

FEED MY SHEEP

*Returning the Church to the Whole
Counsel of God*

A Biblical Manual for Preachers, Pastors, Teachers,
and Churches

Lucius Alston

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Feed My Sheep: Returning the Church to the Whole Counsel of God

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This manuscript is an original work of pastoral instruction, biblical reflection, and ministry training.

Dedication

To every preacher who still trembles before the text, every pastor who studies while others sleep, every teacher who refuses to trade truth for applause, and every hungry believer who longs to hear the Word of God opened clearly, faithfully, and fully.

May the sheep be fed. May Christ be exalted. May the Church be strengthened.

Preface

This book was born from a burden: the people of God are often surrounded by religious activity and yet remain spiritually underfed. Churches can be busy, talented, visible, branded, streamed, scheduled, and celebrated while the sheep quietly starve. The problem is not that the Bible has lost its power. The problem is that too often the Bible has lost its place.

The command of Jesus to Peter was not complicated: “Feed my sheep.” He did not say entertain them, flatter them, market to them, imitate the world for them, or keep them permanently dependent upon the personality of the preacher. He said feed them. The food is the truth of God, centered in Christ, illuminated by the Holy Spirit, proclaimed with clarity, courage, love, and integrity.

This volume follows naturally after the diagnosis made in the preceding work on the crisis of preaching. That book asks what happened. This book answers what faithful preaching must become again. It is not merely a protest against shallow ministry. It is a constructive manual for rebuilding the pulpit, strengthening the preacher, and returning the congregation to the whole counsel of God.

The aim is not to create one more preaching style. The aim is to recover an ancient responsibility. Methods may vary. Personalities will differ. Cultural expressions will change. But the preacher’s assignment remains: open the Scriptures, explain what God has said, show how the text leads to Christ, press its truth upon the conscience, and call the hearer to faith and obedience.

Introduction

There is a difference between speaking in church and feeding the church. A person can be loud without being clear, emotional without being biblical, clever without being faithful, and popular without being useful to the souls in front of them.

The image of feeding is central to Christian ministry because sheep cannot live on excitement alone. They require nourishment. A congregation may shout on Sunday and still be weak on Monday. It may remember the preacher's jokes and forget the preacher's text. It may admire the delivery and remain unable to explain the gospel. When that happens repeatedly, the pulpit has produced stimulation without formation.

Faithful preaching does more than provide information. It announces God's truth with God's authority for God's purposes. It confronts sin, comforts the broken, corrects error, trains believers, reveals Christ, strengthens hope, and equips the saints to live faithfully in the world.

This book is written for pastors, ministers, teachers, evangelists, seminary students, ministry leaders, and serious believers. It is intentionally theological and practical. It will address what the preacher believes, how the preacher lives, how the preacher studies, how the sermon is built, how the Word is delivered, and how the church can develop a sustained culture of biblical nourishment.

The central claim is simple: the health of the Church is inseparably connected to the faithful ministry of the Word. When the Word is neglected, the church becomes vulnerable to confusion, manipulation, immaturity, and spiritual malnutrition. When the whole counsel of God is proclaimed, the church gains roots, discernment, courage, holiness, endurance, and joy.

This is therefore more than a book about sermon technique. It is a call to recover the shepherd's heart, the servant's humility,

the watchman's courage, the teacher's discipline, and the herald's conviction.

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PART I

THE COMMAND TO FEED

*Recovering the shepherd's central assignment:
nourishing Christ's people with the Word of God.*

CHAPTER 1

Feed My Sheep: The Assignment That Has Not Changed

*“He saith unto him, Feed my sheep. — John 21:17,
KJV”*

On the shore of the Sea of Galilee, the risen Christ asked Peter a question that reached beneath failure, bravado, shame, and self-confidence: “Lovest thou me?” Peter had denied Jesus publicly, but Jesus restored him personally and commissioned him pastorally. The evidence of Peter’s love would not merely be what he felt, said, or sang. Love for Christ would be demonstrated by care for Christ’s people.

Three times Jesus connected love with responsibility. Feed my lambs. Feed my sheep. Feed my sheep. The repetition was not filler. It was restoration, emphasis, and assignment. Peter was being told that leadership in Christ’s Church is not ownership. The sheep belong to Jesus. The shepherd serves under the authority of the Chief Shepherd.

**The congregation is not the preacher’s
audience. It is Christ’s flock.**

The Assignment Has Not Changed

Technology changes. Congregations change. Vocabulary changes. Attention spans change. Buildings, musical styles, communication platforms, and cultural expectations change. Yet the central assignment of the preacher remains remarkably stable: nourish the people of God with the truth of God.

Every generation is tempted to believe that the old assignment is no longer enough. The preacher is pressured to become a celebrity, motivational speaker, social commentator, comedian, content creator, brand ambassador, political surrogate, or religious entrepreneur. A pastor may perform

some secondary functions wisely, but none of them can replace the primary command.

To feed the sheep means more than quoting a verse. It means opening the meaning of Scripture so that people understand who God is, what God has done, what God commands, what God promises, and how they must respond. Feeding involves explanation, proclamation, correction, comfort, warning, invitation, and formation.

Love Is the Qualification Beneath the Qualifications

Jesus did not begin by asking Peter about his communication strategy. He asked about love. Skill matters. Study matters. Theology matters. Discipline matters. But the engine of faithful ministry is love for Christ that overflows into love for the people Christ purchased.

A preacher who loves applause more than Christ will eventually manipulate the flock. A preacher who loves control more than Christ will dominate the flock. A preacher who loves comfort more than Christ will avoid difficult truth. A preacher who loves controversy more than Christ will wound the flock. But a preacher who loves Christ will desire to give the people what they need, even when it is not what they initially demand.

Lambs and Sheep

The command includes both lambs and mature sheep. The church contains new believers, seasoned saints, wounded people, doubters, seekers, children, elders, leaders, and those who have been present for years without growing. Faithful preaching must be clear enough for the lamb and rich enough for the mature believer.

This does not require making every sermon simplistic. It requires making every sermon understandable. Depth is not obscurity. A deep well can still provide a clear cup of water.

Feeding Is Repeated Work

No shepherd feeds the flock once and declares the task complete. Ministry requires repetition, patience, consistency, and endurance. The same gospel must be preached again. Foundational doctrines must be revisited. The congregation must be reminded of truths it already knows because memory is weak, pressure is real, and temptation is persistent.

The preacher must resist resentment toward repetition. God's people are not machines receiving data. They are pilgrims walking through changing circumstances. A familiar text may meet them differently after a funeral, a diagnosis, a failure, a promotion, a betrayal, or a season of waiting.

The Food Is Not Ours to Invent

The preacher is a steward of a meal prepared by another. Our task is not to improve God's revelation but to serve it faithfully. Creativity may shape presentation, but it must never replace content. Personality may carry the message, but it must never become the message.

The great question after a sermon is not merely, "Did they enjoy it?" It is, "Were they fed?" Did they understand the text? Did they encounter Christ? Were they corrected, strengthened, comforted, warned, or called to faith? Were they given truth they can carry into life?

The Shepherd's Principle

**The truest evidence that a preacher loves
Christ is a faithful willingness to nourish
Christ's people with Christ's Word.**

For Reflection and Ministry Practice

1. What competes with the ministry of the Word in your present ministry setting?
2. Can your congregation explain the central truth of last Sunday's sermon?

FEED MY SHEEP

3. Where has the desire to be impressive weakened the responsibility to be nourishing?
4. Name one practical change that would make your preaching more text-governed this month.

CHAPTER 2

When the Sheep Are Hungry

*“Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God. —
Matthew 4:4, KJV”*

A hungry sheep does not always know how to describe its hunger. It may become restless, irritable, easily distracted, vulnerable to unhealthy substitutes, and willing to consume whatever is available. The same is true spiritually. A church deprived of sustained biblical nourishment may not announce, “We are starving.” It may simply show the symptoms.

Those symptoms can include dependence upon personalities, attraction to every new teaching, shallow understanding of salvation, confusion about holiness, inability to endure suffering, spiritual consumerism, and a constant demand for novelty. People may attend faithfully while remaining doctrinally fragile.

Busy but Malnourished

A church calendar can be full while the congregation is empty. Programs are not food. Activity is not maturity. Excitement is not discipleship. A ministry may offer conferences, concerts, committees, trips, anniversaries, and special events while giving little sustained attention to teaching people how to understand and obey Scripture.

None of those activities are automatically wrong. The problem appears when supplements replace the meal. Dessert is enjoyable, but a congregation cannot live on dessert.

**A church can have more events than ever
and less biblical strength than ever.**

The Signs of Spiritual Hunger

One sign is biblical illiteracy. People know inspirational phrases but cannot locate them in Scripture. They repeat statements that sound spiritual but contradict the gospel. They confuse personal preference with biblical command.

Another sign is emotional instability. Without deep roots, believers interpret God's faithfulness by the mood of the moment. If circumstances improve, God is good. If hardship arrives, faith collapses. Biblical preaching gives believers a theology large enough to survive pain.

A third sign is susceptibility to manipulation. When people do not know the Word, they can be controlled by titles, charisma, fear, superstition, or false promises. The Bible does not make believers disrespectful; it makes them discerning.

A fourth sign is chronic immaturity. Time in church is not the same as growth in Christ. A person may have twenty years of attendance and only one year of maturity repeated twenty times. The Word, received and practiced, moves believers toward discernment, character, service, and stability.

Hunger Creates a Market for Substitutes

When the pulpit does not provide biblical substance, people search elsewhere. Some find helpful teachers. Others find confusion. Social media provides a sermon every thirty seconds, often without context, accountability, or theological balance. A memorable clip can travel farther than a careful exposition, but reach is not the same as reliability.

The answer is not to scold hungry people for looking for food. The answer is to feed them well, teach them discernment, and help them recognize healthy nourishment.

The Shepherd Must Diagnose the Flock

Faithful pastors pay attention. What does the congregation understand about the gospel? How do members respond to suffering? Can they identify false teaching? Do they know how to

read the Bible? Are families discussing Scripture? Are young believers receiving foundations? Are older believers being challenged to keep growing?

These questions move preaching beyond random inspiration. They help the pastor build a wise, balanced, long-term diet.

Hunger Can Be Healed

Spiritual malnutrition is serious, but it is not irreversible. When the Word is patiently opened, people begin to gain strength. Their prayers deepen. Their worship becomes informed. Their discernment sharpens. Their courage grows. Their understanding of grace expands. Their lives begin to display the fruit of truth.

The recovery may not be immediate. A congregation trained to expect constant excitement may initially resist careful teaching. The shepherd must not become discouraged. Healthy appetites can be cultivated. Over time, people learn to value what truly sustains them.

The Shepherd's Principle

Spiritual hunger is revealed not only by what people lack, but by the substitutes they begin to crave.

For Reflection and Ministry Practice

5. Which signs of spiritual hunger are most visible in your congregation?
6. What percentage of your church calendar directly helps people understand and obey Scripture?
7. What doctrines are currently weak or misunderstood among your people?
8. What six-month preaching plan could begin correcting those weaknesses?

CHAPTER 3

The Difference Between a Crowd and a Flock

“My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. — John 10:27, KJV”

Jesus drew crowds, but He did not confuse crowds with disciples. Crowds can gather because of curiosity, need, excitement, controversy, miracles, music, personality, or momentum. A flock, however, is formed by relationship, guidance, protection, nourishment, and sustained care.

The modern church is often tempted to treat visible attendance as the primary proof of health. Numbers matter because people matter. We should desire to reach more people. But a crowd can be large and spiritually shallow, while a smaller congregation can be deeply formed, faithful, generous, and fruitful.

The Crowd Asks, “What Is Happening?”

The flock learns to ask, “What has God said?” Crowds are drawn by events. Flocks are shaped by truth. Crowds can be moved for a moment. Flocks are led over time.

This distinction helps the preacher evaluate ministry honestly. A sermon may generate a powerful response without producing lasting obedience. People may applaud a point they never apply. The goal is not to suppress emotion, but to connect emotion to truth and truth to discipleship.

A full room is not the same as a fed flock.

Metrics That Matter

Attendance is one metric, not the only metric. The church must also ask: Are people coming to faith? Are believers growing in biblical understanding? Are marriages being strengthened? Are sins being confessed? Are members serving? Are the poor being cared for? Are young believers being disciplined? Are

members enduring hardship with hope? Is the church producing mature leaders?

These outcomes are harder to display on a screen, but they reveal whether ministry is forming people or merely attracting them.

The Danger of Feeding the Crowd's Appetite

A crowd can pressure the preacher to give it what it wants. Paul warned of a time when people would gather teachers according to their own desires. The faithful preacher listens to the congregation's questions and pain, but does not surrender the menu to the congregation's preferences.

Children may request candy for dinner. Love does not grant every request. The shepherd must distinguish between felt needs and deepest needs. People may feel they need constant affirmation when they actually need repentance. They may feel they need a quick answer when they need patient endurance. They may feel they need a promise of ease when they need a theology of suffering.

Jesus Sometimes Thinned the Crowd

Some of Jesus' teachings caused listeners to turn away. He did not alter truth to protect attendance. This does not excuse harshness, arrogance, or careless communication. It does remind us that faithfulness cannot be measured solely by positive reaction.

