

**ROGER HERNANDEZ**

# **HELPFUL TRUTH**



**SIX SECRETS TO HELP YOU  
PREPARE AND PROCLAIM HELPFUL,  
TRUTH FILLED MESSAGES**

**INCLUDES THREE MONTHS OF OUTLINES, EVALUATION, AND PRACTICAL TIPS**

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Design and layout: **Guillermo Pimentel**  
Cover design and illustrations: **Guillermo Pimentel**  
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## DEDICATION

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*I want to dedicate this book to several people.*

*To those who wish to preach, do it.*

*To my family that always supports me, thank you.*

*To those who have ever been blessed by a message God  
has given me, you are the reason I preach.*

*To Jesus who saves me,*

*I surrender to You.*

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## INTRODUCTION

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**W**hen my wife and I were dating, I invited her to listen to me preach a sermon in homiletics class. She agreed with pleasure, and at the end I asked her the logical question: How was the sermon?

She looked at me and, with a lot of love and tender compassion, said, *“Roger, pastors have many qualities and responsibilities associated with their line of work. Even if you do not preach well, you have many other good gifts you can use to bless the church.”*

It hurt. I didn’t say anything to her, but inwardly I resolved to improve my preaching. Being a third-generation Adventist, I’ve heard thousands of sermons, some of them very good, others not so much. I had promised myself I wasn’t going to be a mediocre preacher, but now my girlfriend was telling me that I was one. In not so many words, she had said, *“Roger, your preaching is not good.”*

This book is for anyone who wants to improve their preaching. Whether you are a beginner or an experienced preacher, I want to share with you the experience of more than twenty-five years as a preacher. It has been my privilege to teach students, pastors, administrators, and laity about this important area of ministry and how to improve. I am going to share those same methods, teachings, and principles here for you.

Above all, I want to encourage you to present Jesus in every message.

Christ crucified, Christ risen, Christ ascended into the heavens, Christ coming again, should so soften, gladden, and fill the mind of the minister that he will present these truths to the people in love and deep earnestness. The minister will then be lost sight of and Jesus will be made manifest. Lift up Jesus, you that teach the

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## INTRODUCTION

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people, lift Him up in sermon, in song, in prayer. Let all your powers be directed to pointing souls, confused, bewildered, lost, to “*the Lamb of God.*” Lift Him up, the risen Saviour, and say to all who hear, Come to Him who “*hath loved us, and hath given Himself for us*” (**Ephesians 5:2**). *Let the science of salvation be the burden of every sermon, the theme of every song. Let it be poured forth in every supplication. Bring nothing into your preaching to supplement Christ, the wisdom and power of God. Hold forth the word of life, presenting Jesus as the hope of the penitent and the stronghold of every believer. Reveal the way of peace to the troubled and the despondent, and show forth the grace and completeness of the Saviour* (**Ellen G. White, Gospel Workers [Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1915], 160**).

We join in the prayer of Martin Luther (**Frieder Schulz, Die Gebete Luthers [Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Mohn, 1976], 194, my translation**), who said the following about preaching:

*Behold, Lord, here is an empty cask that needs to be filled. My Lord, fill it. I am weak in faith; strengthen me. I am cold in love; warm me and make me hot, so that my love flows out on my neighbor. I do not have a firm, solid belief; I doubt at times and cannot trust you completely. Oh Lord, help me; increase my faith and trust. I have locked up the treasure of all my goods in you. I am poor; you are rich and have come to have mercy on the poor. I am a sinner; you are righteous. Here within me is a river of sin, but within you is the fullness of righteousness; therefore I remain with you, from whom I can take, but not to whom I may give.*

Before we go on, let's remember the Ten Commandments of preaching (**adapted from the Rocket Company, [---

VI

---](https://www.therocketcompany.com/the-</a></b></p></div><div data-bbox=)**

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## INTRODUCTION

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ten-commandments-of-preaching/):

***Thou shalt not preach stolen sermons.*** God has a message to deliver to your church through you.

***Thou shalt tell stories.*** When it comes to making an impact, stories work better than facts and points.

***Thou shalt finish early in the week.*** The principle of first fruits doesn't only apply to money—put that sermon in the Crockpot and give the Holy Spirit more time to speak to you.

***Thou shalt make your point memorable.*** Having a topic isn't the same as having a point.

***Thou shalt show it, not just say it.*** Object lessons, images, and props can enhance a message and help it be remembered.

***Thou shalt preach what God says, not what you think.*** I'm sure your opinions are interesting, but God's Word is eternal.

***Thou shalt find common ground.*** People won't automatically tune in because you're the preacher or you're preaching the Bible.

***Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's style.*** You are not Andy Stanley, Dwight Nelson, Alejandro Bullón, or E. E. Cleveland. Not only is that OK, but it's also good.

***Thou shalt keep it short.*** The congregation may stop listening before you're done talking.

***Thou shalt get help.*** I know your spouse loves you, but you need more unbiased feedback.

Let's go grow together.

# CHAPTER 1



*“Through the agency of the word and the Holy Spirit, God moves upon the heart.”*  
—Ellen G. White, *Signs of the Times*, Aug. 20, 1894

“Great preaching covers a multitude of sins.”—Bob Russell

**P**reaching is not easy. When I began working for the church as an associate pastor, my boss, an excellent preacher, taught me two things: the value of studying, and the fear of not preaching well.

Before one of my first sermons, he called me and said, *“I’ll be sitting in the front row. Do you see this book in my hand? You have five minutes to catch my attention. If you don’t, I’m going to start reading.”* I was already nervous, and when he told me that, the vegetarian meat I had eaten at lunch almost made a comeback.

I preached, and God blessed me. The sermon was not terrible, and the book remained closed, but my boss taught me a clear lesson about public speaking. Every time you do it, people who listen to you are evaluating



you, and it is very easy to lose their attention, especially in this day and age. For me, that experience was like throwing myself into the pool for the first time with no previous experience. It was scary, yes, but nobody learns to swim with swimming videos. If you are going to be not only a willing vessel but also an effective one you must have the courage to stand up and preach.

Maybe you can identify with those same feelings of anxiety, nervousness, and doubt. They accompany many preachers. Before we go into the later chapters in which I talk about **how to** preach, let me help you understand that you should not be afraid **to** preach. Let me share with you the principles that have helped me when I have moments of self-doubt, insecurity, and plain fear, as I had before my first preaching appointment. Cheer up! When you feel you can't do it, remember the following:

### **1. Every preacher you admire today was a terrible speaker at one point.**

Do you think that Alejandro Bullón came out of his mother's womb and went directly to a stadium with 45,000 people? Do you think that Jose Vicente Rojas, Mark Finley, or Hyveth Williams suddenly, one day, took a Bible and started explaining the Word in a way people understood and had never seen before? Even in Ellen White as a speaker, we can see growth in how she presented concepts in her writings (some are messages she preached that were later transcribed). If you talked to the vast majority of today's famous preachers or read their books, you would see that their experiences were not that pleasant in the beginning when they started their public presentations.

Someone shared the following questions with me that I think are relevant in relation to this point:

- How do you achieve success? Through experience.
- How do you get experience? By having bad experiences.

So, did you preach poorly this Sabbath? Welcome to the club. We have all been there.

## **2. The twins of effective preaching are prayer and preparation.**

Hence the title of the book: Good Sermon.

“*Sermon*” focuses on the proclamation of the message.

“*Good*” strives to improve the presentation of the message.

They go hand in hand. Some people say that all we need is a Bible and prayer. If so, Jesus would not have given instructions to His disciples, nor would He have taken the time to train them. Note the biblical passage where Jesus commanded His disciples to preach.

### **He gave them three things:**

- a. He gave them authority (power). “*And he called unto him his twelve disciples, and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all manner of disease and all manner of sickness*” (**Matthew 10:1, ASV**).
- b. He gave them instructions. “*These twelve Jesus sent out, instructing them . . .*” (**Matthew 10:5, ESV**).
- c. He gave them words. “*When you are arrested, don’t worry about how to respond or what to say. God will give you the right words at the right time*” (**Matthew 10:19**).

If preparation is not important, why did Jesus spend three and a half years with His disciples, teaching them, preparing them, and instructing them? Usually, success lies at the intersection of preparation and anointing.

That does not mean that only the educated can preach. What it does mean is that there are certain habits, expressions, and content, along with delivery, that can distract from the central message God wants you to give.

The more we prepare, the more we eliminate those distractions and the more easily the listener can concentrate on what the Spirit is saying through the sermon.

**Here are two reasons why you should strive to preach well:**

First, according to a Pew Research Center study (*“Choosing a New Church or House of Worship,”* August 23, 2016), people who are looking for a church are looking for good preaching, which, in the minds of visitors, is more important than music, building, or an awesome youth program. That does not mean the others don’t matter, but usually good preaching carries the day in the list of priorities.

Second, and probably more important, is that when we preach a boring and irrelevant message, the people who hear us not only think **we** are boring and irrelevant, but that **God** is also boring and irrelevant.

### **3. A good preacher is not made in a day.**

This is the reality of preaching. Practice isn’t glamorous, but it is essential. Every effective preacher will tell you that eventually the initial nervousness

subsides but never totally disappears. Nobody bats 1.000 or makes a goal every time he or she tries. Even the best cooks occasionally burn the rice or pour more salt than is called for. Same with sermons. The preparation does not make you perfect; it makes you prepared. The more prepared, the more effective.

Olympic athletes train consistently for four years to run ten seconds. The goal is *“every day a little better.”* However beautiful and important the Olympics are, nothing compares to the task of preaching as you present themes with not a gold medal but eternity in mind. Shouldn't we prepare ourselves for the best we can to run the gospel race? I think so.

John Maxwell says that if you read an hour a day about a particular subject, in five years you will be an expert on that subject. The question each preacher should ask is: What did I do today to improve in the preaching area of my life?

#### **4. A significant struggle is the temptation to be someone other than yourself.**

My dad is a pastor. I love my father and learned a lot from him, but I'm not my father. One of the things I remember from my youth is the weekly habit I had of standing next to my father after the sermon. The people came to greet us and told us, *“Pastor Pascual, what a nice sermon, and you, Pascualito [referring to me], you will be a pastor too!”* I did not appreciate the comparison or the name. I do not want to be my dad. I want to be the first Roger, not the second Pascual. I was created an original version with a unique purpose, not a carbon copy.

I encourage you to discover your own voice, your own

personality, your own style. Do not try to be someone else. Why? For this simple reason: God cannot bless the person you're trying to be. He loves you and created you as an original, not as a copy. Before He formed you, God looked at the world and said to Himself, "*We need one of these.*" He is not in love with a future version of you, nor is He in love with a pretend version of you.

A constant struggle new preachers face is to preach in the voice of another. Please don't. Sometimes I see preachers who imitate the gestures, the expressions, and the style of others. Resist that temptation.

### **5. No one feels fully prepared.**

There is no way to prepare 100 percent for all the unexpected events you may have. Look at some of the mishaps that I have experienced. Although I had prepared my sermon, these took me by surprise:

- On International Day, in the middle of my sermon, a fuse exploded in the church's electrical system. Twelve hundred people in the church had to leave in an orderly fashion.
- I preached my first sermon in a church that had a member with a mental illness, who stood up during the sermon and started speaking over me. I had ten pages of notes, and I preached thirty seconds per page. My girlfriend was sitting right behind me. She and I are married today . . . to other people. She broke up with me right after that day.
- I was preaching for a church evangelistic campaign, and in the middle of my sermon (don't ask me why), the local pastor would walk the aisle and greet the people . . . out loud!

