

Preparing A Message

“The Inspiration and Perspiration of Kingdom Preaching”

By Don Rousu

The textbook for this course is H. Grady Davis, *Design for Preaching*, Fortress Press, 2003, available online at <http://www.augsburgfortress.org/store> This amazing classic was originally written in 1958, and then revised and released again in 2003. The first 40 pages, especially, are a “must read” for this course.

Icebreaker: Ralph Winter, Hollywood film producer (X-men, Wolverine), speaking at a Youth for Christ National Gathering in Edmonton, June 2009 said, “Movies are the sermons of tomorrow.” What do you hear in that, and how do you *feel*?”

Group Brainstorm: “Why preach?”

Some relevant scriptures:

Romans 1:16 The gospel is the power of God . . .

Romans 10:9-10, then 10-17 Faith comes by hearing . . . and how shall they hear . . .?

I Cor. 1:17-25 It pleases God through the foolishness of preaching to save . . .

Mt. 10: 7, 8 Preach that the Kingdom of God is at hand!

Statistics from Thom S. Rainer’s book, *Surprising Insights from the* (editor: Read “recently”) *Unchurched*, Zondervan: Grand Rapids, 2001.

Ninety (90) percent of the *formerly* unchurched people say a major factor in their conversion was the pastor and his preaching.

The pastors of significantly growing churches spend 20 – 30 hours per week in preparing their messages. (For some, this may be for preaching twice a week)

Pastors of stagnant or declining churches (98% of churches in US) spend two hours or less per week preparing their messages. **What does that say?**

My goal: To share the most important lessons I’ve learned, what I believe are the *essential components*, from which any novice can synthesize the rest. I want to offer what I believe are the basic building blocks for preparing and delivering a message, something like providing the body with essential amino acids

Secondly, I want to create a model which is simple and duplicable, one which you can master and pass on to others. How many have already mentored others in preaching?

Nothing like a long-term mentorship (my journey with my own son)

Principle #1: Get One Clear Thought!

Revelation via Sidney Harris critiquing the common expression: “I know what I mean; I just can’t say it.” He said, “Balderdash! The reason you can’t say it is because you haven’t had a clear thought yet!” *Hoc verum certissima est!*

Let me offer a striking example of a clear thought about a little understood subject, codependency. A lot of people use the word, but how many understand what it means?

Melody Beattie wrote a best-selling book (more than 3 million copies sold) entitled *Codependent No More*. The reason this book is read by so many, and highly recommended to their friends, is because Melody Beattie had a clear thought! When she talks about codependency, **she knows what she means, and she can say it.**

Listen to other so-called experts in the field try to define co-dependency. Author Robert Subby,

“An emotional, psychological, and behavioral condition that develops as a result of an individual’s prolonged exposure to, and practice of, a set of oppressive rules – rules which prevent the open expression of feeling as well as the direct discussion of personal and interpersonal problems.”

Ernie Larsen, another “specialist” and pioneer in the field tries to define codependency like this,

“Those self-defeating, learned behaviors or character defects that result in a diminished capacity to initiate or participate in loving relationships.”

That’s a little shorter, but do you have a clear picture from either of these statements as to what co-dependency is? I don’t. Dr. Laura calls this stuff “psycho-babble,” which I think is a good word for it.

These attempts at definitions merely describe, in very abstract terms, some of the **symptoms** of codependency, rather than the thing itself. Listen now to Melody Beattie, a non-professional (i.e. not a counselor, psychologist, psychiatrist, or therapist), but the leading authority in the field. She identified herself as a codependent, and sought to define codependency in one sentence. Not symptoms, but the thing itself, the essence:

“A codependent person is one who has let *another’s person’s behavior* affect him or her, and who is *obsessed* with *controlling* that person’s behavior.”

Can you repeat it? Try. The focus is on “another person’s behavior.” So simple. So clear. So profound.