The preacher should remove unnecessary offense but cannot remove the offense of the cross. We must speak truth with love, clarity, patience, and humility, while recognizing that some truths confront cherished idols.

Turn Gatherings into Formation

Every gathering should contribute to the formation of a people who know God, love one another, serve their neighbors, resist falsehood, and follow Christ. The sermon is central but not isolated. Small groups, classes, conversations, family

discipleship, music, prayer, and service should reinforce the Word.

When the church becomes a flock, people are known, not merely counted. They are cared for, corrected, equipped, and sent. They learn not only to receive ministry but to become ministers.

The Shepherd's Principle

Faithful ministry does not merely gather hearers; it forms followers who recognize and obey the voice of Christ.

For Reflection and Ministry Practice

9. Which ministry metrics currently receive the most attention in your church?
10. What evidence of spiritual formation can you identify beyond attendance?
11. Where might fear of losing a crowd be softening necessary truth?
12. How can the sermon connect more intentionally to discipleship during the week?

CHAPTER 4

Shepherds, Hirelings, and Performers

*“The good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep. —
John 10:11, KJV”*

Jesus offered one of the sharpest contrasts in ministry when He distinguished the good shepherd from the hireling. The hireling performs a task while conditions remain favorable. When danger arrives, he protects himself first. The shepherd remains because the sheep matter more than his convenience.

Ministry exposes motives. Public success can hide selfish ambition for a season, but pressure reveals whether a leader loves the flock, loves the platform, or merely loves what the platform provides.

The Shepherd

The shepherd knows the sheep, seeks the wandering, protects the vulnerable, tends the wounded, and leads toward nourishment. Biblical shepherding includes tenderness and courage. The same staff that guides may also defend.

A shepherd does not preach only to display knowledge. He studies because actual people must live on Monday with what he says on Sunday. He remembers that the grieving widow, tempted teenager, exhausted parent, recovering addict, confused skeptic, and mature saint are all listening.

The Hireling

The hireling asks first, “What will this cost me?” He serves when the reward is visible, the criticism is low, and the arrangement is beneficial. Because the sheep are not truly loved, they become replaceable.

Hireling ministry may appear polished. The issue is not presentation but devotion. A person can be gifted and still be governed by self-interest. The danger is greatest when the

preacher begins to believe that the ministry exists to sustain his image.

The Performer

The performer treats the pulpit as a stage and the congregation as an audience. Every moment must land. Every story must impress. Every response must validate. The performer may accidentally feed people, but feeding is not the controlling aim.

Performance enters preaching when delivery becomes detached from truth and character. Excellence is not the enemy. Preparation, vocal discipline, clear structure, memorable language, and appropriate emotion can serve the Word. Performance begins when these become tools for self-exaltation.

The goal is not to become less effective. The goal is to become effective for the right reason.

The Shepherd's Test

Ask what happens when no one applauds. Ask what happens when faithfulness reduces popularity. Ask whether the preacher can rejoice when another minister is honored. Ask whether private prayer matches public passion. Ask whether difficult people are still treated as souls rather than obstacles.

No minister passes every test perfectly. The purpose is not condemnation but examination. Shepherds need grace, correction, rest, accountability, and continual renewal.

Recovering the Shepherd's Heart

The shepherd's heart is recovered by returning to Christ. We remember that we were sheep before we were shepherds. We were lost, found, carried, corrected, cleansed, and fed. Ministry becomes gentler when grace is remembered and braver when the Chief Shepherd is trusted.

The Shepherd's Principle

The preacher's deepest ministry identity is not celebrity, entrepreneur, or performer, but under-shepherd of Jesus Christ.

For Reflection and Ministry Practice

13. What pressures tempt you toward performance rather than shepherding?
14. How do you respond when faithful preaching receives little visible affirmation?
15. Who has permission to question your motives and methods?
16. What practice would help you know and carry the actual burdens of your congregation?

CHAPTER 5

The Pulpit Is Not a Stage

“For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord. — 2 Corinthians 4:5, KJV”

A stage exists to display the person standing upon it. A pulpit exists to display the Word resting upon it. The difference is more than furniture. It is theology.

The pulpit symbolizes submission. The preacher stands beneath the authority of Scripture, not above it. He does not arrive to offer private opinions baptized in religious language. He comes as a messenger responsible to say what the King has said.

When the Pulpit Becomes a Stage

The pulpit becomes a stage when the preacher’s personality overwhelms the text, when stories consume the sermon, when controversy is manufactured for attention, when vulnerable people are used as material, or when every service is designed around the leader’s image.

It also becomes a stage when preaching is evaluated only by immediate reaction. The preacher begins chasing louder responses, sharper lines, more dramatic moments, and more shareable clips. Eventually the sermon is constructed backward from the desired reaction rather than forward from the meaning of the text.

A sermon is not successful because the room reacted. It is successful when the Word was faithfully proclaimed and rightly received.

The Proper Place of Personality

God does not erase personality. Peter did not sound like Paul, and Paul did not sound like John. Culture, vocabulary, rhythm,

humor, testimony, and temperament all influence delivery. The problem is not having a personality. The problem is making personality the authority.

Faithful preaching allows the preacher's humanity to serve the message. The preacher can be warm, funny, intense, reflective, poetic, conversational, or celebratory. But every gift must bow before the text.

The Sacred Weight of the Moment

Whenever Scripture is opened before the congregation, eternal realities are present. God is addressed. Christ is proclaimed. Sin and grace are named. Souls are summoned. The suffering seek hope. The confused seek light. The comfortable may need awakening.

This sacred weight should not produce stiffness, but sobriety. The preacher can smile, laugh, and celebrate while still recognizing that the pulpit is not a playground for ego.

Let the Text Have the Last Word

One practical test is simple: if the memorable lines, stories, and illustrations were removed, would the congregation still understand the text? Could listeners explain the passage's main claim? Could they identify how it points to Christ and what obedience it requires?

Another test concerns proportion. How much of the sermon explains Scripture, and how much is detached commentary? A sermon may begin with a verse and never return to it. That is not biblical preaching; it is a speech with a scriptural launchpad.

Descending from the Pulpit

The preacher should leave the pulpit smaller in the people's eyes and Christ larger. The goal is not that they say, "What a preacher," but that they see more clearly, "What a Savior."

That does not mean people will never appreciate skill. Gratitude is natural. Yet the faithful preacher redirects praise,

refuses to feed celebrity culture, and remembers that the treasure is carried in an earthen vessel.

The Shepherd's Principle

The preacher's gifts should make the truth clearer, never make the preacher greater than the truth.

For Reflection and Ministry Practice

17. Review your last three sermons: how much time was spent explaining the text?
18. Which parts were designed primarily to produce reaction?
19. Could a listener summarize the biblical claim without repeating your illustrations?
20. What would it look like for Christ to become more visible and the preacher less central?

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CHAPTER 6

The Preacher as Steward, Not Owner

“Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful. — 1 Corinthians 4:2, KJV”

A steward manages what belongs to another. That single truth destroys the illusion that the church, the pulpit, the people, the message, or the ministry belongs to the preacher. Everything has been entrusted. Nothing has been surrendered into our ownership.

Paul described ministers as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. A steward does not alter the master’s instructions to increase personal comfort. He does not hide provisions from the household, nor distribute them according to favoritism. He administers faithfully what has been placed in his care.

The Message Is Entrusted, Not Invented

The gospel is received before it is proclaimed. The preacher does not stand over Scripture as an editor deciding which portions remain useful. He stands under Scripture as a servant charged to announce the King’s Word.

This is why faithfulness must govern relevance. The preacher should labor to communicate truth in language people understand, but never reshape truth into something the age will applaud. Relevance is not achieved by changing the message. It is achieved by showing how the unchanging message addresses the real questions, sins, wounds, fears, and hopes of the present moment.

We are free to change the plate, but we are not free to change the food.

The People Are Entrusted

Pastors often speak of “my church” or “my people.” Such language can express affection, but it can also quietly reveal possession. The congregation is Christ’s. He purchased the Church with His blood. The pastor is accountable for how Christ’s people are taught, protected, corrected, and loved.

This accountability should produce both courage and tenderness. Courage, because the steward must give the household what the Master commands. Tenderness, because the people are not objects in a ministry system; they are souls for whom Christ died.

The Gifts Are Entrusted

Voice, intellect, imagination, leadership, memory, education, testimony, cultural fluency, and opportunity are gifts. They are not proof of superiority. The steward must develop them diligently and deploy them humbly.

Neglect is not humility. A preacher who refuses to study, prepare, learn, or improve is not being spiritual; he is mishandling what has been entrusted. Excellence becomes worship when it is offered to God rather than used to magnify self.

Results Belong to God

Stewardship also protects the preacher from carrying a burden God never assigned. We are responsible for faithfulness, not sovereignty. We can prepare, preach, pray, plead, and love, but only God gives growth.

This truth keeps success from making us proud and difficulty from making us despair. Visible results matter, but they are not the final judge of obedience. Some faithful sermons produce immediate response. Others become seed that germinates years later.

The Final Accounting

Every steward eventually gives an account. The preacher will not be asked whether he matched another minister's platform. He will be asked whether he was faithful with the truth, people, opportunities, and gifts entrusted to him.

The coming judgment of Christ should not create panic in the faithful servant. It should create holy seriousness. The aim is to hear the Master say, "Well done."

The Shepherd's Principle

The ministry becomes healthier when the preacher remembers that everything is entrusted and nothing is possessed.

For Reflection and Ministry Practice

21. Where has ownership language shaped your ministry more than stewardship language?
22. Which entrusted gift currently needs greater discipline and development?
23. Are there portions of Scripture you are tempted to withhold from the household?
24. What would faithfulness look like even if visible growth remained slow?

PART II

THE WORD WE PREACH

Recovering confidence in the authority, truthfulness, sufficiency, and governing power of Scripture.

CHAPTER 7

The Authority of Scripture

“All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable. — 2 Timothy 3:16, KJV”

Every sermon answers an authority question, even when the preacher never mentions it. Why should the congregation believe what is being said? Is the final authority the preacher’s experience, personality, education, tradition, political instinct, cultural preference, or the written Word of God?

Biblical preaching begins with the confession that Scripture speaks with authority because God speaks through Scripture. The Bible is not merely a collection of religious reflections about God. It is the God-breathed Word by which the Church is taught, corrected, trained, and equipped.

Authority Is Received

The preacher does not create authority through volume, title, clothing, vocabulary, or emotional force. Authority is borrowed from the text. When the preacher accurately explains and

applies Scripture, he speaks with a weight greater than personal opinion. When he departs from Scripture, the authority disappears no matter how impressive the delivery remains.

The preacher is authoritative only where the preacher is biblical.

Scripture Judges the Church

The Church does not sit in judgment over the Bible as though each generation may approve or reject its teaching. Scripture judges the Church. It examines our doctrine, worship, leadership, ethics, priorities, and practices.

This is especially important when tradition becomes powerful. Traditions can serve faithfulness, but they are not infallible. “We have always done it this way” cannot settle a biblical question. The reforming question is always, “What has God said?”

Authority and Humility

Scriptural authority should never produce pastoral arrogance. The preacher is also under the Word. Before the sermon confronts the congregation, it must confront the preacher. Before the preacher calls others to repent, he must submit his own assumptions, habits, and desires to the text.

A humble preacher can say, “I was wrong.” He can revise an interpretation when careful study requires it. Submission to Scripture is stronger than attachment to one’s own past statements.

Authority in a Suspicious Age

Many hearers have been harmed by leaders who used the Bible as a weapon for control. The answer is not to weaken biblical authority, but to distinguish God’s authority from abusive leadership. Scripture does not authorize manipulation, secrecy, exploitation, or unquestionable human power.

Healthy authority is transparent, accountable, Christlike, and sacrificial. It opens the text so people can see the basis of the claim. It encourages Berean examination rather than demanding blind loyalty.

The Authority to Comfort

Authority is not only confrontational. A promise comforts because God has spoken. Forgiveness can be announced because God has spoken. Hope in suffering, assurance in Christ, and courage before death rest not on the preacher's optimism but on the trustworthy Word of God.

When biblical authority returns to the pulpit, the congregation learns to build life on something firmer than mood, trend, or personality.

The Shepherd's Principle

The power of preaching is not that a strong personality has spoken, but that God's Word has been faithfully opened.

For Reflection and Ministry Practice

25. What sources function as practical authorities in your preaching?
26. How does your sermon demonstrate that its claims arise from the text?
27. Where might tradition need to be reexamined under Scripture?
28. How can you exercise biblical authority without encouraging personal dependency?

CHAPTER 8

Inspiration, Truth, and Trustworthiness

*“Holy men of God spake as they were moved by
the Holy Ghost. — 2 Peter 1:21, KJV”*

The doctrine of inspiration explains why Scripture can carry divine authority while being written through human authors. God did not erase personality, history, vocabulary, genre, or circumstance. He worked through them so that what was written communicates what He intended.

This means the Bible is fully human in expression and fully divine in origin. Moses sounds like Moses. David sounds like David. Luke writes differently from John. Yet through these real authors, the Holy Spirit gave the Church trustworthy Scripture.