- On another occasion, a woman who apparently did not like a part of the sermon was loudly contradicting everything I said.
- One time, someone turned off the lights while I was preaching, and I could not see the congregation (this actually happened more than once).
- Often, the batteries have run out of juice in the cordless microphone repeatedly while I was using it (why does this keep happening in churches at least once a month?).
- I preached in an evangelistic series, before which the pastor told me, *"This is going to be a packed house tonight."* No guests came. A sprinkling of members. The pastor was late.
- Once I was preaching to thirty young people who had been sitting for three hours waiting for the sermon to begin (**we started with 400 people, but the preliminaries killed us**), and we were below the cafeteria at 1:00 p.m. with the smell of food everywhere. Try to keep their attention for forty minutes.
- Children crying and no one cares. Children running in front of the platform and no one claims them.
- Problems with the slides, problems with the controls, with the projector, with the sound.

None of those things were part of the script. I did not get up on that morning of the blackout thinking to myself, Today is fuse explosion day in the city of Atlanta. These things just happen.

That's why the best question is not whether you're

ready but whether you're willing. Usually, it's those who are willing whom God readies. By the way, that does not contradict point number two. We've already seen that preparation is important. I just wanted to speak to those who never believe they are ready. There will always be a reason why you can't preach. Enough already. **Preach!**

If God could help me—a bit of a stutter, with a troubled substance-abuse adolescence, terrified of public speaking—to be able to speak to people about Jesus consistently and effectively, I'm sure He can do the same for you.

### YBH

YBH is the question your audience asks each time you preach: *"Yes, but how?"* This section is designed to share practical steps with you.

Things you can do today to improve your preaching:

- 1. Preach every time you can.** The key to improving is to do what you're passionate about as often as possible, even if you aren't perfect, until you do it well.
- 2. Read.** Good preachers, like good leaders, are readers. You do not have to read a book a day, but you should read daily.
- 3. Evaluate yourself.** It is important that people who love you evaluate you. It is also important that you record yourself. Some people tell me, "Pastor, I do not like to hear my own voice." OK, you do not want to hear yourself, but do you want us all to hear you? I do not think that's fair.
- 4. Practice out loud consistently.** The sermon sounds different in your mind than it does when it makes

contact with your lips.

**5. Pray and fast.** You can prepare yourself, but only God can anoint you. A sermon is a spiritual adventure, and only spiritual disciplines can give you the heavenly anointing. Many preach, but not everyone can connect with the audience. The connection with the audience comes directly from the connection with God.



# CHAPTER 2



## PREACH JESUS

*“Isaac turned to Abraham and said, ‘Father?’ ‘Yes, my son?’ Abraham replied. ‘We have the fire and the wood,’ said the boy, ‘but where is the sheep?’” —Genesis 22:7*

“Through the writings of Moses and all the prophets, explaining from all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.” —Luke 24:27

**A** while back, on a Saturday night, my daughter’s boyfriend and I were having a conversation. He was telling me about that morning’s church service. The pastor preached from the Old Testament. It was an interesting sermon, but something was missing. Jamil told me, *“If anyone had **come** to that church that morning without knowing Jesus, he or she would’ve **left** without knowing Jesus. There was nothing about Jesus in the sermon.”*

### **Ouch.**

Perhaps that preacher forgot this quote: *“There is not a point that needs to be dwelt upon more earnestly, repeated more frequently, or established more firmly in the minds of all than the **impossibility** of fallen man meriting*

*anything by his own best good works. Salvation is through faith in Jesus Christ alone”* (Ellen G. White, **Faith and Works** [Nashville, TN: Southern Publishing, 1979], 19, emphasis supplied).

After deciding **what** you are going to preach about, you must decide **whom** are you going to preach about. That “*Whom*” has a name: His name is Jesus.

I often say the following when I teach about preaching: If the sermon you are preparing does not have a connection with Jesus, it is best to throw it away and start over. A sermon without Jesus is just a speech. The difference between a speech and a sermon is . . . Jesus.

Both legalists and liberals have taken Jesus out of His place in preaching. Legalists say that Jesus is not enough. So, they add the law. Liberals say Jesus is not necessary. So they eliminate Him.

Both positions are wrong. You end up with a lot of talk and little of Jesus on both sides.

Here are some principles to remember when preparing a Christ-centered sermon:

### **1. Christ-centered preaching assumes the Bible is a book about Jesus.**

The Old Testament announces Jesus to us, and the New Testament presents Jesus to us. You must be intentional in demonstrating the connection between Jesus and the passage you are preaching about.

*“There need to be far more lessons in the ministry of the Word of true conversion than of the arguments of the doctrines. **For it is far easier and more natural for***

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## PREACH JESUS

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***the heart that is not under the control of the Spirit of Christ to choose doctrinal subjects rather than the practical.*** *There are many Christless discourses given no more acceptable to God than was the offering of Cain. They are not in harmony with God”* (Ellen G. White, **The Voice in Speech and Song** [Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 1988], 342).

The center of the Bible is not the heroes of the Bible; it is the Hero of the Bible—Jesus. All the other characters have lessons to teach us, but Jesus was the perfect version of David, Job, Moses, Esther, and all the others. Here are some examples from a sermon by Tim Keller:

Jesus is the true and better Adam who passed the test in the garden and whose obedience is imputed to us.

Jesus is the true and better Abel who, though innocently slain, has blood now that cries out, not for our condemnation, but for acquittal.

Jesus is the true and better Abraham who answered the call of God to leave all the comfortable and familiar and go out into the void not knowing wither he went to create a new people of God.

Jesus is the true and better Isaac who was not just offered up by his father on the mount but was truly sacrificed for us. And when God said to Abraham, *“Now I know you love me because you did not withhold your son, your only son whom you love from me,”* now we can look at God taking his son up the mountain and sacrificing him and say, *“Now we know that you love us because you did not withhold your son, your only son, whom you love from us.”*

Jesus is the true and better Jacob who wrestled and took the blow of justice we deserved, so we, like Jacob,

only receive the wounds of grace to wake us up and discipline us.

Jesus is the true and better Joseph who, at the right hand of the king, forgives those who betrayed and sold him and uses his new power to save them.

Jesus is the true and better Moses who stands in the gap between the people and the Lord and who mediates a new covenant.

Jesus is the true and better Rock of Moses who, struck with the rod of God's justice, now gives us water in the desert.

Jesus is the true and better Job, the truly innocent sufferer, who then intercedes for and saves his stupid friends.

Jesus is the true and better David whose victory becomes his people's victory, though they never lifted a stone to accomplish it themselves.

Jesus is the true and better Esther who didn't just risk leaving an earthly palace but lost the ultimate and heavenly one, who didn't just risk his life, but gave his life to save his people.

Jesus is the true and better Jonah who was cast out into the storm so that we could be brought in.

Jesus is the real Rock of Moses, the real Passover Lamb, innocent, perfect, helpless, slain so the angel of death will pass over us. He's the true temple, the true prophet, the true priest, the true king, the true sacrifice, the true lamb, the true light, the true bread.

The Bible's really not about you—it's about him.

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## PREACH JESUS

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*“The Bible is not about you.”* (<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/justin-taylor/the-bible-is-not-basically-about-you/>)

### **2. Christ-centered preaching is demonstrated by an emphasis on Jesus.**

First of all, Jesus did not preach as much as the modern church does. There are thirty-seven miracles and only two sermons recorded in the Bible. This is not to say that preaching is not important, but the most effective preaching is that of a transformed life, which not only speaks to the lost about their destiny but also does things for them to show them how much God loves them. We preach too much and do very little, but that’s a conversation for another day. The message of the Bible is, *“What Jesus did”* always comes before *“what would Jesus do.”* Let’s examine how Jesus preached by looking at two examples: the Sermon on the Mount and the sermon Jesus preached in Nazareth, His hometown.

#### **Exhibit 1:** The Sermon on the Mount

Jesus begins by saying, *“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven”* (**Matthew 5:3**, NIV, emphasis added).

**Note the emphasis.** The first word is *“blessed.”* Before talking about more difficult, hard, and painful things, He begins with the word *“blessed.”* If you take good notice, you see that Jesus uses the sandwich system:

Blessed (**bread**): Something good.

Poor in spirit (**peanut butter**): Something hard.

Kingdom of God (**bread**): Something good.

This is also known as a chiasmic structure. A chiasmic structure is or Chiasm

*“is a literary device in which a sequence of ideas is presented and then repeated in reverse order. The result is a “mirror” effect as the ideas are “reflected” back in a passage. Each idea is connected to its “reflection” by a repeated word, often in a related form. The term chiasm comes from the Greek letter chi, which looks like our letter X. Chiasmic pattern is also called “ring structure.” (<https://www.gotquestions.org/chiasm-chiasmic.html>)*

**Exhibit 2:** The Sermon at the Synagogue

Let’s read the passage in Luke:

*When he came to the village of Nazareth, his boyhood home, he went as usual to the synagogue on the Sabbath and stood up to read the Scriptures. The scroll of Isaiah the prophet was handed to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where this was written: “The Spirit of the LORD is upon me, for he has anointed me to bring Good News to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim that captives will be released, that the blind will see, that the oppressed will be set free, and that the time of the LORD’S favor has come.” He rolled up the scroll, handed it back to the attendant, and sat down. All eyes in the synagogue looked at him intently (Luke 4: 16–20).*

Notice where Jesus ends His sermon. He is preaching from the passage of Isaiah, but Isaiah ends it a little differently. See if you can tell the difference between Jesus’ words and the original:

*“The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is upon me,  
for the LORD has anointed me  
to bring good news to the poor.*

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## PREACH JESUS

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*He has sent me to comfort the brokenhearted  
and to proclaim that captives will be released  
and prisoners will be freed.*

*2 He has sent me to tell those who mourn  
that the time of the LORD's favor has come,  
and with it, the day of God's anger against their enemies.”  
(Isaiah 61:1, 2 NLT).*

The lesson here is simple. The gospel is always good news, not good advice. Your audience can get good advice from many people much better qualified than you. The good news can only be given by a person who has experienced the good news in his or her life. The good news is not that God takes a bad man and makes him good; it is that God takes a dead man and makes him live.

Notice what the pen of inspiration tells us about Jesus' way of speaking.

### **Jesus talked with . . .**

- a.** Words that were full of *“tender, courteous grace”* (White, Gospel Workers, 45).
- b.** Words that were *“always patient and cheerful”* (Gospel Workers, 43).
- c.** Words that *“helped all who were in sorrow and affliction”* (Gospel Workers, 45).

The motivation for a person to change is not the fear of being lost but the love of salvation. This quote illustrates:

*The shortness of time is frequently urged as an incentive for seeking righteousness and making Christ our friend. This should not be the great motive with us; for it savors of selfishness. Is it necessary that the terrors of the day of God should be held before us, that we may be compelled to right action through fear? It ought not to be so. Jesus is attractive. He is full of love, mercy, and compassion. He proposes to be our friend, to walk with us through all the rough pathways of life. He says to us, I am the Lord thy God; walk with me, and I will fill thy path with light. Jesus, the Majesty of Heaven, proposes to elevate to companionship with himself those who come to him with their burdens, their weaknesses, and their cares. He will count them as his children, and finally give them an inheritance of more value than the empires of kings, a crown of glory richer than has ever decked the brow of the most exalted earthly monarch. . . . It is our privilege to have daily a calm, close, happy walk with Jesus (Ellen G. White, **Lift Him Up** [Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1988], 322).*

### **3. Christ-centered preaching is the most Adventist thing you can do.**

Sometimes I meet people who say that Jesus is “milk” while prophecy is “solid food”; that Jesus is preached by other churches and that we are called to preach present truth. Ellen White seems to differ: “*Of all professing Christians, Seventh-day Adventists should be foremost in uplifting Christ before the world*” (Ellen G. White, **Gospel Workers** [Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1915], 156, emphasis supplied).