- A. Getting a singular, clearly focused thought, requires work. This is the hardest part of the task, and you can't go any further until you complete this step. Some call it "The Big Idea." **Share: Your level of experience in speaking, and do you agree or disagree?**
- B. From where does one get a singular, clearly focused thought?
1. Something you *know* well.
 2. Your life experiences - what is your life's message? "Autozoography"
What has God been writing on your heart? (II Cor. 3:3)
 3. What do you fervently believe? For what do you have passion?
 4. Clear thoughts are often represented in mental pictures.
In looking for the "Now Word of the Lord" for a given occasion, I often ask for a clear picture. Sometimes I can suddenly "see it".
- C. How do you know when you've got that one clear thought?
The Acid test: The church secretary, doing the bulletin on Thursday, asking for a sermon title! A good sermon title is that one clear thought (Rick Warren says it should always use a verb that requires action):
"Walk in the Light"
"Resist the Devil"
"Proclaim the Kingdom"
"Heal the Sick"
Bartling: "Travel Light"
- D. Let's practice. Pencil to paper. Something you could speak on with conviction right now. Your life's message (autozoography), in one phrase, or one sentence. Give us one clear thought!

[OR] Work on texts together: Hebrews 12:1-2
I Thess. 4:13-18
II Cor. 9:6-end
Eph. 5:18-21

Principle #2: Develop That One Clear Thought! (Prepare the vehicle to deliver the goods)

There are so many speakers who have good ideas, even wonderful revelations, but don't know how to "unload an insight." This is both a craft and an art. We need to develop good skills and good intuition at the same time.

- A. Every effective message has a good *beginning*, a good *middle*, and a good *end*.

1. A good message is like an airplane that takes off, flies, and lands. Airplane pilots, what is the hardest part?
 2. A good message is like a good song: A good intro, a clear theme with a hook, and a strong ending. Song writers, what is the hardest part?
 3. Delivering a life-changing revelation can be compared to telling a good joke. Most of the joke exists for the sake of setting up the punch line.
- B. Every effective message has *a compelling sense of movement*. It goes someplace. It carries you along. Your hearers want to hear more. They want to know how it will end.
1. You need to have the end in sight before you begin.
 2. With the end in sight, sheer instinct will usually help you get there!
- C. A good way to become conscious of the beginning, the middle, and the end is to relive the process whereby you gained your revelation, your insight. Then, take your hearer back to the beginning and walk them through the process. If you do that, it becomes their discovery, their insight; they'll own it, and it'll stick.
 "At first I thought this, then I thought that, then I finally realized this!"
 Using Hebrews 12:1-2 as an example:
- First I thought it was about laying aside every sin and weight
 - Then I thought it was about running the race with perseverance
 - Then I finally realized the key revelation is in looking away from all of that to Jesus! He is the goal, the source, and the power!
- D. Personal sharing about Prof. Weyermann's critique on my first work: "This work, replete with clever phrases and cute expressions, is a piece of undisciplined trash."
 The beginning of development: Write an outline, a tree without stems and leaves.
1. An outline will quickly show if there is movement of thought, passion, and conviction.
 2. Ex.: Oprah Winfrey's feature on "Overcoming Obesity, Regaining Your Health"
- Introduction: Doctors now say one of the leading causes of disease is obesity. Today, we are interviewing several overcomers to see what they have done.
- I. Picture of Alana in high school
 - A. Slim beautiful
 - B. Athletic, cheerleader.
 - II. Second picture of Alana, 12 months ago
 - A. Almost 300 pounds, high blood pressure, diabetic
 - B. How did this happen? Taped interview
 - C. Alana tells on video how she feels about herself
 - III. And here she is today - live picture backstage. Gasp! "She's beautiful!"
 - A. Alana decided to take control of her life
 - B. On tape, Alana describes her healthy regime while rolling clips

Conclusion: “Alana, come on out and meet the audience!” She gives more testimony, and answers a couple of questions.

Note: *You cannot succeed in any field of communication without developing this kind of communication plan*, whether it’s public speaking, a television show, commercial advertising, live drama, ballet, opera, news broadcast, documentary, commentary, history, philosophy . . .

Have you ever watched the same television commercial several times and kept asking yourself, “What was the point of that?”

Or you walked away from a public speaking event, someone asked you what it was about, and you couldn’t tell them, because nothing stuck in your mind?

2. Another example - Wimber: “The Meat Is In the Street” (note movement of thought), John 4:34

Intro: Everyone looking for eternal food that satisfies
“I didn’t get fed at my last church - looking for meat, not milk”
“You won’t find it in here, listening to me teach”
Jesus said, “My meat is to do the will of my Father”

Ending: You can find the meat, but you find it out there,
doing His will in the street.