Inspiration Is More Than Religious Genius

Biblical writers were not merely unusually insightful people describing profound spiritual experiences. Scripture claims a divine source. “God-breathed” means the written Word proceeds from God and therefore carries His truthfulness.

If inspiration is reduced to human brilliance, the preacher becomes free to accept what seems useful and dismiss what seems difficult. But if God has spoken, careful listening becomes an act of worship.

Truth and the Character of God

The trustworthiness of Scripture is connected to the character of God. God does not lie. His Word is true. This does not remove the need for interpretation, nor does it deny the presence of poetry, symbolism, parable, hyperbole, narrative perspective, and other literary forms. Truthful reading requires reading each text according to what kind of text it is.

Taking the Bible seriously does not mean reading every sentence woodenly. It means reading every sentence faithfully.

Difficulties Are Invitations to Study

Apparent tensions, cultural distance, unfamiliar customs, and hard passages should not be hidden from the congregation. They should be studied with patience. Many difficulties arise because readers ignore context, genre, language, or the progressive unfolding of revelation.

The preacher does not need to pretend every question is simple. Honest faith can acknowledge complexity while maintaining confidence in God's Word. The pulpit should model careful trust rather than fragile defensiveness.

Trustworthiness and Pastoral Care

People bring Scripture into hospital rooms, courtrooms, funerals, marriages, temptations, and private crises. If the Bible is merely inspiring literature, its comfort depends on the reader's preference. If it is the trustworthy Word of God, its promises can support the soul when every visible support collapses.

The Preacher's Responsibility

Because Scripture is inspired, handling it carelessly is serious. Misquotation, distorted context, invented meanings, and manipulative promises are not minor technical errors. They misrepresent God.

The faithful preacher therefore studies grammar, history, context, theology, and genre. This labor is not academic vanity. It is reverence. We study carefully because God has spoken and people must hear Him accurately.

Confidence Without Carelessness

Confidence in Scripture should create courage in proclamation and discipline in interpretation. The preacher can

speaking boldly, but only after listening carefully. Certainty must arise from the text, not from temperament.

The Shepherd's Principle

The doctrine of inspiration calls the preacher to confident proclamation and careful interpretation at the same time.

For Reflection and Ministry Practice

29. How would you explain inspiration to a new believer?
30. Do you tend to avoid difficult passages or address them honestly?
31. Which interpretive skills need strengthening in your study process?
32. Where have you confused confidence in God's Word with confidence in your first interpretation?

CHAPTER 9

The Sufficiency of the Bible

*“That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly
furnished unto all good works. — 2 Timothy 3:17,
KJV”*

To say Scripture is sufficient is not to say it contains every fact about every subject. It does not teach automobile repair, advanced mathematics, or how to configure a computer network. Sufficiency means Scripture gives everything necessary for knowing God, receiving salvation, understanding His moral will, and living faithfully before Him.

The Church does not need a new gospel, a secret revelation, or a fashionable philosophy to complete what God forgot to provide. Scripture is sufficient for the mission and formation of God’s people.

Sufficient Does Not Mean Shallow

Some churches affirm sufficiency in theory while neglecting the Bible in practice. A verse is read, then the real authority becomes motivational psychology, cultural commentary, leadership slogans, or the preacher’s personal story.

Useful knowledge from history, science, counseling, sociology, and experience can illuminate human life. But such sources must remain servants, not masters. They can help describe a problem; Scripture must govern our understanding of God, sin, redemption, holiness, and hope.

**The Bible need not answer every question to
remain the final authority for the questions
it was given to answer.**

The Attraction of Secret Knowledge

People are often drawn to claims that God has revealed something new, hidden, exclusive, or unavailable to ordinary believers. Secret knowledge makes the teacher appear necessary. Biblical sufficiency makes the Word central and the teacher accountable.

The Holy Spirit genuinely guides, convicts, comforts, and applies truth. But the Spirit does not contradict the Scripture He inspired. Impressions must be tested. Prophetic claims must be weighed. No private word outranks the written Word.

Sufficiency and the Real World

Sufficiency does not make the preacher simplistic about trauma, mental illness, economics, medicine, abuse, or social complexity. It means the preacher brings these realities under a biblical vision of creation, fall, redemption, wisdom, justice, community, and hope.

A wise pastor may refer someone to a physician, counselor, attorney, or specialist. Doing so does not deny Scripture's sufficiency. It recognizes different forms of expertise while refusing to let any discipline redefine the gospel or human nature contrary to God's Word.

The Exhaustion of Novelty

When the Bible is treated as insufficient, the preacher must constantly produce something new to maintain attention. This creates exhaustion. The ordinary means of grace begin to feel ordinary in the worst sense.

Recovering sufficiency frees the preacher to trust repeated truth. The gospel remains powerful. Prayer remains necessary. Scripture remains living. The Lord's Table remains meaningful. The Church does not need to be embarrassed by the means Christ appointed.

Fully Equipped

Paul taught that Scripture equips the servant of God for every good work. The faithful ministry of the Word forms conviction, character, wisdom, endurance, worship, and mission. The preacher's task is not to improve the divine equipment but to use it faithfully.

The Shepherd's Principle

Scripture is sufficient not because it addresses everything exhaustively, but because it provides everything necessary for faithfulness to God.

For Reflection and Ministry Practice

33. Which outside sources most often displace Scripture in your sermons?
34. How do you distinguish helpful insight from governing authority?
35. Are claims of private revelation being tested biblically in your ministry?
36. What ordinary biblical means have you been tempted to treat as inadequate?

CHAPTER 10

The Bible Jesus Used

“Beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself. — Luke 24:27, KJV”

Jesus loved, trusted, quoted, obeyed, and fulfilled the Scriptures. The Bible of His earthly ministry was what Christians call the Old Testament. He treated its words as the Word of God, appealed to it in temptation, used it in controversy, read it in worship, and interpreted His mission through it.

This matters because many churches functionally preach as though the Bible begins in Matthew. The Old Testament is occasionally visited for heroic stories, seasonal references, or dramatic miracles, but its theology, covenant structure, wisdom, prophecy, law, worship, and expectation remain largely unexplored.

Jesus Read the Whole Story

On the road to Emmaus, Jesus did not offer discouraged disciples a detached inspirational thought. He walked them through Moses and the Prophets and showed how the Scriptures pointed to Him. Their hearts burned because the whole story was opened around the person and work of Christ.

The preacher must learn to read individual passages within the unfolding drama of creation, fall, promise, covenant, kingdom, exile, redemption, and new creation. This keeps sermons from becoming isolated moral lessons.

The Old Testament is not a collection of unrelated stories. It is the unfolding story that prepares the way for Christ.

More Than Finding Hidden References

Christ-centered interpretation does not require forcing Jesus into every detail. Not every tent peg symbolizes the cross. Faithful preaching honors the original meaning of the text and then traces its place within the larger biblical story fulfilled in Christ.

A passage may point to Christ through promise, pattern, office, sacrifice, kingdom, wisdom, failure, longing, or contrast. Adam, Israel, the priesthood, kingship, temple, sacrifice, exodus, and exile all contribute to the vocabulary by which the New Testament explains Jesus.

Jesus and the Law

Jesus did not treat the law as an embarrassment. He fulfilled it, exposed shallow readings of it, and revealed its deepest intention. The preacher must avoid both legalism and lawlessness. The law cannot save, but it reveals God's holiness, exposes sin, orders covenant life, and points to the need for grace.

Jesus and the Prophets

The prophets confronted idolatry, injustice, empty worship, covenant unfaithfulness, and false security. They also announced restoration, a coming King, a new covenant, the Spirit, and the reign of God. Their voices are urgently relevant when preached in context and fulfilled in Christ.

Jesus and the Wisdom Writings

Psalms, Proverbs, Job, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs address worship, suffering, desire, work, speech, justice, mortality, relationships, and the fear of the Lord. They train the congregation to live skillfully in God's world while longing for the wisdom found perfectly in Christ.

Recovering the Bible Jesus Used

A church that neglects the Old Testament loses theological depth. It cannot fully understand the cross without sacrifice, Jesus' kingship without David, redemption without exodus, covenant without Abraham, new creation without Genesis, or the Day of the Lord without the prophets.

The whole Bible belongs to the whole Church.

The Shepherd's Principle

To preach Christ fully, the preacher must learn to read and proclaim the Scriptures that prepared the world to recognize Him.

For Reflection and Ministry Practice

37. What percentage of your annual preaching comes from the Old Testament?
38. Do your Old Testament sermons become moral lessons or connect to the biblical story?
39. Which Old Testament section are you least prepared to preach?
40. Plan one series that helps the congregation understand a major biblical theme across both Testaments.

CHAPTER 11

Why the Text Must Govern the Sermon

“Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season. — 2 Timothy 4:2, KJV”

A sermon may contain Scripture without being governed by Scripture. The distinction is crucial. In a text-governed sermon, the passage determines the main claim, structure, emphasis, tone, and application. In a preacher-governed sermon, the passage is recruited to support a message already chosen.

The first approach listens. The second uses. The first asks, “What is God saying here?” The second asks, “Can I find a verse that helps me say what I want?”

The Main Point of the Text

Every passage contributes something specific in its context. The preacher’s first task is to identify that central burden. What is the author doing? Encouraging? Warning? Explaining? Commanding? Lamenting? Celebrating? Correcting? Narrating?

The sermon’s central idea should faithfully restate the text’s central idea for the present congregation. Creativity belongs in expression, but not in replacing the passage’s meaning.

**The sermon has no right to make the text say
what the text does not say.**

Structure Should Serve Meaning

Three points and a poem are not required by heaven. Some texts unfold as argument, story, contrast, movement, lament, vision, dialogue, or command. The sermon structure should help listeners follow the passage rather than forcing every passage into the same mold.

This does not mean structure is unimportant. Clear organization is pastoral kindness. It means the structure arises from the text and serves comprehension.

Emphasis Must Be Proportional

Preachers often become fascinated by a minor detail and build the sermon around it while neglecting the author's main concern. A useful interpretive rule is to emphasize what the text emphasizes and subordinate what the text subordinates.

This guards against speculative preaching. Silence in the text should not become certainty in the pulpit. Imagination can help listeners enter a scene, but it must be clearly distinguished from revelation.

Tone Matters

The text also governs tone. A lament should not be preached as comedy. A warning should not be softened into vague encouragement. A celebration should not sound like a lecture. A pastoral appeal should not be delivered as a threat.

Tone is part of meaning. Faithful delivery seeks to reproduce the emotional and moral force of the passage.

Application Must Grow from the Text

Application answers how this truth confronts belief, affection, behavior, relationships, worship, and hope. It should not be a generic moral added at the end. The applications must be legitimate consequences of the passage's meaning within the gospel.

Freedom Through Submission

Some preachers fear text-governed preaching will limit creativity. In reality, it frees the preacher from the exhausting demand to invent. Every passage provides a world of truth, tension, beauty, doctrine, and application. Submission does not make sermons lifeless. It gives them substance.

The Shepherd's Principle

The text must not merely appear in the sermon; it must control what the sermon says and how the sermon says it.

For Reflection and Ministry Practice

41. Can you state the main point of your next text in one clear sentence?
42. Does your outline follow the movement of the passage?
43. Have you given a minor detail more weight than the author does?
44. Does the tone of your delivery match the tone of the text?

CHAPTER 12

The Danger of Using Scripture as Decoration

*“Making the word of God of none effect through
your tradition. — Mark 7:13, KJV”*

Decoration is present but not controlling. A framed verse may hang on a wall without shaping the life of the house. In the same way, Scripture can appear in a sermon while having little influence over its content.

The preacher reads a verse, closes the Bible, and proceeds for forty minutes with stories, opinions, slogans, grievances, and predictions. The congregation leaves saying the message was biblical because the service included a text. But the text functioned as decoration.

The Launchpad Sermon

In a launchpad sermon, the verse provides an opening phrase from which the preacher launches into a preferred subject. The sermon may be energetic and even contain true statements, but listeners never learn what the passage means in context.

This habit teaches the church to misuse Scripture. Members imitate what they observe, quoting fragments without context to support whatever they already believe.

**A Bible verse at the beginning does not make
everything that follows a biblical sermon.**

The Slogan Sermon

Slogans are memorable, but they can compress truth until it becomes distorted. “Name it and claim it,” “Your season is now,” or “You are next” may generate excitement while bypassing repentance, providence, suffering, wisdom, and the sovereignty of God.

Memorable language should summarize biblical truth, not substitute for it. A phrase should be tested by the passage, the whole canon, and the gospel.

The Testimony-Heavy Sermon

Testimony can glorify God and connect truth to life. Yet personal experience is not self-interpreting. What happened to the preacher is not automatically a promise to every hearer.

When testimony dominates, the congregation may learn more about the preacher's victories than about Christ's finished work. The preacher's story should point beyond itself and remain subordinate to Scripture.

The Political Proof-Text

Scripture is also decorated when verses are selected merely to bless a political tribe, condemn opponents, or baptize a policy platform without careful biblical reasoning. The Word must confront every party, ideology, race, class, and nation. It belongs to no campaign.

The Promise Without Context

One of the most common forms of decoration is the isolated promise. A statement given to a particular person or covenant community is lifted from context and guaranteed to every listener in precisely the same form. When the promised outcome fails, people blame themselves or God.