It is not Jesus or doctrine. It is Jesus in the doctrine. It is not either Jesus or prophecy. It is Jesus in the prophecy. Jesus is not one of our beliefs. Jesus is in



all our beliefs. He's like the frame of a picture that has several photos in it.

#### **4. Christ-centered preaching is the vehicle of true transformation.**

If it's true that what makes your church attractive is changed lives, what is the best way to make that happen? Preaching Jesus. Religious information without Jesus is counterproductive. Your job is not to change people. Only the Holy Spirit can do that. The preacher's job is to bring them to the God who can change them. When we focus on our sins, there is little victory, because we become what we contemplate.

Let's use an illustration about exercise.

If you look in the mirror and you do not like what you see, you have two options: first, you focus on your obesity, scream, regret your condition, and neglect the exercises you are doing to lose weight. As a second option, you persevere in exercising, see the long-term results, and thus achieve the desired goal.

When we preach sermons without Jesus, we are condemning people to experience information without power. Having information without power is like telling an obese person to run up Mount Everest. You may know how to do it, but you cannot do it. Information without power causes three problems:

- a. It's frustrating because there is little victory.
- b. It's hurtful, because to feel better you hurt others who sin differently.
- c. It's impossible because you are always running but never arriving.

That is why I always say that preaching focused on sin produces sinners. Preaching focused on Christ produces Christians.

People are in search of change. Only Jesus and His grace can do it. The problem is that grace is hard to find. Can they find grace in your city? They do not find grace in the following areas:

- a. Sport.** If you play well, you get paid. Endorsements, applause, fans always come to where the winner is. Sports are driven by performance.
- b. Work.** If you work well, you have bonuses, they promote you, they give you pay increases, they accommodate you in a new office. In other words, your benefits depend on the work you do.
- c. School.** You try hard, you do well in your tests, and you're on the honor roll. Those who work hard receive scholarships, recognition (*summa cum laude*), and the paper that says you really deserve what you worked for. You depend on the work you do to succeed.

Our world is governed by production. From the supermarket to the information networks, the principle is the same. You get rewarded for what you do. Your value is in your production capacity.

There is little inherent worth—at the moment you stop producing, it's over. It is impossible to buy a car, a house, or a computer by grace. If you want to shop at a mall, eat in a restaurant, or have a haircut, you have to pay for it. A credit card gives you a “time of grace” that does not really exist, because in the end you always have to pay.

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## PREACH JESUS

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So, the core question is this: If we all fail, and grace is the best alternative to avoid failure, where can we find grace? Where can we enjoy an environment where we can experience liberation, transformation, and the grace that changes lives? That place is the church. The church is the place where grace must abound. It is the hope of the world. It is the only place where you can find love for the sinner and help for the lost. It is the hospital where each patient can receive treatment and recover. It is the only place where you go as you are and come out better than you were.

The church, with all its imperfections, can be the vessel God uses to help His children and teach them the path of grace. The church is the place where God wants people to come, the place where we can reveal our problems and find solutions for them. It is the place where we experience grace and love.

*“Love cannot be commanded; it cannot be won by force or authority. Only by love is love awakened”* (Ellen G. White, **The Desire of Ages** [Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1898], 22).

The big question is: Do our friends find grace in our preaching when they come to church?

### **YBH**

When you are preparing your sermon, ask yourself the following questions:

1. Where is the good news in this sermon?
2. Where is the lamb?
3. How can I connect this topic with the gospel and the cross?

4. If someone who does not know Jesus comes to my church for the first time this weekend, would he or she come out knowing Jesus?

# CHAPTER 3



## **PREACH WITH POINTS**

*“I planted the seed in your hearts, and Apollos watered it, but it was God who made it grow.”—*

**“Christ crucified, Christ risen, Christ ascended into the heavens, Christ coming again, should so soften, gladden, and fill the mind of the minister that he will present these truths to the people in love and deep earnestness.”—Ellen G. White, Evangelism, 185**

### **Three points in both references above:**

- I planted.
- Apollos watered.
- God made it grow.
  
- Crucified Christ.
- Ascended Christ.
- Christ’s return.

**T**he purpose of this chapter is to present a system I have found helpful: preaching with points. This system changed the way I presented my message and helped me connect better with the audience.

Preaching with points is not the only way. There are many types of sermons, such as thematic sermons and expository sermons. Each one should preach in his or her own armor. Before you move on to the next chapter, I would like to share this system with you because I think it can help you improve your preaching.

Sermons that contain three points follow what is known as the “*rule of three*.” The rule of three is a way to organize spoken and written language by grouping elements into a set of three, the minimum number of elements necessary to establish a pattern.

The first point introduces the theme, the second suggests the pattern, and the third point can push the pattern toward the goal or unexpectedly change or modify it.

**Literature usually uses this mode, the rule of three:**

The Three Little Pigs;

Goldilocks and the three bears;

Little Red Riding Hood, wolf, and grandmother.

Introduction, development, and conclusion.

The list is extensive. But we are not preaching literature; we are preaching the Word. Does the same rule apply for the Bible? If you look carefully at the Bible, you may discover that numerology is an essential part of Bible literature, especially the number three. Here are some examples:

- Earth, sea, and sky
- Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
- Justification, sanctification, and glorification

- Three crosses
- Three parts of the sanctuary: atrium, Holy Place, and Most Holy Place.
- Three disciples who were the closest to Jesus

Jesus often uses the rule of three in His parables. He builds the parable of the Good Samaritan in a frame of three. First comes the priest and then the Levite, but it is the Samaritan who stops to help the man in need (**Luke 10:25–37**). In this case, the unexpected identity of the third person gives the parable the element of surprise.

Jesus uses a frame from the rule of three with opposite effect in the parable of the great supper. In this case, the center of the parable confirms the pattern of apathy the guests show toward the invitation. The first one said to him, *“I have bought a piece of land”*; the second said, *“I have bought five yoke of oxen”*; the third said, *“I just got married.” “I say that none of those who were invited will taste my dinner”* (**Luke 14:17–24**, paraphrased).

Jesus also uses the rule of three for rhetorical effect.

In the parable of the sower, the goodness of the good land is brought home with the golden seal that produced a harvest of *“thirty, sixty, and a hundredfold”* (**Mark 4:8**, NASB).

In the parables of the lost sheep and the lost coin, Jesus emphasizes God’s concern for the lost by describing God’s search for them in three acts. The shepherd leaves the ninety-nine sheep, seeks the lost one, and finds it (**Luke 15:4**), while the woman does three things to search for a coin: lights a lamp, sweeps the house, and carefully searches for the coin (**Luke 15:8**).

Let's do an exercise. Find the three elements in the following passage: *"I planted the seed in your hearts, and Apollos watered it, but it was God who made it grow"* (**1 Corinthians 3: 6**).

That passage teaches us the growth system of a church:

Some sow.

Others water.

God makes it grow.

One more example:

If I asked you what are the three things God did for the world, based on the passage in **John 3:16**, what would your answer be?

*"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life"* (KJV).

Write the answers here:

God \_\_\_\_\_

God \_\_\_\_\_

God \_\_\_\_\_

At the very least, I think you have here a buffet of evidence regarding the rule of three. I'll share with you the benefits of preaching with points.

## **1. Keeps you within the time.**

People value their time. The gospel is eternal, but sermons don't have to be. When you preach using



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## PREACH WITH POINTS

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the point system, it is easier to stay in one lane rather than touching upon several topics at once. One author recommends the following:

*“This is a very simple but important technique on how to preach. If your message contains three important points and you are going to preach for forty minutes, then divide your time into five parts:*

- a. The introduction of your message (5 min.)
- b. First point (10 min.)
- c. Second point (10 min.)
- d. Third point (10 min.)
- e. The conclusion of your message (5 min.)

(Translated from . . .

<https://www.comopredicarelevangelio.com/blog>

### **2. It's easier to remember.**

Points stay better in the mind when you repeat them several times with key phrases. Since most people forget what you preached in a short amount of time, the more elements of the sermon that are remembered on Monday, the more useful your message will be to their life.

### **3. Captures more of their attention.**

Speaking without points can become monotonous. Points, especially if you and the audience repeat them several times during the course of the sermon, break the monotony. In a world where attention is becoming increasingly difficult to obtain, especially with television,

computers, and phone screens, preaching for one hour without any interaction from the people can cause them to lose attention. When you preach with points, you keep the process moving. Listeners feel they are moving forward and that they are going to reach a destination. That feels emotionally better than a speech that begins and goes on without knowing when it ends!

Here are some different styles for three-point sermons:

**1. Structural.** The first point introduces the theme of the sermon, the second confirms and develops, and the third either boosts it or takes it on an unexpected course. For example:

*“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16, ESV).*

God loved.

God gave.

God saved.

*“For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek” (Romans 1:16, ESV).*

The gospel is power.

The gospel brings salvation.

The gospel is for all (*this is an unexpected course for Jewish listeners who thought they had control of salvation and only they would be saved*).

**2. Alliterative.** Alliteration occurs when all three points sound similar, beginning with the same word or

letter or sound, or they have one word in common. For example:

*“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16).*

The love of God.

The gift of God.

The destination with God.

*“This letter is from Paul, a slave of Christ Jesus, chosen by God to be an apostle and sent out to preach his Good News” (Romans 1:1).*

We are slaves.

We are chosen.

We are sent.

**3. Illustrative.** This method is used to illustrate something about God, about us, or about the church. For example:

- The church must preach (1) in houses, (2) on the street, and (3) in cities.
- The church should grow (1) upward with prayer, (2) across with compassion, and (3) forward with vision.

The following is the format I use to prepare my outlines for each of my sermons, in other words, the skeleton. Feel free to adapt and improve it, use it, and share it. It goes like this:

**Text:** the Bible passage I am going to preach about

**Title:** an attention-grabbing title

**Thesis:** a phrase that describes the main point of the sermon

**Three points:** (within each point)

**Point 1** (What is the lesson here?)

**Application** (What should I learn?)

**Illustration 1** (It's like . . . )

**Mini call 1** (What should I do?)

**Point 2** (What is the lesson here?)

**Application** (What should I learn?)

**Illustration 2** (It's like . . . )

**Mini call 2** (What should I do?)

**Point 3** (What is the lesson here?)

**Application** (What should I learn?)

**Illustration 3** (It's like . . . )

**Mini call 3** (What should I do?)

**Final call**

Here are three examples of this system. Use your Bible to fill in the blanks:

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## PREACH WITH POINTS

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### SERMON # 1

**Text:** Matthew 10:1–20

**Title:** You Already Have It

**Thesis:** You already have what you need to finish the mission.

1. He gave us \_\_\_\_\_ 10:1

Illustration

Application

Mini call

2. He gave us \_\_\_\_\_ 10:5

Illustration

Application

Mini call

3. He gave us \_\_\_\_\_ 10:19–20

Illustration

Application

Mini call

Final call

### SERMON # 2

**Text:** Mark 16:9–15

**Title:** Jesus Appears

**Thesis:** Jesus knows that His presence changes everything.

1. He appeared to Mary, a symbol of \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ 16:9

Illustration

Application

Mini call

2. He appeared to the two disciples, a symbol of \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ 16:12

Illustration  
Application  
Mini call

3. He appeared to all the disciples, a symbol of \_\_\_\_\_  
16:14

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Illustration  
Application  
Mini call  
Final call

### **SERMON #3**

**Text:** Mark 3:11, 21, 22

**Title:** What Do People Think of You?

**Thesis:** If you want to do something meaningful in your life, be prepared to be in the mouth of many. If you do not want that to happen, stay in mediocrity. No one talks about the mediocre.