5. Let’s take a clear thought and develop it into an outline.

Heb. 12:1-2

- I. The God who saves us calls us to run and win a race characterized by the great heroes of faith in the previous chapter.
 - a. Ancient heroes of faith (Heb 11)
 - b. Our contemporary heroes of faith
- II. The greatest obstacles to our victory are the “weights” and “sins” that cling so closely to our carnal nature. “We have met the enemy, and they is we.” - Pogo
 - a. The weights and sins that defeated Israel in the wilderness
 - b. The weights and sins that threaten to defeat us (Look further in Heb 12)
 - c. The weights of the flesh that Jesus faced in the wilderness
- III. We are destined to win this race, simply by looking away from (αφοραω) the things of the flesh to keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith
 - a. To set the mind on the flesh is death
 - b. To set the mind on the spirit is life
 - c. We become what we behold

Work in groups and help each other. Ask three questions (More on this later):

What’s the point?

What’s the problem?

Where’s the power?

I Thess. 4:13-18

II Cor. 9:6-end

Eph. 5:18-21

Principle #3: Communicate in *Memorable Ways*

Sharing Activity: “For you, what tends to be the difference between a message you remember and one you forget?”

- A. *Visual:*** People remember pictures, visual images. Get a clear picture and develop it.
1. What Biblical picture would you use to illustrate “relinquishment”? Gen. 22
 2. What Biblical picture would you use to illustrate “restoration”? Job.
 3. Tell true stories, your own or others. (Wimber: “All we have is our stories.”)
II Cor. 9:6 ff Illustration: Give money for house > receive money for house.
 4. Wimber’s picture of the vineyard: The Bus
 5. Get several different pictures for the same truth, and use them in a series:
H.E. Fosdick: Preaching is like taking people for a walk around Mt. Matterhorn.
- B. *Personal Emotion:*** People remember things that touch them emotionally. A word of caution: Be authentic, and avoid manipulation at all costs.
1. My generation: “Where were you the day John Kennedy was shot?”
Now: “Where were you on 9/11?”
 2. You will touch people emotionally when you share your own fears, weaknesses, doubts, struggles, failures, and insecurities. “We do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses . . .”
 3. You will touch people emotionally when you share your joy and faith over all the mighty acts of God that you have seen and heard. (Acts 4:20)
- C. *Life Related:*** People remember things that relate directly to their own life experience: Sickness, financial stress, difficulty in human relationships. (Heb. 12:1-2)
- D. *Humorous:*** People remember things that are genuinely funny:
Wimber’s personal testimony, “I’m A Fool for Christ, Whose Fool Are You?”
Evangelist David Ring: “I Have Cerebral Palsy. What’s Your Problem?”
But don’t try to be funny if you’re not --- find your own unique style and go with it.
- E. *Verbal Maxims:*** “Ask not what your country can do for you . . .”

In which of these areas are you most skilled and comfortable, and in which are you least skilled and uncomfortable?

Principle #4: Maintain the Essence of Effective Preaching (Propel the Vehicle with Kingdom Passion)

- A. Past centuries, aspiring public speakers (law and theology) were schooled in classical rhetoric.
Focused on techniques of rhetoric, “the art of persuasive speech.”
Logic: Major premise, minor premise, conclusion
All men have sinned, you are a man, therefore you have sinned.
Figures of speech: Simile, metaphor
I saw One *like* the Son of Man
Herod *is* a fox, Jesus *is* the Lamb who was slain
Power of contrast: Not this, not this, but this
Discipleship is not conformity to a religious tradition
Discipleship is not loyalty to your denominational
Discipleship is following Jesus, even when it flies in the face of tradition
The rhetorical question:
“Did He ever say life would be easy?”
“They aren’t all apostles, are they.”
Other Rhetorical Techniques:
The pregnant pause, the varied rate, the changed voice dynamic, etc.
- B. All of these help in effective public speaking - but there is something more to effective preaching. Techniques will not carry the day. Have you ever heard someone play the piano with flawless technique, and it left you cold, unmoved? What is the essence of effective speaking and preaching?
1. Fanny Lou Hamer on T.V., grade 4 education, a civil rights leaders from the deep south, employed powerful rhetoric, in spite of poor grammar. The powerful rhetoric came naturally because of something greater: **Conviction**. Meaning? She was ready to die for her cause! Conviction will produce great rhetoric!
 2. Brian Doerksen, 1992 worship festival, in a workshop for songwriters, said, as I remember it, that a lot of Christian music is technically good, but it is pallid, lifeless, nauseating, revolting. Why? Because the songwriter, or the singer, or both, lack **passion**.
 3. Helmut Thielicke was preaching in Germany after WWII when most churches were empty, to thousands of people each Sunday in the chapel at the University of Hamburg. Why did he attract such crowds when the churches were empty? They asked him. His reply: “The churches are empty because the preaching is bad. And the preaching is generally so bad because the preacher has no **faith**.” (State church hirelings, functionaries of the state to perform baptisms, marriages, burials)
- C. The essence of effective preaching can be expressed in these three words, near synonyms: Conviction, Passion, Faith. Romans 1:16,17.