Faithful preaching explains who is speaking, to whom, under what covenant, in what situation, and how the promise relates to Christ and the Church.

Returning Substance to the Sermon

The cure is simple to state and demanding to practice: keep the Bible open. Read the paragraph, not merely the fragment. Explain the context. Trace the argument. Define important words. Show the theological connection. Apply the actual claim.

The congregation should be able to look down at the page and see why the preacher is saying what he is saying. This visibility builds trust and trains people to read Scripture for themselves.

The End of Part Two

The preacher has now been called to feed as steward under the authority of inspired, trustworthy, sufficient Scripture. The next task is to embrace the whole counsel of God, refusing to serve only the portions that are easiest, safest, or most popular.

The Shepherd's Principle

Scripture must be the substance of the sermon, not religious decoration around the preacher's preferred message.

For Reflection and Ministry Practice

45. How often does your sermon leave the immediate context of the passage?
46. Which personal stories could be shortened so the text can become clearer?
47. Are any favorite slogans stronger than their biblical support?
48. What steps will keep the Bible visibly and functionally open throughout the sermon?

PART III

THE WHOLE COUNSEL OF GOD

Preaching the full message of Scripture without subtraction, distortion, or imbalance.

CHAPTER 13

What Paul Meant in Acts 20

“Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men. For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God. — Acts 20:26–27, KJV”

Paul’s farewell to the Ephesian elders is one of the clearest portraits of responsible ministry in the New Testament. He speaks as a man who understands that preaching carries moral weight. He had not merely visited, inspired, and moved on. He had taught publicly and from house to house, warned with tears, endured opposition, and refused to hold back what the people needed.

His claim that he had declared “all the counsel of God” does not mean he had preached every verse of Scripture in a single sermon or exhausted every doctrine. It means he had not selectively edited God’s message to protect himself, please the hearers, or avoid difficult consequences.

The Courage Not to Withhold

The phrase “I have not shunned” reveals temptation. There were truths Paul could have avoided. Some teachings would provoke resistance. Some would confront idols. Some would expose sin. Some would require sacrifice. Yet Paul refused to let fear determine the boundaries of his preaching.

Every preacher faces the same pressure. It may come from influential members, denominational culture, political tension, personal friendships, financial concerns, social media reaction, or the desire to be regarded as compassionate. The pressure is not always to preach falsehood. Often it is simply to remain silent where Scripture speaks.

**Faithfulness is measured not only by what
the preacher says, but also by what the
preacher refuses to omit.**

Counsel Means the Purpose and Plan of God

The whole counsel of God includes the broad purpose of God revealed across Scripture: creation, fall, covenant, redemption, Christ, the Church, mission, judgment, resurrection, and the renewal of all things. It includes God's character, human sin, saving grace, holy living, Christian community, suffering, hope, and eternity.

A whole-counsel preacher does not reduce Christianity to a few favorite themes. The Bible is not merely a collection of inspirational sayings. It is the unfolding revelation of the living God and His redemptive work.

A Ministry That Can Say, "I Warned You"

Paul's language about being innocent of blood echoes the watchman imagery of Ezekiel. The preacher is not responsible for forcing every hearer to obey, but is responsible for making the warning clear. Silence can become a form of pastoral negligence.

This does not authorize angry or reckless preaching. Paul warned with tears. His courage was joined to compassion. He did not enjoy announcing judgment. He loved people enough to tell them the truth.

Teaching Publicly and Personally

Paul's whole-counsel ministry occurred in both public gatherings and personal settings. The pulpit is central, but it cannot carry the entire burden alone. Churches need classes, conversations, mentoring, small groups, family discipleship, and pastoral care that reinforce biblical truth.

The Goal Is a Clear Conscience

No preacher will finish ministry having said everything perfectly. Yet the goal is to serve with a clear conscience: no deliberate distortion, no fearful omission, no secret agenda, and no refusal to address what God has made plain.

The Shepherd's Principle

The whole counsel of God is not everything the preacher wants to say; it is everything the congregation needs to hear from the full witness of Scripture.

For Reflection and Ministry Practice

49. Which biblical subjects have received little attention in your preaching during the last two years?
50. Where do you feel pressure to remain silent even though Scripture speaks clearly?
51. How can difficult truth be delivered with Paul's combination of courage and tears?
52. Create a list of major biblical themes that your congregation should understand within the next year.

CHAPTER 14

Preaching Grace Without Erasing Holiness

“For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly. — Titus 2:11–12, KJV”

Grace is the heart of the gospel. We are not saved by moral achievement, religious performance, family background, or personal improvement. Salvation is God’s gift in Christ. Yet biblical grace is never permission to remain unchanged.

Titus teaches that grace not only pardons; grace trains. The same grace that receives the sinner begins disciplining the saint. It teaches us to say no to ungodliness and yes to a life shaped by the character of God.

Cheap Grace and Crushing Legalism

The church often swings between two distortions. Cheap grace announces forgiveness without transformation. Crushing legalism demands transformation without sustaining grace. One minimizes sin. The other minimizes Christ.

Faithful preaching refuses both errors. It tells the truth about sin without suggesting that sinners can repair themselves. It magnifies grace without suggesting that repentance and holiness are optional.

Grace does not lower God’s standard; grace brings us into Christ and teaches us to walk in a new way.

Holiness Is Not a Denominational Personality

Holiness is sometimes treated as the specialty of certain traditions, generations, or cultural styles. Scripture treats

holiness as the calling of every believer. It concerns the whole person: desires, speech, relationships, money, sexuality, work, worship, integrity, justice, mercy, and love.

Preachers should not reduce holiness to a short list of visible behaviors while ignoring pride, greed, cruelty, dishonesty, racism, bitterness, or exploitation. Selective holiness creates self-righteousness rather than Christlikeness.

Preach the Order of the Gospel

The order matters. We do not become holy in order to make God save us. We are saved by grace, united to Christ, indwelt by the Spirit, and called to live out the new identity we have received.

Imperatives must therefore grow from indicatives. The preacher should show what God has done before demanding what believers must do. Obedience is not payment for grace. It is the fruit of grace.

Specific Application

General calls to ‘do better’ rarely produce clear obedience. The text should be applied specifically. What does holiness require in the workplace, the marriage, the phone, the bank account, the private imagination, the treatment of enemies, and the use of power?

Specificity must be pastoral rather than intrusive. The preacher applies the Word to real life without using the pulpit to settle personal disputes or publicly embarrass individuals.

Hope for the Struggling Believer

Holiness preaching must leave room for process, repentance, restoration, and the patient work of God. Some believers hear every command as evidence that they are beyond hope. The preacher must distinguish between the believer who is battling sin and the person who has made peace with sin.

The call to holiness is not an announcement that grace has ended. It is evidence that grace is active.

The Shepherd's Principle

True grace forgives the guilty, transforms the willing, disciplines the wandering, and forms the believer into the likeness of Christ.

For Reflection and Ministry Practice

53. Does your preaching emphasize pardon more than transformation, or transformation more than pardon?
54. Which dimensions of holiness are often ignored in your ministry context?
55. How can you ground moral instruction more clearly in the finished work of Christ?
56. Choose one command from Scripture and write an application that is specific, gracious, and actionable.

CHAPTER 15

Preaching Love Without Silencing Judgment

*“Behold therefore the goodness and severity of
God. — Romans 11:22, KJV”*

The Bible does not force us to choose between the love of God and the judgment of God. It reveals both. God’s judgment is not an embarrassment to be hidden behind softer language, and God’s love is not a sentimental weakness that cancels holiness.

Many modern hearers assume love means unconditional approval. Scripture presents love as holy commitment to the true good of another. Because God loves, He warns. Because God is just, evil will not reign forever. Because God is merciful, He provides salvation in Christ.

The God We Are Not Authorized to Edit

Preachers can be tempted to present only the attributes of God their listeners find acceptable. One ministry emphasizes wrath until grace disappears. Another emphasizes kindness until accountability disappears. Both construct a god smaller than the God of Scripture.

Whole-counsel preaching allows each text to speak in its proper force while locating it within the full revelation of God.

**A God who never judges evil cannot finally
comfort its victims.**

Judgment Is Good News to the Oppressed

For those who suffer injustice, judgment means God sees, God cares, and God will act. The biblical hope of judgment declares that cruelty, violence, exploitation, and hidden evil will not receive the last word.

Judgment should therefore be preached not with personal vindictiveness but with moral seriousness. The preacher stands under the same judgment and survives only by mercy.

Jesus Spoke of Judgment

Christ spoke repeatedly of accountability, separation, loss, and final judgment. It is impossible to claim to preach Jesus faithfully while erasing themes Jesus Himself proclaimed.

At the same time, Jesus wept over Jerusalem. He moved toward the cross. He received sinners. Judgment in Christian preaching must lead toward the urgent offer of mercy, not toward the preacher's enjoyment of condemnation.

The Cross Holds Love and Judgment Together

At the cross, sin is not ignored and sinners are not abandoned. The holiness of God and the mercy of God meet in the self-giving sacrifice of Christ. The cross tells us that sin is more serious than we imagine and grace is more costly and wonderful than we deserve.

Avoiding Manipulation

Judgment should never be used to control people through exaggerated threats, fabricated visions, or emotional coercion. The preacher must say what Scripture says, no more and no less.

The aim is conviction leading to repentance and faith, not terror that attaches people to the preacher.

The Shepherd's Principle

Love and judgment are not rival truths. At the cross, God's holy opposition to sin and God's saving love for sinners are revealed together.

For Reflection and Ministry Practice

57. When you preach God's love, do hearers understand His holiness?
58. When you preach judgment, do hearers also see the open door of mercy?
59. How does final judgment bring hope to victims of injustice?
60. Write a gospel invitation that holds together urgency, compassion, accountability, and grace.

CHAPTER 16

Preaching Heaven, Hell, and Eternity

*“And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal. —
Matthew 25:46, KJV”*

Modern life trains people to live as though the immediate moment is everything. Scripture stretches the horizon. Human beings are created for eternity, death is not the end, Christ will return, the dead will be raised, judgment will occur, and every life will stand in relation to God forever.

Preaching eternity does not make the Church less relevant. It places present life in its true proportion.

Heaven Is More Than Escape

Heaven is often reduced to reunion, relief, clouds, or vague peace. The deepest hope of the believer is God Himself. Eternal life is life in the unveiled presence of God, under the reign of Christ, free from sin, death, mourning, and curse.

The Christian hope also includes resurrection and the renewal of creation. Believers are not merely floating spirits. God’s redemptive purpose embraces embodied life and a restored world.

Hell Must Be Handled With Tears

Hell is not material for jokes, threats, or theatrical excess. It is a terrible reality tied to final rejection of God, judgment, exclusion, and loss. Jesus spoke of it plainly, and faithful preachers cannot pretend He did not.

Yet the tone matters. No preacher should speak of eternal loss with delight. We warn because we love, and we plead because Christ saves.

The doctrine of hell should put tears in the preacher's eyes, urgency in the preacher's voice, and mercy in the preacher's invitation.

Eternity Gives Weight to the Present

If eternity is real, then faith, repentance, holiness, justice, evangelism, suffering, sacrifice, and perseverance matter profoundly. Present decisions are not trivial. The hidden life is not hidden forever.

Eternity also comforts. Faithful labor is not wasted. Grief is not permanent. The body's weakness will not have the last word. The believer's future is held by the risen Christ.

Avoid Speculation

Preachers should resist building elaborate claims from uncertain details. Scripture gives enough to produce faith, hope, warning, and worship. Curiosity must not outrun revelation.

Funeral Preaching

Funerals expose whether a church has a theology of death and resurrection. The preacher should comfort the grieving, honor the deceased truthfully, avoid declaring what cannot be known, and clearly proclaim the hope offered in Christ.

Sentiment cannot replace the gospel. Neither should the funeral become a harsh ambush. Truth and tenderness belong together.

The Shepherd's Principle

Eternity enlarges the sermon: it warns the careless, steadies the suffering, comforts the grieving, and fixes the Church's hope upon Christ.

For Reflection and Ministry Practice

61. How often does your preaching address resurrection, judgment, heaven, and hell?
62. Which popular ideas about the afterlife need biblical correction in your congregation?
63. How can eternity be preached without sensationalism?
64. Draft a funeral-sermon framework that is truthful, compassionate, and centered on Christ.

CHAPTER 17

Doctrine Is Not a Dirty Word

“But speak thou the things which become sound doctrine. — Titus 2:1, KJV”

Doctrine simply means teaching. Every sermon teaches something about God, humanity, sin, salvation, the Church, and the Christian life, even when the preacher claims not to be doctrinal. The question is not whether doctrine will be preached, but whether it will be sound.

Some people resist doctrine because they associate it with arguments, arrogance, complexity, or lifeless lectures. Those abuses are real, but the solution to bad doctrine is not no doctrine. It is biblical doctrine taught with clarity, humility, worship, and practical force.

Doctrine Gives the Church a Spine

Without doctrine, believers cannot reliably identify truth, expose error, explain the gospel, interpret suffering, or understand Christian identity. Emotion may motivate for a moment, but doctrine gives endurance.