1. The demons called him \_\_\_\_\_ 3:11

Illustration  
Application  
Mini call

2. His family called him \_\_\_\_\_ 3:21

Illustration  
Application  
Mini call

3. His enemies called him \_\_\_\_\_ 3:22

Illustration  
Application  
Mini call  
Final call

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## PREACH WITH POINTS

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### YBH

Let's do an exercise together. I'm going to give you one more passage, and you're going to try to preach with points.

**Text:** Mark 1: What are the three things Jesus teaches us about how we should keep the Sabbath?

**Thesis:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Point 1.** Sabbath is for attending \_\_\_\_\_

**1:21, 22:** "Jesus and his companions went to the town of Capernaum. When the Sabbath day came, he went into the synagogue and began to teach.

**22** The people were amazed at his teaching, for he taught with real authority—quite unlike the teachers of religious law."

**Point 2.** Sabbath is for \_\_\_\_\_

**1:29:** "After Jesus left the synagogue with James and John, they went to Simon and Andrew's home."

**Point 3.** Sabbath is for \_\_\_\_\_

**1:30, 31:** "Now Simon's mother-in-law was sick in bed with a high fever. They told Jesus about her right away. So he went to her bedside, took her by the hand, and helped her sit up. Then the fever left her, and she prepared a meal for them."

# CHAPTER 4



## PREACH SIMPLY

*“Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. But whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues in it—not forgetting what they have heard, but doing it—they will be blessed in what they do.”—  
James 1: 23–25, NIV, emphasis added*

**“He spoke to them in language so simple that they could not fail of understanding.”—  
Ellen G. White, Gospel Workers, 45**

*“That preacher was deep!” one brother said.*

*“And what did he preach?” they asked.*

*“I do not know, I did not understand anything, but it was profound!”*

**P**astor Alejandro Bullón shares a personal experience when he was critiqued after one of his sermons. A man approached him and said, “Pastor



*Bullón, I did not like your sermon at all, because I understood everything.*” It seems that for some people, complicated equals effective. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Sometimes, in our desire to communicate the word of God, we make the simple complicated. Someone has said that the difference between an actor and a preacher is that the actor makes the fantasy look like reality and the preacher makes the truth look like fantasy. The best way to steal power from the Word of God is to present it in a way that people can't understand. As I said before, when the preacher presents the message in a boring and irrelevant way, people not only think the preacher is boring and irrelevant, but God is as well. I agree with tech CEO Radu Mărcușu when he said, *“A person can have the best idea in the world, but if that person cannot convince enough people, it doesn't matter.”*

One of the people who best expressed complicated elements in simple words was Apple's Steve Jobs. He said that *“simplicity is the ultimate sophistication.”* When Jobs first introduced the iPod, he could have put it like this:

*“Today we are introducing a new, portable music player that weighs only 6.5 ounces, is as small as a can of sardines, and has a voluminous storage capacity; the battery is high-end, and it transfers music at breakneck speed.”*

**He said it like this:**

*“iPod. A thousand songs in your pocket.”*

Here are three reasons why you should present your messages with simple words and concepts that everyone can easily understand.

## 1. Words present concepts that help transform the listener.

The simpler your points are, the better. If people do not understand you or do not know how to apply what you are saying to their own life, how are they going to be changed into the image of God? One of the best compliments anyone can give me is to tell me that their children understood what I preached. According to the book of James, the most impactful messages have three characteristics:

*“Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. But whoever **looks intently** into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues in it—**not forgetting** what they have heard, but **doing it**—they will be blessed in what they do”* (James 1:23–25, NIV, emphasis supplied).

### Make your points

- a. interesting
- b. memorable
- c. action conducting

The best messages that result in a change in people are clear, simple, and interesting. When Jesus preached, He said things like these:

*“You have heard the law that says, ‘Love your neighbor’ and hate your enemy. But I say, love your enemies! Pray for those who persecute you!”* (**Matthew 5:43, 44**).

The message is clear, to the point, and interesting, because it contrasts with what the people at that time understood. The best way to do this is to ask yourself when you are preparing the message:

### **Is this clear?**

- Can the attending children understand it?
- Can non-believers understand it?

Andy Stanley (with whom I do not share everything in methodology) talked about something that I see clearly when I preach all over the world, especially to people who aren't members of the church:

**Q:** *“Is it fair to assume unchurched people are biblically illiterate?”*

**A:** Obviously, there is a continuum, but I think it is safe to assume biblical illiteracy. At the same time, however, preachers need to be careful not to talk down to people. And there's a way to do that. Most pastors I listen to start halfway up the ladder and then go up from there. But there's a happy medium where we assume a certain social and cultural sophistication, but not a biblical sophistication.

Whenever pastors assume people in their congregation know certain things, they miss opportunities to teach. If a pastor makes assumptions year after year, then a whole generation has never heard [that truth] for the first time. If we assume too much, we communicate too little. Starting from the bottom rungs of the ladder every time we open the Scripture is really important. We often need to reinforce basic things we assume people may know. In my experience, just

because people have heard something once or twice doesn't mean they understand it.”

<https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2014/july-web-only/andy-stanley-stop-saying-bible-says.html>

### **Ellen White reminds us:**

Many of those for whom our ministers labor are ignorant of the truths of the Bible and the requirements of God, and the simplest lessons on practical godliness come to them as a new revelation. These need to know what is truth, and in laboring for them the minister should not take up lines of thought that will simply please the fancy or gratify curiosity. Let him instead break the bread of life to these starving souls. Never should he preach a sermon that does not help his hearers to see more plainly what they must do to be saved (**Ellen G. White, Gospel Workers [Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1915], 153**).

### **2. My purpose in preaching is to impact, not to impress.**

I want the listener to comment on the power of God and not on the skill of the preacher at the end of the sermon. There is coronation without a king in many churches every Saturday. They have an increase in protocol and an impeccable oratory, but not much transformation happens. I prefer transformed people, not just informed people. This quote is of great importance to me:

*It is not flowery discourses that are needed, not a flood of words without meaning. Our ministers are to preach in a way that will help people to grasp vital truth. My brethren, do not soar where the common people cannot follow you, and if they could, would be neither benefited nor blessed.*

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## PREACH SIMPLY

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*Teach the simple lessons given by Christ. Tell the story of His life of self-denial and sacrifice, His humiliation and death, His resurrection and ascension, His intercession for sinners in the courts above. In every congregation there are souls upon whom the Spirit of the Lord is moving. Help them to understand what is truth; break the bread of life to them; call their attention to vital questions (White, Gospel Workers, 153).*

This reality became painfully evident to me a few years into my ministry. I preached and preached, but I saw the same struggles, the same dramas and falls in people. People knew eschatology but did not know their own children. People were well informed of what Pope Francis was doing in the Vatican, but they did not know Fred the neighbor who was far from Jesus. It was then that God helped me to preach messages that people understood, and instead of using flowery language, I began to emphasize Christ and to give them practical advice on how to implement real Christianity in their lives. These were the years of the greatest growth in that church. Like Paul, I set out to do the following:

*“When I first came to you, dear brothers and sisters, I didn’t use lofty words and impressive wisdom to tell you God’s secret plan. 2 For I decided that while I was with you I would forget everything except Jesus Christ, the one who was crucified. 3 I came to you in weakness—timid and trembling. 4 And my message and my preaching were very plain. Rather than using clever and persuasive speeches, I relied only on the power of the Holy Spirit. 5 I did this so you would trust not in human wisdom but in the power of God.”*

**(1 Corinthians 2:1–5).**

### **3. We have forgotten the children, and that is dangerous.**

At some point in the history of Christianity, we started doing church services for adults. Children get a story in the middle of it (which we eliminate when we are short on time). If we are honest, most of our worship service is for and by adults. The fact that we need to have a Children's Day demonstrates that children are not an integral part of many of our services, especially our homiletics. This is dangerous for three reasons:

- a. It is dangerous to tell a child that worship is not for him or her from the moment they are born, and then hope that when they are adults, they will magically understand that it is now for them. Between **50** and **70** percent of our children leave the church. Why do you think that happens?
- b. Jesus showed special interest in children. Is it not dangerous to use a model different from Jesus, in which children are to be seen but not heard or taken into account?
- c. The adults who are attending have already decided that they will be Adventists. The children still haven't decided. Isn't it dangerous to neglect the group that still hasn't decided whether to stay or not? Let's imagine that you are a child and that the messages you receive do not connect with your world or your realities and are not relevant to you. What desire would you have to go to a church that does not talk about your needs and isn't appealing?

Children especially like stories. An easy way to connect with them is to use stories in the message and use relatable illustrations. If most of your illustrations

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## PREACH SIMPLY

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have to do with marriage or vices and you use words that only adults understand, you are saying out loud that certain people in the church matter more than others. That is problematic and anti-gospel. I recommend this: ask the children in your church what topics they would like you to preach on. From time to time, sit with them and ask them if they are understanding what you are preaching. That conversation is going to be very revealing.

Preach in a simple way. Preach clearly. My prayer for you is that you preach in such a way that you can help your audience to have the following experience:

*There is no reason why our lips should not be trained to the high praises of God. When we hear the words of a cheering discourse, or the earnest exhortation of a brother or sister, why should not a wave of glory and a chorus of "Amens" go up to God from the congregation of his people? Would it not be thus if the fire of God's love were kindled in our hearts? I know it would be so. Coldness, formality, want of faith and love and intense earnestness and devotion, has killed the spirit of warmth and religion out of our services. We need everything,—the gold of love, the white raiment, which is the righteousness of Christ, the eye-slave,—that we may discern the goodness and love of God. When God works for his people, how few return to give him glory? . . . Our religion should be of that heavenly character that will impress the world with the fact that we have been with Jesus and have learned of him (Ellen G. White, Signs of The Times, May 6, 1889, par. 8).*

### YBH

One of the best ways to preach is simply to ensure there is a key phrase (thesis) in each sermon. Carey Nieuwhof came up with five ways to make that

memorable phrase that you are going to develop with the points of your sermon. He says you should think of the word CREAM:

**C – CONTRAST:** Combine two contrasting ideas – the past and the future, the light and the dark, the rich and the poor, truth and lies, laughter and sorrow. In a sermon series I taught several years ago, I profiled Haman (a politician featured in the book of Esther); I used contrast to come up with this bottom line: *“A life devoted to self ultimately leaves you alone.”*

**R – RHYME:** This is one of the oldest memory tricks in the book, which is why you remember one of Benjamin Franklin’s quotes: *“An apple a day keeps the doctor away.”* The bottom line for Andy Stanley’s Comparison Trap series was *“There’s no win in comparison.”* Sticky.

**E – ECHO:** Repeating a word or phrase is a powerful way to help people remember. I recently used this bottom line: *“Fixing your mind on Christ fixes your mind.”*

**A – ALLITERATION:** Alliteration may be overused by preachers, but don’t entirely abandon this technique – it’s powerful. *“Your boldest moments are your best moments”* (from our Bold series) is memorable because of the double b. Simple, but it works.

**M – METAPHOR:** Metaphors engage people’s imagination, and when that happens, people remember more. The Bible is actually full of metaphors (like a ring in a pig’s snout). In a series on the Supernatural, I preached on miracles with this bottom line: *“Miracles are signs that point beyond themselves to something greater.”* We actually built road signs that pointed to the beach, to Disney, and more and explained that the sign is not the destination...the sign just points to something great, in the same way, that miracles point to the power of Christ.



