teach like you do. We want to be Master Communicators, because one day, we want to see you face to face and hear those words, “Well done you good and faithful servant.” In Jesus' name I pray - ***Amen.***