A church that will not learn doctrine will eventually borrow beliefs from the culture around it.

Doctrine and Devotion Belong Together

Paul’s letters regularly move from truth to life, from theology to practice, from what God has done to how believers should live. Doctrine should produce worship, humility, confidence, obedience, and love.

If doctrine produces only pride, it has been mishandled. If devotion has no doctrinal foundation, it will become unstable.

Teach the Great Truths

Congregations should understand the Trinity, the person and work of Christ, the Holy Spirit, creation, humanity in God's image, sin, atonement, justification, adoption, sanctification, the Church, Scripture, resurrection, judgment, and the return of Christ.

These themes need not be presented in technical language every week. But they should be woven into the regular diet of the Church and periodically taught with deliberate focus.

Define Your Terms

Church language can sound familiar while remaining misunderstood. Words such as grace, faith, glory, salvation, anointing, righteousness, covenant, redemption, and sanctification should be explained rather than assumed.

Clear definition is not showing off. It is pastoral care.

Doctrine Protects Worship

We cannot worship God faithfully while remaining indifferent to who God is. Doctrine guards worship from becoming projection, where we praise an imaginary deity made in our own preferences.

Sound doctrine gives worship content. It tells us why God is worthy, what Christ has accomplished, and what the Spirit is doing.

The Shepherd's Principle

Doctrine is truth arranged for understanding, worship, protection, and faithful living.

For Reflection and Ministry Practice

65. Which core doctrines could most members of your congregation explain clearly?
66. Where has technical language created unnecessary distance?

67. How can your next sermon define one major biblical term without becoming a lecture?
68. Design a twelve-week doctrine series that connects belief to worship and daily life.

CHAPTER 18

The Old Testament Belongs in the Pulpit

*“For whatsoever things were written aforetime
were written for our learning. — Romans 15:4,
KJV”*

The Old Testament makes up the majority of the Christian Bible, yet many congregations hear only a small collection of its stories and Psalms. Neglecting it impoverishes the Church’s understanding of God, Christ, covenant, worship, justice, wisdom, suffering, and hope.

The New Testament assumes the Old Testament. Jesus and the apostles quote it, interpret it, and announce its fulfillment. A church cannot fully understand the gospel while remaining unfamiliar with the Scriptures that prepared its way.

More Than Heroes and Moral Lessons

Old Testament narratives are often reduced to lessons such as ‘be brave like David’ or ‘have faith like Daniel.’ These applications may contain truth, but they can miss the larger theological purpose of the passage.

The central character of Scripture is God. The preacher must ask what the text reveals about God’s character, covenant, judgment, mercy, and redemptive purpose.

Christ in the Old Testament

Christ-centered preaching does not require forcing Jesus into every detail through imaginative allegory. It means locating each passage within the unfolding story that reaches its fulfillment in Christ.

Promises, patterns, offices, sacrifices, covenants, kingship, priesthood, exodus, temple, wisdom, and prophetic hope all contribute to the biblical road leading to Jesus.

The Old Testament is not a warehouse of sermon illustrations; it is the first great movement of the one redemptive story.

Preach the Law Wisely

The law reveals God's holiness, exposes sin, orders covenant life, and prepares the way for the gospel. Preachers must distinguish Israel's covenant context from direct commands to the Church while still drawing legitimate theological and moral instruction.

Careless preaching may bind Christians to commands not given to them or dismiss the law as irrelevant. Careful preaching asks how the text functions in its original covenant and how it is fulfilled and applied in Christ.

The Prophets and the Pursuit of Justice

The prophets confront idolatry, hypocrisy, exploitation, violence, false worship, and corrupt leadership. Their message resists a privatized faith that ignores the treatment of neighbors.

Yet prophetic preaching must remain governed by the text rather than becoming partisan speech. The preacher announces God's standards, not a political party's entire platform.

Wisdom and Worship

Psalms, Proverbs, Job, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs give language for praise, lament, decision-making, suffering, work, relationships, desire, and life's complexity. They help the Church become honest before God.

The Shepherd's Principle

To neglect the Old Testament is to preach the climax while ignoring the story that gives the climax its meaning.

For Reflection and Ministry Practice

69. What percentage of your preaching comes from the Old Testament?
70. Which Old Testament sections have been most neglected?
71. How can you preach Christ from the Old Testament without forcing artificial connections?
72. Select one Old Testament book and plan a faithful introductory series.

CHAPTER 19

Preaching the Difficult Texts

“All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable. — 2 Timothy 3:16, KJV”

Some passages are difficult because their meaning is complex. Others are difficult because their message confronts modern assumptions. Some include violence, judgment, sexuality, slavery, gender, miracles, obscure laws, troubling actions, or historical questions. The temptation is either to avoid them or to handle them carelessly.

If all Scripture is profitable, then difficult texts belong within the Church’s diet. They require greater patience, humility, context, and honesty.

Do Not Pretend the Difficulty Is Not There

Hearers often recognize hard questions even when the preacher ignores them. Dismissing concerns can weaken trust. Faithful preaching names the issue, explains what can be known, distinguishes certainty from interpretation, and refuses false confidence.

**Saying “I do not know” can be more faithful
than offering an impressive answer the text
does not support.**

Context Is Essential

Difficult passages are especially vulnerable to isolation. Historical setting, literary form, covenant context, canonical development, and the passage’s role in the larger argument can transform understanding.

A verse may describe behavior without approving it. A command may address a specific covenant setting. A proverb

may state a general pattern rather than an absolute promise. Genre matters.

Read With the Whole Bible

No passage should be used to overthrow the clear teaching of Scripture elsewhere. The Bible's unity helps interpret individual texts. Later revelation may clarify earlier patterns, and Christ stands at the center of the canon.

Avoid Two Equal Errors

One error is embarrassment that apologizes for Scripture before understanding it. The other is harsh certainty that uses difficult texts as weapons. Faithful preaching is neither ashamed nor cruel.

Prepare Beyond the Sermon

Some difficult subjects require follow-up classes, written resources, question sessions, or personal conversations. A forty-minute sermon cannot settle every issue. The preacher should create pathways for deeper learning.

Protect the Vulnerable

When texts touch abuse, trauma, race, sexuality, marriage, power, or suffering, application must be responsible. The preacher should never use submission, forgiveness, endurance, or authority to protect abusers or silence victims.

Biblical authority is not served by pastoral recklessness.

The Shepherd's Principle

Difficult texts should be approached with courage, context, humility, canonical wisdom, and care for the people who will hear them.

For Reflection and Ministry Practice

73. Which difficult passages have you avoided, and why?

74. What interpretive resources are needed before preaching them?
75. How can you distinguish certainty, probability, and honest uncertainty?
76. What pastoral risks should be considered when applying a difficult text?

CHAPTER 20

A Balanced Diet for the Church

*“I have fed you with milk, and not with meat. — 1
Corinthians 3:2, KJV”*

A healthy congregation requires variety within unity. The Church needs gospel proclamation, doctrinal instruction, moral formation, wisdom, comfort, correction, lament, mission, hope, and worship. One favorite theme cannot carry the entire weight of discipleship.

Some ministries preach victory every week. Others preach condemnation every week. Some focus almost exclusively on family, prophecy, social issues, spiritual warfare, prosperity, or personal success. Even a biblical theme becomes distorting when it crowds out the rest of Scripture.

Milk and Meat

Milk is not bad. New believers need foundations. Mature believers also need reminders of the gospel. The problem in Corinth was not that milk existed, but that prolonged immaturity prevented deeper growth.

The preacher must make deep truth accessible without permanently reducing the congregation’s diet to elementary material.

Balance Across Time

No single sermon can say everything. Balance is achieved across a sustained preaching ministry. A text on comfort need not include every warning. A text on judgment need not contain an entire theology of suffering. But over months and years, the congregation should receive a broad and faithful diet.

**Evaluate the balance of a preaching ministry
by the year, not by demanding that every
sermon become a miniature systematic
theology.**

Diagnose Before Planning

A wise preaching plan considers the biblical text and the actual condition of the congregation. New churches may need foundations. Grieving churches may need lament and hope. Divided churches may need reconciliation. Comfortable churches may need mission and repentance.

Diagnosis must not become captivity to immediate needs. The congregation also needs truths it does not yet know it needs.

Use Multiple Planning Horizons

A yearly plan can ensure broad balance. A quarterly plan can address seasons and church rhythms. Weekly preparation can respond pastorally without losing the long-term direction.

Sequential exposition is especially useful because it forces the preacher to encounter themes that would not be chosen naturally. Topical series can then address doctrines and pastoral needs with deliberate focus.

A Whole-Counsel Grid

Review your preaching across major categories: God, Christ, Spirit, gospel, holiness, Church, mission, relationships, suffering, justice, wisdom, prayer, worship, money, work, sexuality, family, death, resurrection, judgment, and hope.

The grid is not a legalistic scorecard. It is a tool for recognizing blind spots.

Feed the People You Actually Have

Balance also includes age, maturity, education, culture, and life circumstance. The same truth must be explained so that

children can begin, new believers can follow, and mature believers can continue growing.

Clarity and depth are allies. The best meal is both nourishing and edible.

The Shepherd's Principle

A balanced preaching ministry gives the congregation the full range of biblical truth across time, producing believers who are rooted, discerning, holy, hopeful, and ready to serve.

For Reflection and Ministry Practice

77. Review your last twelve months of sermons and identify repeated themes and missing themes.
78. Which doctrines or biblical books should be added to the coming year's plan?
79. How can sequential exposition and topical teaching complement one another?
80. Build a one-year preaching grid that includes gospel, doctrine, holiness, wisdom, mission, suffering, and hope.

PART IV

CHRIST-CENTERED PREACHING

Opening every portion of Scripture in the light of the person, work, reign, and gospel of Jesus Christ.

CHAPTER 21

We Would See Jesus

“Sir, we would see Jesus. — John 12:21, KJV”

The request brought to Philip was simple, direct, and timeless: “Sir, we would see Jesus.” That desire should govern the Christian pulpit. People may enter church carrying grief, guilt, fear, ambition, confusion, anger, disappointment, or hunger. They may be drawn by music, relationship, tradition, crisis, or curiosity. Whatever brings them into the room, the preacher’s highest responsibility is to show them Christ.

To show Christ is not merely to mention His name near the conclusion of a sermon. It is to make His identity, His words, His work, His kingdom, His cross, His resurrection, and His present lordship central to the message.

The Difference Between Mentioning Jesus and Preaching Jesus

A sermon can contain Christian vocabulary without being Christ-centered. Jesus may appear as an example of positive thinking, a helper for personal success, or a religious symbol placed upon a message whose true center is the listener.

Christ-centered preaching asks a deeper question: How does this text reveal the necessity, identity, work, authority, promise, or pattern of Christ within the whole story of redemption?

The preacher has not completed the assignment merely because Jesus was named. The congregation must be helped to see who Jesus is and why He matters.

Christ Is Not a Sermon Accessory

Jesus is not added to make a motivational message sound Christian. He is the Lord before whom every human purpose

must bow. The sermon does not begin with our dreams and then recruit Jesus to support them. It begins with God's revelation and summons us into the life of Christ's kingdom.

This corrects a common distortion. Preaching can become centered on self-esteem, achievement, comfort, relationships, prosperity, or personal destiny. Scripture addresses human life richly, but it does so under the lordship of Christ.

Seeing Jesus Changes the Hearer

In the Gospels, those who truly encountered Jesus were not merely informed. They were exposed, invited, corrected, healed, forgiven, commissioned, and transformed. The rich ruler was confronted. Zacchaeus changed direction. Peter was humbled. Mary worshiped. Thomas confessed. The thief received hope.

Christ-centered preaching therefore refuses to leave Jesus safely admired at a distance. It brings the hearer before His claims.

Show His Beauty and His Authority

Some preaching presents Christ as demanding but not beautiful. Other preaching presents Him as comforting but not commanding. The biblical Christ is both Lamb and King, Savior and Lord, gentle and authoritative, crucified and risen.

The preacher should help people see why Jesus is worthy of trust, worship, obedience, sacrifice, and love.

The Preacher Must First See

A preacher cannot consistently reveal a Christ he rarely contemplates. Study must become worship. The minister should not approach the text merely asking, "What can I say?" but, "What do I see of Christ, and how must I respond?"

When the preacher's own heart is warmed by the glory of Christ, the sermon gains more than information. It carries reverence, wonder, urgency, and affection.

The Shepherd's Principle

The Christian sermon succeeds at its deepest level when people are helped to see, trust, worship, and obey Jesus Christ.

For Reflection and Ministry Practice

81. Review your last five sermons: was Christ central, incidental, or absent?
82. How did each sermon reveal both the beauty and authority of Jesus?
83. Where are you tempted to make the listener rather than Christ the center?
84. Write one sentence stating what your congregation should see about Jesus in your next sermon.

CHAPTER 22

Christ in All the Scriptures

“And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself. — Luke 24:27, KJV”

On the road to Emmaus, the risen Christ taught two discouraged disciples how to read the Bible. Their problem was not lack of information. They knew the recent events. Their problem was interpretation. They did not yet understand how the suffering and glory of the Messiah stood at the center of the scriptural story.