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(from Carey Nieuwhof, *“How to Craft a Killer Bottom Line for Your Next Talk,”* <http://careynieuwhof.com/2016/02/how-to-craft-a-killer-bottom-line-for-your-next-talk/>.)

# CHAPTER 5



## PREACHING WITH ILLUSTRATIONS

*Jesus always used stories and illustrations like these when speaking to the crowds. In fact, he never spoke to them without using such parables.*  
*Matthew 13:34*

*"Stories aren't just facts; stories are facts with souls."  
—Alexei Kapterev, Presentation Secrets, emphasis added*

**T**here are three types of preachers in contemporary preaching: those who make you sleep, those who hurt you, and those who move you. I want to be in the third group. I am not interested in solely informing; I want to transform. I want to connect with people in such a way that words produce action in them.

What John Maxwell says is true: *"Talk is easy. Everybody talks. The question is, how can you make your words count? How can you really communicate with others?"*

**(Everyone Communicates, Few Connect [Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2010], 2).**

According to Socrates, three factors make a good

presentation:

- **Logos:** has to do with the rational part of the presentation
- **Pathos:** transmits and connects with emotions
- **Ethos:** related to the personality of the speaker

The preachers who move listeners have those same three elements in this form: Christ, clarity, and connection. Christ is the central and most important part of the subject, which touches the heart and reason. **Clarity** for the preacher is to explain his point clearly and briefly, with the dose of emotion necessary to motivate the listener to change. The **connection** is established when the person who is listening links with the presenter. This is done best when there are good stories within the sermon.

When God wanted to give us the explanation of the plan of salvation, He did it through a story. One of the phrases that Jesus repeated often when He was here on earth was, “*The kingdom of God is like . . .*” Jesus used such comparison stories constantly. Moreover, **Matthew 13:34** tells us that Jesus used stories as His preferred method of communicating truth.

Stories connect with a part of the brain that engraves the concepts. The best stories, like food, do not come in cans. They are recent. They are real. They are not inventions of your imagination nor exaggerations (“*exaggeration*” is a cute word for lie). The best stories are personal. Your life is more interesting than you think.

### I. The benefits of stories

There are three benefits to using good stories:

**A.** Generally, it's easy to relate. One of the best ways to connect with the audience is to talk about experiences that you and they have experienced. This best exemplifies the teaching conveyed in the sermon. The best illustrations, from more to less effective are as follows:

1. Things that happened to you and the audience
2. Things you read about and the audience experienced
3. Things you experienced and the audience read about
4. Things you and the audience read about
5. Things that neither you nor the audience have experienced or read about

For example, when I talk about an experience in which a girlfriend and I broke up (**this was more on her end than mine; she told me she did not want to go out with me anymore and I said OK**), people remember because most of them have experienced something similar.

**B.** It is easier to remember. People forget your oratory but remember your stories. This is true especially when you tell stories that connect with and explain Bible principles. That's why Jesus used so many stories. I use the following experience to talk about marriage:

My wife and I had to travel by plane from Michigan to Maryland, with a stop in Ohio, where there is a large lake that produces ferocious winds in the fall. It was the month of November, and our first flight took off and landed smoothly. The problem came when we boarded the second plane. We immediately noticed that this "*airplane*" was different. It only had sixteen seats,

organized in two rows. I was placed in front of my wife, and from my seat I could clearly see the controls of the small ship and even the pilot.

After the relevant instructions, we took off. But the airplane began to move around, to shake and totter like a paper carried by the wind. My heart throbbed a thousand beats a minute. I confessed my sins known and unknown. My wife was holding my hand so tightly that it literally stopped the circulation of blood. It may have been my imagination, but to this day, I'm pretty sure the pilot pulled out a paper to look at that said, "*Just for emergencies.*"

No one read anything, no one spoke, we hardly breathed. It seemed like an eternal nightmare until we finally flew above the clouds and the turbulence subsided. We were in this calm for a long time, but it disappeared when we began the descent. Again the silence, again the discomfort; I almost broke three fingers. Only by the grace of God could we land and thank God for His care. All I had in my mind was the idea of strangling my travel agent.

What does marriage have to do with this story of airplanes and hands squeezed like oranges? A lot. That day I learned three lessons, and today I would like to share them with you:

### **1. Each marriage will have its turbulence.**

Happiness is not guaranteed. When we get married, we embark on a long journey on which we will pass through uncomfortable places. Sometimes there is silence, and at other times they squeeze your hand. Married life is similar to a trip on an airplane. We can expect ups and downs at any time.

### **2. As difficult as the situation is, it's worse outside.**

While Kathy and I were in the midst of turbulence, things turned the color of fire ants. However, not one of the passengers got up from his or her seat and said, “*This is very bad, I’m leaving.*” Why didn’t anyone do that? Because, although we were not comfortable inside, outside was worse.

This is often the case in families. Countless people leave home when they are in the midst of conflict, believing that the solution to their problems is a change of spouse. But how sad is their condition when they see that they did not solve anything. Traveling without turbulence and marriages without fights or differences only exist in the fantasy world of Hollywood.

### **3. The pilot knows what he is doing—he has traveled that route before.**

I am not a pilot, I do not know the state of Ohio, and I have never taken that route before. My pilot has done it before. This reminds me that when we get on an airplane, we place our lives in the hands of the pilot. We should do the same in our marriage. Jesus knows what He is doing, for He is the pilot. Remember: He did not join us in marriage to make us fail!

Would you like to consecrate your marriage to the Lord Jesus Christ? Do you want us to ask together?

**C.** Repetition is easier. When people leave the church at the end of the worship service, you want them to get home and tell others what they learned. If you remember a story you told, which reminds you of the spiritual concept you dealt with, you can repeat it to people who need that message. The stories are sticky—they stay with us even after worship time is over.

**II.** For help, use visual illustrations.

In a study by Weiss and McGrath (**Trey Cox**, “*The*

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## PREACHING WITH ILLUSTRATIONS

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**Weiss-McGrath Study,**” The Jury Rules blog, [www.thejuryrules.com/2012/12/21/the-weiss-mcgrath-study/](http://www.thejuryrules.com/2012/12/21/the-weiss-mcgrath-study/)), people remembered only **10** percent of what they heard in the previous **72** hours, but **20** percent of what they saw. That’s double. What is even more interesting is that they remembered **65** percent of what they saw and heard. You are missing out on a great opportunity by not using the projector or other visual aid you have at your disposal.

As the saying goes, a picture is worth a **thousand** words. There is something called “*The Picture Superiority Effect*,” which shows that we process visual information **60,000** times faster in the brain than if we hear the text alone. Lesson: use visual aids!

A picture is worth a **thousand** words. To describe the head, you can use the following:

*“Upper part of the human body, and superior or anterior of many animals, where some sense organs and the brain are found.” Or you could say it “is the anterior part of the body containing the mouth, brain, and various sensory organs (usually organs of vision, hearing, smell, and taste).”*

Or you can show people the following picture:



Even if you do not feel comfortable using PowerPoint slides, always try to have something tangible that you can teach with. When I talk about prayer, for example, I like to take my cell phone and explain how, when we disconnect the cell from the charger, eventually it will run out of battery. The same thing happens with the spiritual life.

### **III. Use stories that are relatable to your audience's experience.**

The type of artwork matters. You would never go to a nursing home and give a seminar on how to breastfeed a baby. Why? Because even if the seminar is **100** percent accurate, and you practice it and present it in an interesting way, the topic is not relevant to the audience. You should first ask yourself, Who am I talking to?

The good speaker asks himself five things before preaching, all focused on his audience:

1. What are their needs?
2. What are their interests?
3. What makes them happy?
4. What can they understand?
5. What are their wounds?

When you select illustrations, put yourself in the place of the people listening to you. The single mother, the adolescent, the child, the couple, the grandfather, the new believer, the prodigal, the first-time guest. If you do not imagine yourself talking to these different kinds of people, then you might use the same kind of illustrations you always have and connect with only a portion of your church audience.

Those who are listening to your sermon are also



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## PREACHING WITH ILLUSTRATIONS

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asking themselves questions about you and your message. Connective presentations use illustrations that answer the following three questions your audience has: Why? How? What?

1. Why should this matter to me?
2. How can this improve my life?
3. What action should I take today?

Put yourself in their place and remember, “*what makes the biggest difference is whether or not I am able to focus on the audience*” not on self. It is not about you! (Alexei Kapterev, Presentation Secrets [Indianapolis: Wiley, 2011], loc. 4311, Kindle).

**IV. Good illustrations have three main characteristics.**

**They are:**

**A. Personal.** This does not mean that anecdotes from history or events occurring in the world should be excluded, but I have found that if I want to connect with the audience, I must tell them about personal experiences. At the end of this chapter in the YBH section, I’ll teach you how to keep a record of illustrations that will never run out on you.

**B. Real.** Exaggeration is sin. Many times I have heard illustrations where one wonders if it happened just as the preacher says. Pastor Bullón tells a story of an encounter with an angel in the jungle, and other people recount it as if it had happened to them. Do not overdo it. Do not be sensationalistic. Do not invent or make yourself look like a hero forever, or present your family as the best of examples or your decisions as always the best. Be real and genuine.

**C. Current.** A preacher's temptation (I know, because it happens to me) is to only tell stories that happened a long time ago. Recent stories are the ones that let people know you still have areas where you are growing up and need Jesus. Another benefit is that they can relate with what is happening in the world now and see it under the prism of the gospel through the apocalyptic and biblical context.

## **V. Good illustrations connect to the brain in a special way.**

Have you ever wondered how the brain works and why we remember the illustrations we identify with? Let me tell you about a scientific term: reticular activation system. In His grace, God puts this filter in our minds. When you are in a room watching a movie where a fan is running in the background, after a while you stop hearing the sound of the fan. That's the reticular activation system working. The brain chooses what to pay attention to. This filter focuses on:

1. Things we value
2. Things that are unique
3. Things that are dangerous or threatening

When you give an illustration, the brain of your listener focuses on what you say, whether it has relevance to them, whether it is something they have not heard before, or whether it's something dangerous. I do not recommend using the third element of something dangerous; use the previous two. This is why people are interested, for example, when we talk about the state of the dead. If what you are saying is not important to them or you do not say it with originality, you will have an audience that is more interested in their phone screens

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## PREACHING WITH ILLUSTRATIONS

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versus the one that presents the PowerPoint slides.

Whatever your illustration may be, understand the power of a story that brings people to a more personal knowledge of a God who told us a love story in the Bible, that drives us to fall in love with Him. It is more than arguments and logic. It is a love story.

*“God would draw minds from the conviction of logic to a conviction deeper, higher, purer, and more glorious. Often human logic has nearly quenched the light that God would have shine forth in clear rays to convince men that the Lord of nature is worthy of all praise and glory, because He is the Creator of all things ” (Ellen White, Gospel Workers [Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1915], 157).*

### YBH

**1. How can I get illustrations? This is a very effective way:**

**STEP 1:** Write the words MY LIFE

### MY LIFE

**STEP 2:** Add general categories

Childhood, school, parents

Heroes, **MY LIFE** sports

Courtship, marriage, Jobs

**STEP 3:** Choose a category and write everything you remember

How I met my wife    Worst memory

Best memory    **Marriage**    The day I got married

Children    Moving    First house    Who introduced us

**STEP 4:** Repeat the steps for each category.

You will never run out of illustrations again. Make sure you have some kind of file where you save those categories and put the pictures there.