Vibrant, passionate faith will give birth to clear thoughts and brilliant rhetoric!

1. If you don't have that kind of faith, ask for it.
"Father God, speak to *me*. Change *my* heart. Fill *me* with passion.
Bring *me* to faith."
2. Sit under the preaching of people who are full of passion, full of faith
 - a. Romans 1:16,17
 - b. Do any such people come to mind?**
3. Pray in the Holy Spirit:
Jude 20: "But you, beloved, *build yourselves up on your most holy faith*; pray in the Holy Spirit; keep yourselves in the love of God; look forward to the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life."

Sharing: What do you do to build yourself up on your most holy faith?

Principle #5: Identify the Gospel, and preach it! (Make sure the message is really the Good News!)

What is the Gospel? (Brainstorm)

- A. One of the hardest things you will ever do is preach the Gospel. Why?
 1. Because the Gospel sounds too simple, too good to be true, we don't believe it. The preacher engages in warfare against a prevailing spirit of unbelief. The temptation is to preach something people can and will believe: "Isn't it sad, all the sin in the world?" Ain't it awful? Jesus can't come soon enough."
 2. Often the preacher thinks he/she is preaching the Gospel just because he/she is expounding a biblical truth. For example, look at what *Jesus* said in the *Gospel*, Mt. 5:27-28. Is that Good News?
 3. One can preach gospel words with unbelief, bitterness or an evil conscience, and the words will not minister life, because of what comes out of the man's spirit.
 4. We can only preach the Gospel when we have received the Gospel ourselves in fullness of faith and experienced its life-changing power. The Gospel is not mere words, but the very Word of God incarnated in the life of the messenger.
- B. A simple grid for discovering the Gospel in every text (or outside the text):
 1. "Goal, Malady, Means" or "Point, Problem, Power"

Illustration using Romans 12:1, 2

Goal (Point): ***That the hearers*** might discern, not just the good or acceptable will, but the Perfect will of God for our lives, because it can be known.

Malady (Problem): If we are conformed to this world, we will miss His will altogether, and be condemned along with the world.

Means: (Power): ***Our Lord Jesus Christ***, in presenting his body as a living sacrifice, has made the mercy of God ours. By his mercy and his indwelling presence, we can now present our bodies as a living sacrifice, experience the transformation of our minds, and thereby come to know the perfect will of God, which brings blessing and life.

Note: This grid also works as a self-test for topical messages. Ask these questions:

2. Does this message focus on what man should do, or on what God has done (Gal. 2:20; 3:10-14)? The Law is always about *what man should do*. The Gospel is always about *what God has done, and is doing through us now*.
3. Am I preaching Jesus Christ, and Him crucified (I Cor. 1:23; 2:2)?
Jesus is the Good News
To preach Him is to preach the Gospel.
What does it mean to proclaim, "Repent, for the Kingdom of God is at hand?"
4. More texts to work on to identify the Good News:
Luke 6:32-38.

I Corinthians 5:1-8

II Cor. 9:6 ff.

Questions, comments, discussion

For continual growth and improvement

Critique yourself by listening to audio recordings of your own preaching (required)

Listen to great preachers, and read what they write

Television

iPod, mp3s, CDs, cassette tapes

Radio – Swindoll

Books (my favorite: Thielicke)

Constantly forage: Know the Book, and read great literature, like C.S. Lewis

Learn new ways from man to develop a thought: Diagnosis, Prognosis

Learn new ways from the Spirit of God to develop a thought.

Helpful handouts, resources: Books, magazines, internet

www.preachingtoday.com

www.pastors.com

Joe Kelder's Bibliography

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