Jesus began with Moses and the Prophets and explained the things concerning Himself. This provides a model for Christian interpretation: every passage must first be understood in its own context, then located within the unfolding redemptive story that reaches its fulfillment in Christ.

One Bible, One Redemptive Story

The Bible contains many books, genres, authors, covenants, settings, and centuries. Yet it bears one unified witness to God’s purpose of redemption. Creation, fall, promise, covenant, sacrifice, kingdom, exile, return, prophecy, incarnation, cross, resurrection, Church, and new creation belong to one great story.

Christ-centered preaching helps the congregation understand where each text stands within that story.

Every text has an address in the biblical story, and every road in that story ultimately leads toward Christ.

Avoiding Forced Allegory

Finding Christ in all Scripture does not mean assigning a hidden meaning to every object. David's five stones do not automatically represent five spiritual principles. The innkeeper in a parable does not necessarily symbolize a church officer. Imagination must remain under textual discipline.

Legitimate connections emerge through promise and fulfillment, covenant development, typology, repeated patterns, divine offices, themes, and explicit New Testament interpretation.

Promises, Patterns, and Offices

Christ fulfills promises made to Abraham and David. He is the true Passover Lamb, the greater Moses, the final High Priest, the righteous King, the suffering Servant, the Son of Man, and the true Temple.

These connections are not clever additions. They arise from the Bible's own language and structure.

The Problem Christ Solves

Many passages reveal the depth of the human problem: sin, idolatry, fear, death, exile, failed leadership, broken covenant, and inability to produce righteousness. Christ-centered preaching shows how the gospel answers what the text exposes.

This does not mean rushing past the passage's original message. The preacher should first let the text speak fully, then trace its place in redemption.

The Gospel Shape of Scripture

Scripture repeatedly displays patterns of judgment and mercy, death and life, bondage and deliverance, exile and return, guilt and cleansing. These patterns prepare the heart to understand the cross and resurrection.

Teaching the Congregation to Read

Christ-centered preaching should not make hearers dependent upon mysterious preacher insight. It should teach them how to follow the Bible's own connections. Over time, members should gain confidence in tracing themes, recognizing fulfillment, and reading each testament in light of the other.

The Shepherd's Principle

**Faithful Christ-centered preaching honors
the original meaning of the text while
locating it within the one redemptive story
fulfilled in Jesus.**

For Reflection and Ministry Practice

85. What legitimate biblical pathway connects your current text to Christ?
86. Are you relying on explicit Scripture, canonical themes, or personal imagination?
87. How does the passage expose a need that the gospel answers?
88. Explain the Christ connection in language a new believer could follow.

CHAPTER 23

The Cross Is More Than a Closing Illustration

*“But we preach Christ crucified. — 1 Corinthians
1:23, KJV”*

The cross is sometimes reserved for the final minutes of a sermon. After the main message has focused on success, relationships, courage, or personal improvement, Calvary is mentioned as a familiar emotional conclusion. Paul’s preaching operated differently. Christ crucified was not decoration. It was the center.

The cross reveals the seriousness of sin, the holiness of God, the depth of divine love, the substitutionary work of Christ, the defeat of evil, the cost of forgiveness, and the pattern of Christian discipleship.

The Cross Explains Grace

Grace is free to the sinner, but it was not cheap. Forgiveness rests upon the self-giving sacrifice of the Son. The preacher should resist language that makes pardon sound like God simply decided sin did not matter.

At Calvary, God does not deny justice. He provides atonement.

The Cross Exposes Human Pride

Paul called the message of the cross foolishness and a stumbling block because it removes boasting. We are not saved because we were wiser, stronger, more moral, or more spiritually sensitive. We are saved by a crucified Messiah.

**At the foot of the cross, every title lowers,
every achievement shrinks, and every
sinner stands in need of grace.**

The Cross Reveals God

The cross is not the angry Father punishing an unwilling Son. Father, Son, and Spirit act in unified saving purpose. Christ gives Himself willingly. The cross reveals the triune God's holy love.

Preaching should avoid careless explanations that divide the persons of the Trinity or portray redemption as divine conflict.

The Cross and Discipleship

Jesus not only died for His people; He called them to take up the cross. Christian discipleship includes self-denial, costly obedience, enemy love, suffering, service, and surrender.

This must not be confused with earning salvation. The disciple carries a cross because Christ first carried the cross that saves.

The Cross and Human Suffering

The cross tells sufferers that God is not distant from pain. In Christ, God enters rejection, injustice, humiliation, violence, abandonment, and death. Yet the cross also warns against treating suffering itself as automatically redemptive.

Abuse should not be spiritualized. Oppression should not be protected by telling victims simply to carry their cross. Jesus' cross confronts evil and opens the way to resurrection.

Preaching the Cross From Every Genre

Not every passage directly describes Calvary. Yet the realities clarified at the cross - sin, sacrifice, grace, covenant, kingship, reconciliation, victory, love, and obedience - illuminate the entire canon.

The preacher should connect responsibly, not mechanically. The goal is not to repeat the same paragraph every week, but to show the many dimensions of Christ's saving death.

The Shepherd's Principle

The cross is not a decorative ending to Christian preaching; it is the decisive saving act that defines grace, exposes pride, reveals God, and shapes discipleship.

For Reflection and Ministry Practice

89. Does your preaching explain why the cross was necessary?
90. Which dimension of the atonement does your congregation understand best, and which is neglected?
91. How can you preach cross-bearing without excusing abuse or glorifying needless suffering?
92. Write a concise gospel explanation that connects sin, cross, grace, and faith.

CHAPTER 24

Resurrection Preaching

“And if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins. — 1 Corinthians 15:17, KJV”

Christian preaching does not end at a sealed tomb. The resurrection is not an inspirational metaphor for recovering from setbacks. It is the historical and theological declaration that Jesus Christ has conquered death, been vindicated as Lord, inaugurated the new creation, and secured the future resurrection of His people.

Without the resurrection, Paul says, Christian faith collapses. The cross cannot be separated from the empty tomb.

The Resurrection Vindicates Jesus

Jesus was condemned by human authorities, but raised by the power of God. The resurrection announces that His claims are true, His sacrifice is accepted, and His lordship is established.

Preaching the risen Christ therefore carries authority. We do not merely offer one spiritual option. We announce the reign of the One whom death could not hold.

The Resurrection Defeats Despair

Death appears to be the great finality. The resurrection exposes it as a defeated enemy. Believers still grieve, but not as those without hope. Suffering remains painful, but it is no longer ultimate.

**Resurrection hope does not deny the grave;
it declares that the grave will not have the
last word.**

More Than Personal Comeback

Popular preaching often uses resurrection language for promotions, business recovery, relationship restoration, or emotional renewal. God may graciously restore many areas of life, but the resurrection of Jesus must not be reduced to a slogan for temporary success.

Its promise is larger: forgiveness, new life, the Spirit, the defeat of death, the resurrection of the body, and the renewal of creation.

Resurrection and Holiness

Believers are united with Christ in His death and resurrection. New life is not only future. The power of the risen Christ calls the Church to walk differently now.

Resurrection preaching therefore joins hope with transformation. The same gospel that promises life after death produces a new manner of life before death.

Resurrection and Mission

The risen Christ sends His disciples. The message cannot remain inside the gathered church. Because Jesus lives and reigns, the Church goes to the nations, serves its neighbors, confronts darkness, and bears witness with confidence.

Preach Resurrection All Year

The resurrection deserves more than one annual sermon. Every Lord's Day is shaped by the reality that Christ is alive. Funeral sermons, evangelistic messages, doctrinal teaching, pastoral comfort, and calls to holiness should all be illuminated by resurrection hope.

The Shepherd's Principle

Resurrection preaching announces that Jesus is Lord, death is defeated, new creation has begun, and every believer's future is secure in Christ.

For Reflection and Ministry Practice

93. Is the resurrection central to your preaching or mostly confined to Easter?
94. Where have you reduced resurrection to the idea of personal comeback?
95. How does the resurrection shape holiness, suffering, mission, and hope?
96. Add a clear resurrection claim to your next gospel presentation.

CHAPTER 25

The Gospel in Every Sermon

“Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you. — 1 Corinthians 15:1, KJV”

The gospel is not merely the message used to bring unbelievers into the Church. It is the good news by which the Church continues to live. Believers never graduate beyond grace, never outgrow the cross, and never become independent of Christ.

For that reason, every sermon should stand in meaningful relationship to the gospel. This does not require attaching an identical evangelistic paragraph to every text. It means showing how the passage relates to God’s saving work in Christ and how grace empowers the response the text demands.

What the Gospel Is

The gospel announces what God has done through Jesus Christ: the eternal Son became flesh, lived in perfect obedience, died for sins, was buried, rose bodily, reigns as Lord, offers forgiveness and reconciliation, gives the Spirit, gathers a people, and will return to renew all things.

The gospel includes a summons: repent, believe, follow Christ, and receive the gift of life.

Good advice tells people what they should do. Good news announces what God has done.

Do Not Turn Every Text Into Self-Help

Without the gospel, preaching easily becomes moralism. Hearers are told to be stronger, pray harder, forgive better, manage money wisely, improve relationships, resist temptation,

and serve faithfully. These commands may be biblical, but detached from grace they become burdens.

The gospel reveals both pardon for failure and power for obedience.

Preach to Believers and Unbelievers

The same sermon may address mature Christians, confused churchgoers, children, seekers, skeptics, and people who have never understood salvation. The preacher should make the gospel intelligible without assuming everyone already knows it.

At the same time, the sermon should avoid speaking as though believers need nothing beyond a repeated conversion appeal. The gospel has implications for every area of life.

Avoid the Artificial Gospel Attachment

Hearers can recognize when the gospel conclusion has no relationship to the sermon. Responsible preaching traces a genuine connection. A wisdom text may reveal the truly wise life embodied in Christ. A law text may expose sin and the need for grace. A narrative may display covenant faithfulness. A lament may find hope in the suffering and risen Savior.

Invitation Without Manipulation

Because the gospel demands response, preaching should invite response. The preacher calls unbelievers to repent and believe and calls believers to renewed trust and obedience.

The invitation should be clear, urgent, gracious, and free from emotional manipulation. Music, repetition, fear, and public pressure should never be used to manufacture what only the Spirit can produce.

The Gospel Creates the Church

The Church is not held together by taste, politics, generation, ethnicity, personality, or preference. It is created by the gospel. Sinners are reconciled to God and to one another through Christ.

When every sermon is related to the gospel, the congregation is repeatedly reminded who it is, whose it is, and why it exists.

The Shepherd's Principle

Every sermon should reveal how God's saving work in Christ forgives, forms, empowers, and summons the hearer.

For Reflection and Ministry Practice

97. Can you state the gospel clearly without using unexplained church language?
98. How does your present text genuinely connect to Christ's saving work?
99. Where might your application become moralism without grace?
100. Write separate calls to response for an unbeliever and for a believer.

PART V

THE PREACHER'S STUDY

Moving from prayerful encounter with the text to faithful explanation, clear structure, and life-giving application.

CHAPTER 26

Enter the Study Praying

*“Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold
wondrous things out of thy law. — Psalm 119:18,
KJV”*

The preacher’s study is not merely an office. It is a meeting place. Books, notes, commentaries, language tools, and digital resources may surround the desk, but the work must begin with dependence upon God.

Prayer does not replace study, and study does not replace prayer. The preacher prays because the Bible is God’s Word, the congregation belongs to God, the task exceeds human ability, and spiritual understanding requires the work of the Holy Spirit.

Pray Before You Analyze

Before asking what the text can become in a sermon, ask God to expose what the text must become in you. The preacher is not a neutral technician standing above Scripture. He is the first hearer and the first person summoned to repentance, faith, obedience, and worship.

**The sermon should pass through the
preacher’s heart before it proceeds from the
preacher’s mouth.**

Pray Against Familiarity

Familiar passages create a special danger. The preacher assumes he already knows what the text says and begins building the sermon from memory. Prayer slows the mind and restores wonder.

Ask for fresh sight, not novelty. The goal is not to invent a meaning no one has ever discovered. It is to see the ancient

truth clearly enough to proclaim it faithfully in the present moment.

Pray for the Congregation

Bring actual people before God. Pray for the grieving, the proud, the confused, the young, the aged, the unbelieving, the wounded, the distracted, and the mature. Ask not only, “What does this text mean?” but also, “What do these people need from this text?”

This does not authorize manipulating the passage around private information. It cultivates pastoral sensitivity while the text remains in control.

Pray for Protection

Study can become a place of temptation. The preacher may be tempted toward pride, laziness, plagiarism, bitterness, fear, or the desire to impress. Prayer acknowledges these dangers.

Ask God for honesty with sources, patience with difficulty, courage with hard truth, compassion in application, and humility in uncertainty.

Pray During the Process

Prayer belongs at every stage: selecting the text, observing details, resolving questions, shaping the outline, writing applications, and preparing delivery. Short prayers throughout study keep the work relational rather than mechanical.

Pray After the Sermon Is Written

Once the manuscript or outline is complete, place it before God again. Ask whether anything is unclear, unloving, exaggerated, self-serving, or detached from the text. Ask God to use the sermon beyond the preacher’s capacity.

Then release the outcome. The preacher is responsible for faithfulness. God is responsible for fruit.