**2. The following is a good resource page:**

*“Anecdotes and Christian Illustrations for Sermons”*

<http://www.sigueme.net/anecdotas-ilustraciones/ilustraciones-sermones>.

# CHAPTER 6



*“Discernment is not knowing the difference between right and wrong. It’s knowing the difference between right and almost right.” — (Attributed to Charles Spurgeon but whoever said it was right)*

“They gathered in such large numbers that there was no room left, not even outside the door, and he preached the word to them.”—Mark 2:2, NIV

**Y**ou can do better the next time you preach. How? You will see. There is a difference in good preachers. Anyone can preach the Bible to people, but not everyone can do it in a way that connects and motivates change. This chapter gives you five practical tips on how to improve your preaching for this very Saturday.

## **I. The mathematics of preaching**

### **1. No text subtractions.**

Many people like to hear about Jesus being their Shepherd. But the text also says, *“Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death”* (**Psalm 23:4, KJV**).

When you preach, take the full context into account.

## **2. Do not multiply.**

Sometimes we focus on one sin and make it bigger than all the others. For example, take homosexuality. We cry out that God created Adam and Eve. But we forget that **1 Corinthians 6:9,10** mentions that sexual immorality, adultery, homosexuality, robbery, drunkenness, slander, and other sins are taken into account in exactly the same way. Don't pile on one sin as worse than the others.

## **3. Do not add.**

As an example, **Deuteronomy 22:5** says, "*A woman must not put on men's clothing, and a man must not wear women's clothing. Anyone who does this is detestable in the sight of the LORD your God.*" Using this text to prove that women should not wear pants is to add to the text. That's why it's good to use the Adventist Bible commentary, so you can avoid a lot of nonsense. I once heard that we must be vegetarians because in the temple's Holy of Holies there was a throne where Aaron's rod was sprouting, and the flesh of the sacrifice was kept outside of that room. This was said to draw a lesson to promote a good diet, which is very praiseworthy, but in a completely wrong way. The rod of Aaron did not symbolize a vegetarian diet.

## **4. Do not divide.**

A text without its context is a pretext, as the saying goes. For example, we like the first part of this text: "*The eyes of the LORD search the whole earth in order to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him. What a fool you have been! From now on you will be at war.*" (**2 Chronicles 16:9**). The principle there is that God is seeking whom to bless. But look at how the text ends, it speaks of war. Lesson? Preach the complete message,

not the convenient part you decided to pull out of it.

## **II. Eight tips to take care of your voice**

### **1. Warm up your voice before preaching.**

- a. Turn the volume up and down as you speak.
- b. Say, “*Vivivivivivi vavavavava vovovovovovo*,” over and over.
- c. Take a warm shower. The heat in the shower warms the vocal cords.

### **2. Practice good breathing techniques.**

Expand the diaphragm without lifting your shoulders.

### **3. Practice good posture.**

Stand straight, do not slouch, so that the voice can come out better.

### **4. Hydrate.**

People should take in at least half their weight in ounces of water each day. This prevents you from fainting in the pulpit from dehydration and gives you clarity of mind.

### **5. Get proper rest.**

This also gives clarity of mind. Sleeping only six hours a night has a similar effect to taking a few alcoholic drinks. Rest well.

### **6. Fuel your body correctly.**

Better fuel will improve clarity of expression, and the opportunity for the voice of God to guide you in adjusting your sermon while you are preaching.

### **7. Keep your body in shape.**

Make sure you exercise for an hour each day. No

excuses. If you think you do not have time now, you will have less time when you get sick, and believe me, you're going to get sick.

### **8. Take voice lessons.**

There should be a school or schools that offer it in your city. That will help you keep your most important preaching tool in good shape.

## **III. Preach as Jesus did.**

Here are ten characteristics of Jesus' preaching taken from the book *Gospel Workers* (**Ellen G. White [Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1915], 44–47**):

**1. He teaches with them in mind:** *“He taught in a way that made them feel the completeness of His identification with their interests and happiness.”*

**2. He uses simple language:** *“He spoke to them in language so simple that they could not fail of understanding.”*

**3. Establishes His individuality:** *“By methods peculiarly His own, He helped all who were in sorrow and affliction.”*

**4. Expresses grace and tenderness:** *“With tender, courteous grace, He ministered to the sin-sick soul, bringing healing and strength.”*

**5. Begins with the familiar:** *“The Prince of teachers, He sought access to the people by the pathway of their most familiar associations. He presented the truth in such a way that ever after it was to His hearers intertwined with their most hallowed recollections and sympathies.”*

**6. He saw the needs of all in the audience:** *“He saw the needs of men and women, children and youth,”*



**7. Chooses good illustrations:** *“His instruction was so direct, his illustrations were so appropriate.”*

**8. Understands the power of words:** Jesus spoke with . . .

- a. Words that were full of *“tender, courteous grace”* (**White, Gospel Workers, 45**).
- b. Words that were *“always patient and cheerful”* (**Gospel Workers, 43**).
- c. Words that *“helped all who were in sorrow and affliction”* (**Gospel Workers, 45**).

**9. Expands the circle:** *“He was the Majesty of heaven, but He humbled Himself to take our nature, that He might meet men where they were.”* No matter the . . .

- a. Economic differences: *“While He ministered to the poor, Jesus studied also to find ways of reaching the rich.”*
- b. Differences of country of origin: *“Christ recognized no distinction of nationality.”*
- c. Differences of religious beliefs: *“The life of Christ established a religion in which there is no caste, a religion by which Jew and Gentile . . . are linked in a common brotherhood, equal before God.”*
- d. Relational differences: *“He made no difference between neighbors and strangers, friends and enemies.”*

**10. Makes transformation the goal:** *“Often He met those who had drifted under Satan’s control, and who had no power to break from his snare. To such a one, discouraged, sick, tempted, fallen, Jesus would speak*

*words of tenderest pity, words that were needed and could be understood. Others He met who were fighting a hand-to-hand battle with the adversary of souls. These He encouraged to persevere, assuring them that they would win; for angels of God were on their side, and would give them the victory.”*

#### **IV. Don't kill your sermons with your own bullets.**

##### **Ten things that kill your sermons:**

1. Nervous tics. It is important that you see yourself after you preach. Hands in the pockets, touching the nose, opening and closing your suit, moving from side to side are things we do without realizing that they are distracting.
2. Long, irrelevant, and boring introductions. You have much less than five minutes to catch my attention. Why spend them on introductions and greetings? Go out like a boxer.
3. *“Um.” “Hm.” “Hey.” “This.”* These words that we use to fill spaces are also distracting. When I give someone the recommendation to listen to themselves after preaching, they tell me they do not like to hear themselves in a recording. Do you like us to hear you?
4. As Pastor so and so says: *“You are original. Do not preach their sermons, preach yours.”*
5. Distinguishing personal appearance. Look in the mirror before you preach. It will save you from shame someday, I assure you.
6. Giving all the straw you have to one ox. If you only

have one ox on your farm, you would not give it all the straw. The same here. Do not try to give the people all the information in one day.

7. Chasing rabbits. Sometimes we chase rabbits and get off topic. Focus.
8. Overuse your wonderful family. Your family is not perfect, and if each sermon has an illustration about them, after a while it becomes tiring.
9. De-contextualized illustrations. In the same way you would not talk about how to breastfeed children in a nursing home, you would choose illustrations that connect with your audience.
10. Preaching without visiting, praying, and studying. Without visiting members, you do not know what to preach about. Without praying, you have no power to preach. Without studying, the temptation is to preach secondhand sermons.

### **V. Stop saying these sentences, because they do not help you.**

The first and most important law of communication is that everything communicates. The following phrases hinder, distract, and bring discomfort. Avoid them as much as you can, either because they are overused or they do not make sense to an unbeliever. Here are fifteen things I wish would remain unsaid when anyone goes to the pulpit:

1. *“Good morning. I do not hear you. GOOD MORNING!”*
2. *“Now to begin . . .”*
3. *“Where two or three are gathered . . .”*

4. *“Let’s sing this song twice.”*
5. *“Pray for me to be able to sing today, because I am hoarse.”*
6. *“The pen of inspiration . . .”*
7. *“Lord, please hurry the steps of those who are coming.”*
8. *“Without wasting any more time . . .”*
9. *“How many say amen?” Or “Can you say amen?” Or “Who says amen?”*
10. *“Spanish is the language of heaven.”*
11. *“This will be short.”*
12. *“To conclude . . .”*
13. *“To make this long story short . . .”*
14. *“Visitors, please stand up. You are the flowers of the garden of our church.”*
15. *“To the honor and glory of God, and to your delight.”*

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## CONCLUSION

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I hope you have enjoyed learning more about good preaching and now feel motivated to preach the Word in a way that affects lives for eternity.

Here is a letter from a person who will be attending your church the next time you preach. Hear her out. Understand it. Preach well.

Hello, my name is Mary Smith, from your church in any town in the world. I have had an interesting week, with challenges on many fronts. It seems like my life is a roller coaster. My faith, finances, and family have been on my mind lately. Now I am here in church. Sorry for being late, but it was a crazy morning. It's your turn to preach. These are the things I need while you talk to me today.

### **I need you to preach the Bible.**

I understand that you have opinions. That is good. They are probably very similar to some of mine. But I do not need your opinions today. I long to hear the voice of God, not your opinions backed by a couple of texts. I can tell when the sermon is preached from the Bible. It stays with me all week.

### **I need you to be real.**

I live in the real world. Real temptations, real sins, real family situations. When you start speaking with phrases that only you understand, quoting Greek every ten minutes, and spending more time on making the sermon sound nice and less time on how I, your audience, connect the Bible with what I'm going through, you lose me. Incidentally, it does not take much time for that to happen. Enough with the long introductions, nonsense, and additional announcements. I did not come to church to hear when the Pathfinders have their next departure. I have come to find Jesus. Give me a newsletter for

the announcements. I can read. I already have enough information. I need transformation.

**I need you to say it in a real way.**

There is nothing worse than a message full of clichéd phrases. Presenting the message in an attractive and practical way involves preparation and time spent studying. I know you have a million things to do. Please tell me the old story in a way that I have never heard before, with an application that I have never thought of before.

**I need you to be brief.**

The gospel is eternal, your sermons do not have to be. Stop chasing the rabbits. After the endless repetitions and promises to land that are never met, I wonder if the church should be endured or enjoyed. I am not an expert in public speaking, and I do not pretend to know much about your work, but in mine, when a person speaks and speaks, and what he says does not make much sense, it usually means that he isn't prepared. Keep it simple. Remember that my children are with me.

**I need you to expand your repertoire.**

Why is it always the same theme? Are there no other topics in the Bible? The last pastor was all "final events." The prophecy is great, but it's not the only thing. The pastor before him was all "family." Preach the whole Bible, not just the parts you like and the ones you feel comfortable with.

**I need you to have fresh illustrations.**

The stories about your family every week are already tiring. By the way, I've heard you repeat the same story, at least three times. Read. Leave Facebook and Twitter for a little while (no, all the way) and read one or two good books. Give me some suggestions about the books

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## CONCLUSION

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you are reading that have blessed you. Illustrations are found everywhere when you read.

### **I need you to be you.**

You are not Jose Rojas, Dwight Nelson, or Alejandro Bullón. I love you because you are my shepherd. You were there when my relative died, when the house was taken away, when the child became ill. Do not try so hard to be like others. Not everyone loves you in this church, but many do. Stop changing your style by the pressure of those who do not love you. Be yourself. I know how Jesus made you. Help us. Be real.

By the way, thank you for the sermon you're going to preach today. I'm sure it will be a blessing. Please, preach well.

### **YBH**

Go to the appendix and look for the evaluation sheet. Give it to at least three people each time you preach. You'll see how you will improve.



**APPENDIX**  
**SERMON OUTLINES**



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# SERMON OUTLINES

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## EYEWITNESSES

**Key Text:** *“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere—in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” (Acts 1:8).*

**Thesis:** God is looking for witnesses, not lawyers.

**Three points:**

**1. The Holy Spirit gives us power.**

**Application:** Do you want to have power? Then seek to have an intimate relationship with the Holy Spirit.

**Illustration:** \_\_\_\_\_

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**Mini call:** Do you want to pray at this very moment and ask the Lord Jesus to fill you with His Spirit?

**2. Power is used to testify.**

**Application:** A person who has the Holy Spirit cannot remain silent. Just like the purpose of a car is transportation, that of a hammer is nailing, and that of a glass of water is to satisfy your thirst, the purpose of the Holy Spirit in your life is to share Jesus with other people.

**Illustration:** \_\_\_\_\_

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**Mini call:** Who can you think of in this moment who needs Jesus and for whom you can pray this week?

**3. Witnessing should have a local and global impact.**

**Application:** Jesus sent His disciples to share the good news in three places:

**In Jerusalem.** It symbolizes people close to you, both in distance and in customs and culture.

**In Judea.** It symbolizes people you know, but with whom you do not keep a close relationship.

**In Samaria.** It symbolizes people who are hostile to the gospel.

**Illustration:** \_\_\_\_\_

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**Final Call:** Your first task is to identify three people with whom you will work for the next forty days.

**These people are:**

**One from Jerusalem**—someone very close to you (friend or relative)

**One from Judea**—someone similar to you (known)

**One from Samaria**—someone radically different from you (unknown)

Pray for them this week and invite them to church.

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# SERMON OUTLINES

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## Amazing Grace

**Key Text:** *“For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not of yourselves, it is the gift of God”*  
(Ephesians 2:8, NASB).

**Thesis:** Grace is free but was expensive.

**Three points:**

There are three lessons we can learn from today’s text.

**1. Grace is a wonderful gift.**

**Application:** It is a gift that we do not deserve, and yet God gives it to us for free. The greatest difference between Christianity and other religions of the world is the concept of grace. Something given in exchange for nothing? It’s hard to believe, but it’s true!

**Illustration:** \_\_\_\_\_

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**Mini call:** \_\_\_\_\_

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**2. Good gifts are appreciated.**

**Application:** Anyone who has received a gift in their life knows that the more expensive the gift, the more it is appreciated. Our obedience is demonstrated appreciation for the grace of Jesus. This does not make us deserving of it, but it does show how much we appreciate the grace of Jesus.

**Illustration:** \_\_\_\_\_

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**Mini call:** \_\_\_\_\_

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### 3. Good gifts are shared.

**Application:** Following the same line of thought as gifts, we all know that it is practically impossible to silence a person who has received an expensive gift. You don't have to pressure the person, encourage them, or motivate them to share their experience with others. In the same way, anyone who has received the grace of Jesus will naturally share the good news with other people.

**Illustration:** \_\_\_\_\_

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**Final call:** I invite you to share grace in the following ways:

Think of people you want to see in heaven.

Call someone on the phone and pray with them.

Write a postcard.

Give someone a CD or magazine with positive messages.

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## SERMON OUTLINES

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### THE SECRET OF THE NEW BIRTH

**Key texts:** Jesus said, “Jesus replied, “I tell you the truth, unless you are born again,[a] you cannot see the Kingdom of God.” “Jesus replied, “I assure you, no one can enter the Kingdom of God without being born of water and the Spirit.” (John 3:3, 5).

**Thesis:** The new birth is something that you experience but God produces.

**Three points:**

There are three lessons we can learn from today’s text.

**1. The new birth is an act of God.**

**Application:** A baby does not decide its birth. In the same way, the act of being born again is done by God in us when we submit to His will and love. Our greatest struggle is reaching the point in our life in which we accept that we cannot change, thus letting God be the one who controls our life. For those who have done so, the results are out of this world.

**Illustration:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Mini call:** \_\_\_\_\_

**2. New birth brings good results.**

**Application:** Today’s key text tells us two of those good results. Jesus says that “you can see” and “you can enter.” The kingdom of God not only refers to heaven but also to a change of life here on earth. Our values change, as do our attitudes and desires. Actually, nothing good begins until a person is born again. That is the importance of the new birth.

**Illustration:** \_\_\_\_\_

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**Mini call:** \_\_\_\_\_

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**3. You can't fake a new birth.**

**Application:** There is no such thing as a half-pregnant woman. Likewise, the new birth is not something that we can have half of. God has all control or has none. I once heard a pastor say, "If God is your copilot, you're sitting in the wrong seat." When God does His work of transformation, it is permanent and evident, especially for the people close to you.

**Illustration:** \_\_\_\_\_

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**Mini call:** \_\_\_\_\_

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**Final call:** Entrust your life to God and give Him total control. Make a special effort today to treat your family well. Ask God to help you every day: to pray, to study His Word, and to share it with others.

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## SERMON OUTLINES

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### THE HOLY SPIRIT'S WORK

**Key text:** *“But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, <sup>23</sup>gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against these things! <sup>24</sup>Those who belong to Christ Jesus have nailed the passions and desires of their sinful nature to his cross and crucified them there. <sup>25</sup>Since we are living by the Spirit, let us follow the Spirit’s leading in every part of our lives.” (Galatians 5:22–25).*

**Thesis:** The greatest evidence of the Spirit is a transformed life.

**Three points:**

There are three lessons we can learn from today’s text.

**1. The work of the Holy Spirit is to transform us.**

**Application:** Some people believe that the Holy Spirit is only a force, or that the Spirit’s main task is to get us to speak in other languages. According to the biblical text, we can see that the main task is to become like Jesus. We are not transformed through emotional events but by the day-to-day contact with God.

**Illustration:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Mini call:** \_\_\_\_\_

**2. Do not try to do the work of the Holy Spirit.**

**Application:** We waste a lot of time and energy trying to change ourselves, and worse than that, trying to change others. One expression used by psychologists is: *“You can only change and control yourself.”* This expression has some truth to it, but if we go further, we could say, *“You can only allow the Holy Spirit to control*

*you and change you.”*

Let Him do His job!

**Illustration:** \_\_\_\_\_

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**Mini call:** \_\_\_\_\_

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### **3. Your job is to create an environment conducive for change.**

**Application:** There is a part that we must do ourselves in this process. The text encourages us to crucify the sinful nature. This is done through the study of the Word, taking time to pray, attending church regularly, and sharing Jesus with others.

**Illustration:** \_\_\_\_\_

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**Final call:** If you have been trying to change someone, give that person to God. Ask your family the following: What area of my life should I change? Do you feel that God is calling you to be an intercessor? What will you do about it?



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## SERMON OUTLINES

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### SEARCH AND FIND MERCY

**Key Text:** *“Seek the LORD while he may be found; call on him while he is near. Let the wicked forsake their ways and the unrighteous their thoughts. Let them turn to the LORD, and he will have mercy on them, and to our God, for he will freely pardon” (Isaiah 55:6–8, NIV).*

**Thesis:** Do not fix your life to seek mercy; seek mercy and this will fix your life.

**Three points:**

There are three lessons we can learn from today’s text.

**1. Grace: what God gives us that we do not deserve.** Mercy, however, is what God does not give us that we deserve which is death but instead gives us... GRACE!

**Application:** Just like the new birth, grace, mercy, and the Holy Spirit are gifts from God. The reality is that we are born bad, and we become worse. Eternal death is what we deserve. However, God is good.

**Illustration:** \_\_\_\_\_

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**Mini call:** \_\_\_\_\_

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**2. It’s hard to get lost.**

**Application:** God can allow it if you want it. Note all the words that describe God’s attitude in the verse above. List them. John the writer of Revelation tells us of a vision he had in which he saw a door open into the sky. God doesn’t want anyone missing. If you leave your present life and give yourself to God, you will find what you have always dreamed of.

**Illustration:** \_\_\_\_\_

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**Mini call:** \_\_\_\_\_

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**3. I must take this time of mercy to share the good news with the rest of the world.**

**Application:** I have good news and bad news for you. The good news is that God is full of mercy. The bad news is that one day, that opportunity will be over. The Bible is clear: there will come a time when this opportunity will no longer be available. That is why it is urgent for us to tell as many people as we can that today is the day of salvation.

**Illustration:** \_\_\_\_\_

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**Final call:** Think of a person at work who needs God. Tell him or her some positive words of encouragement this week. Use words of grace, even if they do not deserve it.

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## SERMON OUTLINES

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### THREE KEYS FOR ANSWERED PRAYERS

**Key text:** *“If you need wisdom, ask our generous God, and he will give it to you. He will not rebuke you for asking. 6 But when you ask him, be sure that your faith is in God alone. Do not waver, for a person with divided loyalty is as unsettled as a wave of the sea that is blown and tossed by the wind.” (James 1:5, 6).*

**Thesis:** Not all prayers are answered in the same way. There are secrets that have been revealed.

**Three points:**

There are three lessons we can learn from today’s text.

**1. Ask.**

**Application:** The first characteristic of an answered prayer is that you should ask. When we ask, we show our dependence on God, and that pleases Him greatly.

**Illustration:** \_\_\_\_\_

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**Mini call:** \_\_\_\_\_

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**2. Ask God.**

**Application:** It is not only important to ask, but you must ask the right person. There are people who want to help you but cannot. Others can help you but do not want to. God wants to, and He can.

**Illustration:** \_\_\_\_\_

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**Mini call:** \_\_\_\_\_

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### 3. Ask with faith.

**Application:** The third secret for an answered prayer is to ask in faith. Many people fail in this third step. They ask, they ask God, but when they ask, they do not ask with faith. If we make the effort to ask, let us ask with faith, believing that if it is the will of God, we will receive it. The Bible advises that our requests should go along with our thanks.

**Illustration:** \_\_\_\_\_

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**Final call:** If possible, practice a “*prayer walk*” today. Walk around your neighborhood and ask, with faith, for the opportunity to have a conversation with the people who live there.

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## SERMON OUTLINES

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### THE SECRET OF PURIFICATION

**Key text:** *“Gold, which can be destroyed, is tested by fire. Your faith is worth much more than gold and it must be tested also. Then your faith will bring thanks and shining-greatness and honor to Jesus Christ when He comes again” (1 Peter 1:7, NLV).*

**Thesis:** Those who love God are tested, and the test purifies those whom God loves.

**Three points:**

There are three lessons we can learn from today’s text.

**1. God uses tests to purify us.**

**Application:** I would like to tell you that the system God uses to purify us is different from what this verse is saying. We have been programmed by society to avoid anything that causes pain or discomfort at all costs. We make this mistake in our spiritual life as we try to avoid or eliminate pain and discomfort. The tests are intended for the transformation of the character God will produce in us.

**Illustration:** \_\_\_\_\_

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**Mini call:** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**2. The purification process is sometimes painful.**

**Application:** Without the cross there is no glory. Without contractions there is no birth. Good physical condition does not exist without exercise. There is no purity without test. They are the two sides of the same coin. Look for the one and the other. Remember that everything God blesses, the devil strikes.

**Illustration:** \_\_\_\_\_

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**Mini call:** \_\_\_\_\_

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**3. Purification begins from within.**

**Application:** Jesus appealed to the Pharisees concerning their interest in purifying external behavior while they neglected the transformation of their character. The real change begins when God is allowed control to change your character. That change is slower but more permanent.

**Illustration:** \_\_\_\_\_

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**Final call:** This week, ask a person, “How are you?” and take time to listen to their answer. Share the pain of another person.