The Shepherd's Principle

Prayer does not excuse weak preparation; it places preparation under the guidance, correction, and power of God.

For Reflection and Ministry Practice

101. What is your present prayer pattern before sermon study?
102. Where are you most tempted to rely upon skill rather than dependence?
103. How can the congregation's real needs be carried in prayer without controlling the text?
104. Write a short prayer for each major stage of your sermon-preparation process.

CHAPTER 27

Observation: What Does the Text Say?

“Consider what I say; and the Lord give thee understanding in all things. — 2 Timothy 2:7, KJV”

Many sermon errors begin before interpretation. The preacher moves too quickly, assumes the point, and fails to observe what is actually present in the passage. Observation is the disciplined act of seeing before explaining.

A careful reader notices words, structure, repetition, contrast, sequence, commands, promises, questions, characters, movement, tone, and literary form.

Slow Down

Read the text repeatedly and, when possible, aloud. Different readings reveal different details. Read the surrounding chapter. Read the entire biblical book when preparing a sustained series.

Do not begin with the question, “What can I preach?” Begin with, “What is here?”

The preacher who sees little in the text will eventually add much that is not in the text.

Mark the Structure

Look for transitions such as therefore, but, for, because, now, then, and so that. These words reveal logic. Notice where the author gives a command, explains a reason, offers an example, raises an objection, or announces a result.

In narrative, follow the scene. Who acts? Who speaks? What changes? Where is the tension? What does the narrator emphasize?

Notice Repetition and Contrast

Repeated words often signal emphasis. Contrasts may reveal the main point: flesh and Spirit, wisdom and foolishness, faith and sight, life and death, pride and humility.

Do not assume every repeated word is equally important. Observe how it functions within the passage.

Ask Basic Questions

Who is speaking? To whom? About what? Where? When? Why? What problem is being addressed? What response is required? What has already happened? What is expected to happen next?

These questions sound elementary because they are foundational.

Respect Genre

A command is not interpreted like a proverb. A lament is not interpreted like an epistle. Apocalyptic imagery is not treated like a newspaper report. Poetry uses compression, metaphor, and parallelism. Narrative often teaches through plot rather than direct instruction.

Observation must be sensitive to the kind of writing before us.

Create an Observation Sheet

Before consulting commentaries, write what you see. List key words, questions, connections, and possible movements. This keeps outside voices from replacing your own engagement with Scripture.

Commentaries become conversation partners rather than substitutes for reading.

The Shepherd's Principle

Good interpretation begins with patient observation of what the biblical text actually says and how it says it.

For Reflection and Ministry Practice

105. Read your next text five times and list one new observation after each reading.
106. Which repeated words, contrasts, or transitions shape the passage?
107. What genre is the text, and how should that affect your reading?
108. Write twenty observations before consulting a commentary.

CHAPTER 28

Interpretation: What Does the Text Mean?

“Give me understanding, and I shall keep thy law.

— Psalm 119:34, KJV”

Observation asks what the text says. Interpretation asks what the author, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, intended to communicate through those words in their original setting.

The preacher is not free to make the text mean whatever produces a useful sermon. A passage may have many implications, but it does not have unlimited meanings.

Meaning Before Significance

First ask what the text meant in its own context. Then ask how that truth addresses the present congregation. When application is separated from original meaning, the preacher may sound practical while being unfaithful.

**The text cannot mean today what it never
meant when God first gave it.**

Author, Audience, and Situation

Identify the human author, original audience, historical circumstances, and purpose of the book. Why was this passage written here? What problem, question, promise, event, or theological claim does it address?

Background information should illuminate the text, not overwhelm the sermon.

Words in Context

Word studies can help, but they are often abused. A word does not carry every possible dictionary meaning into every sentence. Its meaning is shaped by grammar and context.

Knowing a Greek or Hebrew definition does not automatically produce interpretation. The question is how the author uses the term here.

Scripture Interprets Scripture

Clear passages help illuminate difficult ones. Themes develop across the canon. The New Testament may interpret Old Testament events and promises. Yet cross-references should be chosen carefully rather than gathered merely because they share a word.

Identify the Main Claim

Every sermon needs a governing truth. Ask what the author is doing through the passage: commanding, promising, warning, explaining, comforting, correcting, narrating, praising, or persuading.

State the main claim in one clear sentence. If you cannot summarize the passage, you are not ready to preach it.

Distinguish Certainty from Possibility

Some interpretive conclusions are clear. Others are probable. A few remain disputed. The preacher should not present every judgment with equal certainty.

Humility strengthens authority because it shows the preacher is submitted to the text rather than pretending omniscience.

Consult Reliable Voices

After personal study, consult trusted commentaries, theological works, historical interpreters, and language resources. Compare views. Ask why they differ. Return to the text.

The goal is not to collect quotations but to test and deepen understanding.

The Shepherd's Principle

Interpretation seeks the author's intended meaning in context and then carries that meaning faithfully into the life of the Church.

For Reflection and Ministry Practice

109. State the main claim of your next passage in one sentence.
110. What historical or literary information is essential to understanding it?
111. Which interpretive conclusions are certain, probable, or uncertain?
112. Compare two reliable commentaries and explain the reason for any disagreement.

CHAPTER 29

Context: Stop Kidnapping Verses

“Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour. — Ephesians 4:25, KJV”

A kidnapped verse has been removed from its home and forced to serve a purpose it was never given. It may still sound powerful. It may fit neatly on a graphic. It may receive a strong response. But it has been detached from the argument, story, covenant, or situation that gives it meaning.

Context is not an academic luxury. It is protection against false teaching.

Immediate Context

Read what comes before and after. Pronouns, commands, conclusions, and promises often depend upon earlier statements. A verse beginning with therefore cannot be understood without asking what the therefore is there for.

A verse without its context can become a pretext for almost anything.

Book Context

Ask how the paragraph serves the entire biblical book. What themes are developing? What problem is being addressed? What has the author already established?

Philippians 4:13, for example, belongs to Paul’s testimony of contentment in abundance and need. It is not a blank check for every ambition.

Historical Context

Culture, geography, politics, customs, and historical events may clarify details. But background should never become a display of trivia. Use only what helps the congregation understand the text.

Covenant Context

Commands given to Israel under the Mosaic covenant cannot always be transferred directly to the Church. Promises tied to land, temple, kingship, or national life require careful interpretation through Christ and the New Covenant.

This does not make the Old Testament irrelevant. It makes responsible application necessary.

Canonical Context

Every passage belongs within the whole Bible. Creation, fall, covenant, Christ, Church, and new creation provide the broad horizon. Later revelation may clarify earlier expectation.

Cultural Context Today

The congregation also lives within a context. Words may be heard differently because of present assumptions. The preacher should recognize those assumptions and explain the text clearly without surrendering its authority.

Context and Sermon Length

Not every sermon can explain every layer. The preacher must decide which contextual facts are necessary for understanding and which belong in further study.

Good context makes the sermon clearer. Bad context makes the preacher look informed while the people remain confused.

The Shepherd's Principle

Context protects Scripture from being reduced to isolated slogans and protects the congregation from confident misinterpretation.

For Reflection and Ministry Practice

113. Identify the immediate, book, historical, covenant, and canonical contexts of your next passage.

114. Which popular use of the passage ignores its context?
115. What contextual information is essential for the sermon, and what is merely interesting?
116. Rewrite one commonly misused verse in a sentence that reflects its actual context.

CHAPTER 30

From Exegesis to Outline

*“Write the vision, and make it plain upon tables,
that he may run that readeth it. — Habakkuk 2:2,
KJV”*

Exegesis uncovers the meaning of the text. The sermon outline arranges that truth so people can follow, remember, and respond. A good outline does not impose an artificial shape upon Scripture. It reveals the movement already present and communicates it clearly.

Begin With the Main Idea

State the text’s central claim in one sentence. Then state the sermon’s central claim in language suited to the congregation. These statements should be closely related.

If the sermon has several unrelated ideas, it is probably several sermons competing for one time slot.

**One clear sermon is stronger than five good
thoughts fighting each other.**

Follow the Text’s Movement

Some passages naturally divide into commands, reasons, promises, scenes, questions, or contrasts. Let those movements guide the sermon.

Not every outline needs three points. Structure should serve the text rather than tradition.

Make the Points Functional

Points should do more than label content. They should carry the sermon’s argument. Strong points may explain what God reveals, why it matters, and how the hearer must respond.

Parallel wording can help memory, but forced alliteration can weaken meaning.

Build Transitions

Transitions show how one movement leads to the next. Without them, the sermon feels like separate observations. A transition may summarize what has been established and raise the next question.

Plan the Introduction

The introduction should awaken attention, identify the human or theological issue, and lead naturally to the text. It should not consume the sermon or promise a subject the message never addresses.

Plan the Conclusion

The conclusion gathers the sermon, presses the central truth, points to Christ, and calls for response. It should not introduce a new major argument.

Use a Sermon Map

A practical map may include: text, main claim, fallen condition or human need, Christ connection, purpose, outline, illustrations, applications, invitation, and final sentence.

Test the Outline

Can someone follow it by listening? Does each point arise from the text? Does the order make sense? Is the central truth repeated enough to be remembered without becoming tedious?

The outline is not a cage. It is a road.

The Shepherd's Principle

A faithful outline makes the text's central truth plain, memorable, and easy to follow without replacing the text's own movement.

For Reflection and Ministry Practice

117. State your text idea and sermon idea in one sentence each.
118. Does every major point arise from the passage?
119. Write transitions that show how each section connects to the next.
120. Explain the entire sermon aloud in two minutes using only the outline.

CHAPTER 31

Illustrations That Serve the Text

“And with many such parables spake he the word unto them, as they were able to hear it. — Mark 4:33, KJV”

Illustrations create windows. They help hearers see an idea, feel its weight, and remember its truth. Jesus used images drawn from seeds, lamps, houses, weddings, money, farming, family, and work.

Yet illustrations are servants, not masters. When the story is remembered and the truth is forgotten, the window has replaced the view.

Clarify, Do Not Compete

Use an illustration when a concept needs light, not merely because the story is entertaining. Ask what exact truth the illustration serves.

The best illustration disappears into the truth it reveals.

Use Real Life Honestly

Personal stories can build connection, but they require restraint. Do not exaggerate, improve the facts, or present yourself as the hero of every story.

Protect the privacy of family members, congregants, and counselees. The pulpit is not permission to publish another person's pain.

Avoid the Familiar False Story

Many sermon illustrations circulate without verification. Before repeating dramatic claims, confirm them. An emotionally effective false story damages trust.

When verification is impossible, do not present legend as fact.

Scripture Can Illustrate Scripture

Biblical narratives, images, and characters can illuminate doctrine when handled in their own context. Avoid using a biblical story merely as decorative support for a point foreign to it.

Culture and Accessibility

Illustrations should connect with the actual congregation. References drawn only from one generation, profession, or social setting may exclude others.

Variety helps: family, work, technology, history, nature, community life, and ordinary experience.

Humor

Humor can lower resistance, reveal absurdity, and help people breathe. It should never humiliate vulnerable people, trivialize suffering, or turn sacred matters into comedy material.

Do not let the congregation's laughter become the preacher's addiction.

Placement and Length

An illustration should enter where clarity or emotional connection is needed and leave before it becomes a second sermon. The more powerful the story, the more carefully it must be controlled.

The Shepherd's Principle

Illustrations are faithful when they clarify truth, respect people, preserve accuracy, and return attention to the biblical text.

For Reflection and Ministry Practice

121. What precise truth does each illustration in your next sermon clarify?
122. Have all factual stories been verified?
123. Does any personal story expose someone else without permission?
124. Remove one illustration and determine whether the sermon becomes clearer or weaker.

CHAPTER 32

Application That Reaches the Pew

“But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only.

—James 1:22, KJV”

Explanation tells the congregation what the text means. Application shows how that truth addresses belief, desire, behavior, relationships, suffering, worship, and mission. Without application, hearers may admire the Bible while remaining unchanged.

Application does not mean attaching a list of practical tips to the end of the sermon. It grows from the text’s purpose.

Apply to the Mind

Some texts correct false belief. Hearers must know what to affirm, reject, remember, or understand. Doctrine is application because what people believe shapes how they live.

Apply to the Heart

Scripture addresses desires, fears, loyalties, loves, hopes, shame, pride, anger, and trust. Ask not only, “What should they do?” but, “What is ruling the heart?”

**Lasting obedience requires more than
changed behavior; it requires reordered
love.**

Apply to Action

Specific action helps hearers move from intention to obedience. Instead of saying, “We must forgive,” explain what faithful forgiveness may require, what it does not require, and what first step can be taken.

Application should be concrete without pretending every situation is identical.

Apply to Different Hearers

The same text may confront the proud, comfort the wounded, warn the careless, strengthen the faithful, and invite the unbeliever. Think through multiple hearers.

Do not make every application assume the listener is married, employed, healthy, educated, or already converted.

Apply Gracefully

Application should never imply that obedience earns acceptance with God. Root every command in grace, union with Christ, the work of the Spirit, and the believer's new identity.

Avoid Pulpit Targeting

Do not use application to attack a person or faction through indirect public speech. If a private issue requires correction, address it pastorally.