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## SERMON OUTLINES

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### THE BLESSING OF AFFLICTION

**Key Text:** *“I have told you all this so that you may have peace in me. Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows. But take heart, because I have overcome the world.” (John 16:33).*

**Thesis:** The afflictions that God allows cause us pain but not harm.

**Three points:**

There are three lessons we can learn from today’s text.

**1. Pain is a gift.**

**Application:** Meditate for a moment on what it would mean to live in a world where there is no pain. A bone breaks, you feel nothing. One hand burns, no concern. The skin will tear without you noticing. Good or bad? In analyzing the feeling that we call pain we realize that the pain is truly a gift from God—a gift that God created to protect us.

**Illustration:** \_\_\_\_\_

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**Mini call:** \_\_\_\_\_

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**2. Ask yourself “What for?” instead of “Why?”**

**Application:** When a person is in the midst of affliction, the first question is: Why me? Why now? Why this? The “why” belongs to God. Ask yourself, “What for?” Focus on the purpose, not the cause of your affliction.

**Illustration:** \_\_\_\_\_

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Mini call: \_\_\_\_\_

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**3. There are places that can only be reached through affliction.**

**Application:** The path to the next level in your spiritual life is called affliction. Sometimes arduous, sometimes complicated, it is always a blessing. There are no shortcuts for those who want to experience the fullness of God's blessing.

**Illustration:** \_\_\_\_\_

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**Final call:** Knock on the door of two of your neighbors and ask them if there is something painful happening to them that they need prayer for. Pray for them.



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## SERMON OUTLINES

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### THE SATURDAY SECRET

**Key Text:** *“Keep the Sabbath day holy. Don’t pursue your own interests on that day, but enjoy the Sabbath and speak of it with delight as the LORD’s holy day. Honor the Sabbath in everything you do on that day, and don’t follow your own desires or talk idly. <sup>14</sup>Then the LORD will be your delight. I will give you great honor and satisfy you with the inheritance I promised to your ancestor Jacob. I, the LORD, have spoken!”* (Isaiah 58:13, 14).

**Thesis:** God made the Sabbath to be enjoyed, not endured.

**Three points:**

There are three lessons we can learn from today’s text.

**1. Respect the Sabbath.**

**Application:** Today’s text mentions three things we should avoid: business, words, and non-spiritual activities. Why? God is a God of relationships. He knows we cannot be doing two or three things at the same time and give each one of them the deserved attention. He wants that time for Him. By avoiding the things He asks us to avoid, we will have our attention focused on God and His love, not on us and our problems.

**Illustration:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Mini call:** \_\_\_\_\_

**2. Enjoy the Sabbath.**

**Application:** Wake up early. Have a good breakfast. Pray with your family before leaving for church. Go to church with good expectations. Sing, participate in the service. Sit up front. Say hello to the guests. Invite

someone to eat at your home. Rest well. Do good deeds. Spend high-quality time with your family. Have vespers with the expectation of next Sabbath's soon arrival.

**Illustration:** \_\_\_\_\_

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**Mini call:** \_\_\_\_\_

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### **3. The Sabbath brings great blessings.**

**Application:** As it is the only day that God blessed, there are blessings reserved for that day that do not exist any other day. Today's text mentions three: joy, height, and delight.

Claim those promises for your next Sabbath!

**Illustration:** \_\_\_\_\_

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**Final call:** Invite someone to eat at your home next Sabbath. Do it today, before you leave the church! Preferably a newly baptized person or guest.

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## SERMON OUTLINES

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### I FORGIVE YOU AND FORGET

**Key text:** *“God has chosen you. You are holy and loved by Him. Because of this, your new life should be full of loving-pity. You should be kind to others and have no pride. Be gentle and be willing to wait for others. Try to understand other people. Forgive each other. If you have something against someone, forgive him. That is the way the Lord forgave you” (Colossians 3:12, 13, NLV).*

**Thesis:** Forgiving is more than a feeling.

**Three points:**

There are three lessons we can learn from today’s text.

**1. Forgiveness is a decision.**

**Application:** Forgiveness is not a feeling. If you expect to feel like forgiving, you probably never will. We forgive first with the mind, then with the heart. This does not mean that it will be easy, especially when you have very deep wounds in you. Nor is forgiveness based on whether the other person deserves it or not. Decide to forgive today.

**Illustration:** \_\_\_\_\_

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**Mini call:** \_\_\_\_\_

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**2. To forgive is to treat the one who hurt you as if you have forgiven him or her.**

**Application:** Perhaps you have asked yourself: How can I forgive? The answer is simple. Treat the other person as if you have forgiven him or her. Your acts of forgiveness will produce eventually the feelings of forgiveness in you. You may feel strange when you treat well the person who has hurt you. Do not worry. That

feeling will pass, and it will be replaced by a much more beautiful feeling.

**Illustration:** \_\_\_\_\_

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**Mini call:** \_\_\_\_\_

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### **3. A forgiven person forgives.**

**Application:** The main reason we can forgive others is that God has forgiven us. For a moment, think of how God is with you. He has patience. He is not spiteful. He gives you another chance. You can say, *“That’s God.”* Do not forget that you have God within you to help you. Claim His power in your life today, and forgive the one who has offended you.

**Illustration:** \_\_\_\_\_

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**Final call:** Ask God in prayer to show you someone to forgive. Call him/her or write a letter, and decide to forgive that person.

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## SERMON OUTLINES

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### FORGIVENESS LEADS TO RECONCILIATION

**Key text:** *“For if a man belongs to Christ, he is a new person. The old life is gone. New life has begun. All this comes from God. He is the One Who brought us to Himself when we hated Him. He did this through Christ. Then He gave us the work of bringing others to Him. God was in Christ. He was working through Christ to bring the whole world back to Himself. God no longer held men’s sins against them. And He gave us the work of telling and showing men this” (2 Corinthians 5:17–19, NLV).*

**Thesis:** Before you can reconcile with others, you need to be reconciled with God.

**Three points:**

There are three lessons we can learn from today’s text.

**1. God is not angry with you.**

**Application:** One of the first things we must realize when we speak of reconciliation is that God is not angry with us. He is not waiting with His arms crossed to see if you are good enough to give you a chance in His kingdom. He works actively to restore your relationship with you, which sin destroyed. God is good.

**Illustration:** \_\_\_\_\_

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**Mini call:** \_\_\_\_\_

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**2. Reconciliation is a divine work.**

**Application:** In a way, reconciliation goes hand in hand with forgiveness. They have similar characteristics. First, there cannot be one without the other. Second, both are God’s work in man. Imagine God, for thousands of years, looking for His children, trying to restore the

relationship. Sometimes He is ignored, sometimes forgotten, even though He is always loving us. Don't you think it's time for you to give up and stop running?

**Illustration:** \_\_\_\_\_

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**Mini call:** \_\_\_\_\_

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**3. You and I are agents of reconciliation.**

**Application:** There are so many estranged people in this world. Estranged from their mother-in-law, their partner, parents, their neighbor, and also from God. From the moment you experience restoration in your personal life, you become an agent (but not a secret one) of reconciliation.

**Illustration:** \_\_\_\_\_

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**Final call:** Ask God to show you people who need reconciliation today. Make sure your relationship with God is well, and that will help you and others to be well.

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## SERMON OUTLINES

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### THE SECRET OF PROSPERITY

**Key text:** *“Yours, O LORD, is the greatness, the power, the glory, the victory, and the majesty. Everything in the heavens and on earth is yours, O LORD, and this is your kingdom. We adore you as the one who is over all things.”* (1 Chronicles 29:11, 12).

**Thesis:** My job is not to become prosperous. My job is to connect with the Author of prosperity.

**Three points:**

There are three lessons we can learn from today’s text.

**1. Open your mind.**

**Application:** One of the first things you must understand is that God is the owner of everything. Some close their minds and think that they are responsible for getting ahead in their life. A blessed person is a person who understands Who is the source of wealth. Behind every job, property, or money is God.

**Illustration:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Mini call:** \_\_\_\_\_

**2. Open your heart.**

**Application:** One of the biblical texts that best explains the phenomenon of wealth is the one that says: *“Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also”* (Matthew 6:21, KJV). Who has your heart? For what do you work? For what purpose do you save? Sometimes we work to buy things that we do not need with money that we do not have, to impress people who do not like us. May God help us to change our hearts, so that it may be according to the heart of God.

**Illustration:** \_\_\_\_\_

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**Mini call:** \_\_\_\_\_

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### **3. Open your hand.**

**Application:** This message is twofold. He who opens his hand receives. Also, the one who opens his hand gives.

This is the life of the person God blesses. He opens his hand and receives blessings, but he does not close it; he keeps it open so that the blessing also reaches others.

**Illustration:** \_\_\_\_\_

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**Final call:** Pray to God to show you a person with whom you can share something material today. Do it. It is when we give that we receive.



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# SERMON OUTLINES

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Name of Preacher: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Instructions:** Please grade the sermon using the following grading scale:

- 1= Absolutely disagree
- 2= Moderately disagree
- 3= Agree
- 4= Very much agree
- 5= Absolutely agree

## I. El Sermon

### A. Writing

### OBSERVATIONS

1. The introduction caught the listeners' attention.	1	2	3	4	5	
2. The introduction clearly related to the central theme of the sermon.	1	2	3	4	5	
3. The central truth of the sermon (thesis, proposition) was clearly stated.	1	2	3	4	5	
4. The sermon's main points were well ordered and connected.	1	2	3	4	5	
5. The main points of the sermon were clearly formulated.	1	2	3	4	5	
6. The transitions were appropriate and noticeable from one point to another.	1	2	3	4	5	
7. The illustrations were well chosen, according to the point illustrated.	1	2	3	4	5	
8. The conclusion reinforced the main message and encouraged people to put it into practice.	1	2	3	4	5	
9. The calling was clear and specific.	1	2	3	4	5	

**B. The Message**

**OBSERVATIONS**

1. The sermon's central message was clearly drawn from the biblical passage.	1	2	3	4	5	
2. The central message was Christ-centered.	1	2	3	4	5	
3. He/she talked about things relevant to the daily life of listeners.	1	2	3	4	5	
4. He/she encouraged listeners to please God instead of just scolding them for not obeying.	1	2	3	4	5	
5. Special emphasis was on the application and not just on information.	1	2	3	4	5	

**II. The Preacher**

**OBSERVATIONS**

1. Seemed prepared to present his/her sermon.	1	2	3	4	5	
2. Personal appearance was in accordance with the occasion.	1	2	3	4	5	
3. Speech was fluent and clear.	1	2	3	4	5	
4. Showed accessibility and empathy toward people.	1	2	3	4	5	
5. Non-verbal communication was used appropriately.	1	2	3	4	5	
6. Looked at the audience and had no distractions in his/her non-verbal message.	1	2	3	4	5	

**Please answer:**

**What was the sermon's central message?**

**(Write it in one sentence.)**

This book is for anyone who wants to improve their preaching.

Whether you are a beginner or an experienced preacher, I want to share with you the experience of more than thirty years as a preacher.

It has been my privilege to teach students, pastors, administrators, and church members about this important area of ministry and how to improve.

I am going to share those same six principles in this book for you. Remember, as someone has said, when we preach irrelevant and boring sermons the people listening to them don't only think we are irrelevant and boring, but that GOD IS!

What a sobering responsibility and a glorious opportunity.

Join me.



**Roger Hernández** is the Ministerial and Evangelical Director of the Southern Union, with more than twenty-five years of experience preaching to crowds and teaching preachers how to connect with their audiences.