The congregation should feel the Word searching everyone, including the preacher.

Give Both Immediate and Long-Term Response

Some texts require a decision today. Others call for habits formed over time. Name both where appropriate.

End with a clear answer to the question: because this text is true, what should we believe, desire, do, stop, begin, endure, confess, or hope?

The Shepherd's Principle

Biblical application carries the text from ancient truth into present belief, desire, action, and hope while remaining rooted in grace.

For Reflection and Ministry Practice

125. Write applications for the mind, heart, and behavior from your next text.

126. How would the application differ for an unbeliever, new believer, mature saint, and sufferer?
127. Is any application too vague to obey?
128. Does the application rest upon grace or sound like self-salvation?

CHAPTER 33

Writing, Rehearsing, and Refining

“The heart of the wise teacheth his mouth, and addeth learning to his lips. — Proverbs 16:23, KJV”

Preparation is not complete when the preacher understands the text. The message must be shaped for oral communication. Writing, rehearsing, and refining help close the distance between what is clear in the preacher’s mind and what will be clear in the hearer’s ear.

These practices do not quench the Spirit. They can become acts of stewardship.

Choose Your Writing Method

Some preachers use a full manuscript. Others use a detailed outline, brief notes, or carefully prepared prompts. The best method is the one that supports faithfulness, clarity, presence, and responsible delivery.

A manuscript may strengthen precision but tempt the preacher to read without contact. Sparse notes may strengthen freedom but expose weak structure. Know your tendencies.

Write for the Ear

Spoken language differs from written language. Use shorter sentences, clear transitions, concrete words, and strategic repetition. Read the sermon aloud while writing.

**A sentence that looks impressive on the page
may be impossible to hear in the room.**

Rehearse the Meaning, Not a Performance

Rehearsal helps the preacher internalize the sermon’s movement, test timing, simplify confusing sections, and hear awkward language.

The goal is not theatrical perfection. It is freedom to speak with clarity and genuine presence.

Time the Sermon

Respect the congregation and the service. Length alone does not determine faithfulness, but undisciplined length can hide weak editing.

Know how long the sermon takes when spoken at a natural pace. Leave space for pauses, congregational response, and the unexpected.

Cut Without Mercy

Good material may still need removal. A sermon can be harmed by too many quotations, illustrations, side arguments, or repeated conclusions.

Ask whether every section serves the main claim. Save unused material for another setting.

Refine the Beginning and Ending

The first minutes establish direction. The final minutes press the response. Rewrite both after the body is complete.

Prepare the final sentence. A sermon that ends repeatedly often loses force.

Prepare the Soul and Body

Sleep, hydration, breathing, and vocal care matter. So do confession, prayer, and emotional honesty. The preacher is an embodied servant, not a disembodied voice.

Trust God After Preparation

Thorough preparation does not guarantee visible response. It does allow the preacher to enter the pulpit with a clear conscience, ready to speak and ready to adapt without abandoning the message.

The Shepherd's Principle

Writing, rehearsal, and refinement are disciplines that help the preacher communicate studied truth with clarity, freedom, and respect for the hearer.

For Reflection and Ministry Practice

129. Which preparation method best supports your clarity and presence?
130. Read your next sermon aloud and mark every sentence that is difficult to hear.
131. Time the sermon and remove material that does not serve the main claim.
132. Write and rehearse the final sentence before entering the pulpit.

PART VI

THE PREACHER'S LIFE

The private character, spiritual disciplines, emotional health, and accountable life that must sustain the public ministry of the Word.

CHAPTER 34

Character Before Charisma

“A bishop then must be blameless... of good behaviour. — 1 Timothy 3:2, KJV”

Charisma may open a door, but character determines what happens after the door opens. A gifted preacher can attract attention, move a room, build an audience, and create momentum. Yet no level of public ability can permanently compensate for private corruption.

Scripture places striking emphasis upon the leader’s life. The pastoral qualifications in 1 Timothy and Titus focus far more upon character than upon stage presence. The preacher must be able to teach, but that ability is surrounded by requirements concerning self-control, faithfulness, hospitality, gentleness, reputation, family life, and freedom from greed.

Gifts Are Real but Not Self-Authenticating

Spiritual gifts are graciously given, but giftedness is not proof of maturity. A person may preach powerfully while remaining proud, manipulative, undisciplined, or dishonest. The congregation may confuse visible effectiveness with divine approval, but Scripture does not permit that shortcut.

God may use a gifted person, but usefulness never excuses unfaithfulness.

The Hidden Life Eventually Speaks

Private habits shape public ministry. Secret resentment will leak into tone. Unchecked ambition will influence decisions. Sexual compromise will distort relationships. Financial dishonesty will weaken moral authority. A preacher cannot indefinitely separate the person from the proclamation.

This does not mean ministers must be flawless. It means they must be truthful, repentant, teachable, and governed by the pattern of Christ.

Character Is Formed Slowly

Character is not produced by one conference, one book, or one emotional encounter. It is formed through repeated choices: telling the truth when dishonesty would be easier, keeping promises when inconvenient, admitting wrong without excuse, honoring boundaries, receiving correction, serving without recognition, and obeying God when no audience is present.

Beware the Ministry Exception

Leaders sometimes begin to believe that ordinary rules do not apply because the ministry is important. Rest is neglected, boundaries are crossed, money is handled carelessly, and family responsibilities are excused in the name of calling.

The call of God does not create exemption from holiness. It intensifies accountability.

Reputation and Reality

A preacher must care about reputation without becoming controlled by image. Reputation concerns how the gospel and the office are perceived. Image management, however, hides truth to preserve appearance.

When failure occurs, the first duty is not public relations but repentance, protection of those harmed, truthful accountability, and submission to wise discipline.

The Character of Christ

The goal is not merely respectable leadership. It is increasing conformity to Christ: humility, courage, purity, compassion, truthfulness, patience, and sacrificial love. The preacher should become more like the One being preached.

The Shepherd's Principle

Charisma may amplify a ministry, but only Christlike character can safely carry its weight.

For Reflection and Ministry Practice

133. Which character quality receives the least intentional attention in your life?
134. Where are you tempted to treat ministry success as an exception to ordinary obedience?
135. Who knows your private life well enough to challenge you honestly?
136. Choose one hidden habit that must be strengthened or corrected this month.

CHAPTER 35

The Prayer Life of the Preacher

*“But we will give ourselves continually to prayer,
and to the ministry of the word. — Acts 6:4, KJV”*

The apostles joined prayer and the ministry of the Word. They did not view prayer as the warm-up before the real work. Prayer was part of the real work. Without it, preaching can become technically correct and spiritually thin.

The preacher needs more than prayers about sermons. He needs a life of communion with God that exists apart from public ministry.

Private Prayer Before Public Power

Public passion can be imitated. Private prayer cannot be faked for long. The hidden place exposes whether the preacher desires God or merely desires to speak about God.

**A preacher may borrow an outline, but
cannot borrow another person’s prayer life.**

Prayer as Worship

Prayer begins with God, not merely with need. Adoration reorders the heart. The preacher remembers God’s holiness, wisdom, mercy, power, and faithfulness before presenting requests.

When prayer consists only of crisis management, ministry becomes reactive. Worship restores perspective.

Prayer as Confession

The preacher who regularly names sin before God becomes less defensive before people. Confession breaks the illusion of spiritual superiority and keeps grace near.

General confession can hide specific disobedience. Honest prayer names attitudes, motives, words, habits, and failures without excuse.

Prayer as Intercession

Carry the congregation by name. Pray for households, leaders, children, the sick, the grieving, the wandering, the unbelieving, and the burdened. Intercession transforms preaching because the congregation is no longer an anonymous audience.

Prayer as Listening

Biblical prayer includes attentiveness. This is not permission to treat every internal impression as revelation. It is a posture of quiet submission in which Scripture, conscience, wisdom, and the Spirit's conviction are welcomed.

Seasons of Dryness

Prayer will not always feel powerful. The preacher may face distraction, fatigue, grief, doubt, or spiritual dryness. Faithfulness in those seasons matters. Pray the Psalms. Use written prayers. Ask others to pray. Remain present before God even when emotion is absent.

Protect the Time

What is not scheduled is often displaced. Set regular times for prayer, while also cultivating short prayers throughout the day. Protect these times from the endless urgency of messages, meetings, and digital noise.

Prayer does not make the preacher impressive. It makes the preacher dependent.

The Shepherd's Principle

The preacher's public ministry gains depth when it rises from a private life of worship, confession, intercession, and dependence.

For Reflection and Ministry Practice

137. Does your prayer life exist independently of sermon preparation?
138. Which dimension of prayer - worship, confession, thanksgiving, intercession, or listening - is weakest?
139. Whom in your congregation should you begin carrying regularly by name?
140. Build a realistic weekly prayer rhythm and protect it for thirty days.

CHAPTER 36

The Private Life Behind the Public Word

*“Thou desirest truth in the inward parts. — Psalm
51:6, KJV”*

Every preacher has two pulpits: the visible pulpit before the congregation and the invisible pulpit of daily life. The second determines whether the first can remain trustworthy.

The private life includes habits, finances, sexuality, relationships, entertainment, technology, speech, rest, and thought. These areas may be unseen by the congregation, but they are never unseen by God.

Integrity Means Wholeness

Integrity is not merely avoiding scandal. It is the integration of belief and behavior. The person in the study, at home, online, traveling, and standing before the church should not be several disconnected selves.

The goal is not a flawless image but an undivided life.

Marriage and Family

Ministry must not consume the people closest to the minister. Spouses and children should not be treated as supporting characters in the preacher’s calling. They are persons to be loved, heard, protected, and honored.

No family will be perfect, and pastoral qualifications do not authorize public judgment of every private difficulty. Yet chronic neglect, domination, or hypocrisy at home must be taken seriously.

Sexual Integrity

Power, access, loneliness, admiration, and secrecy can create dangerous conditions. Clear boundaries are not signs of distrust in God; they are expressions of wisdom.

Avoid secret communications, emotional dependency, private settings, financial entanglement, and counseling relationships that blur pastoral roles. When temptation intensifies, seek help early rather than after collapse.

Money and Possessions

Financial opacity destroys trust. Ministers should use accountable systems, avoid manipulating generosity, refuse dishonest promises, and distinguish personal resources from ministry resources.

Contentment protects the soul from turning the gospel into a business opportunity.

Digital Life

The phone can become a private doorway to lust, comparison, anger, gossip, and compulsive distraction. Digital integrity requires boundaries, filters where needed, truthful identity, and restraint in public speech.

Friendship and Ordinary Humanity

Preachers need relationships in which they are not performing a role. Isolation increases vulnerability. Healthy friendships provide laughter, correction, companionship, and perspective.

When Private Failure Occurs

Do not hide, minimize, blame, or spiritualize. Tell the truth to appropriate accountable leaders. Protect those harmed. Accept consequences. Seek professional and pastoral help where needed. Restoration to fellowship and restoration to office are related but not identical questions.

The Shepherd's Principle

The credibility of the public Word is strengthened by a private life marked by truth, boundaries, accountability, and repentance.

For Reflection and Ministry Practice

141. Which private area of life is currently least accountable?
142. What boundaries protect your marriage, family, finances, sexuality, and digital life?
143. Do you have friendships where you are known apart from your ministry role?
144. Write a personal integrity covenant covering your most vulnerable areas.

CHAPTER 37

Humility, Accountability, and Correction

*“Where no counsel is, the people fall: but in the multitude of counsellors there is safety. —
Proverbs 11:14, KJV”*

Ministry visibility can create an illusion of independence. People seek the preacher’s counsel, quote the preacher’s words, and celebrate the preacher’s gifts. Without intentional humility, the leader may slowly become unable to receive what is expected from everyone else: correction.

Humility Is Not Weakness

Humility does not mean pretending to have no gifts or convictions. It means seeing oneself truthfully before God. The humble preacher can lead decisively without believing he is beyond question.

**The leader who cannot be corrected is
already in danger, even before the public
failure arrives.**

Build Accountability Before Crisis

Accountability should not be invented after scandal. Establish relationships and structures while ministry is healthy. These may include elders, denominational oversight, mentors, peers, financial controls, counseling, and written policies.

Effective accountability requires access to real information. A ceremonial board that knows only what the leader chooses to disclose cannot provide meaningful protection.

Invite Specific Questions

General questions receive general answers. Trusted people should be permitted to ask about prayer, marriage, money,

sexual integrity, anger, rest, substance use, online habits, and emotional health.

The goal is not surveillance. It is truth in relationship.

Receiving Criticism Wisely

Not every criticism is accurate, fair, or spiritually mature. Still, even hostile feedback may contain a fragment of truth. Listen before defending. Separate tone from content. Ask whether multiple people have raised a similar concern.

Correction should be weighed, not worshiped and not automatically rejected.

Correcting Others

The preacher who receives correction becomes better equipped to give it. Biblical correction seeks restoration, names facts, protects dignity, and distinguishes between weakness, immaturity, misconduct, and abuse.

Public rebuke should not replace responsible private process except where Scripture, safety, or public harm requires a public response.

Apology and Repentance

A true apology does not say, “I am sorry you were offended.” It names the wrong, acknowledges the harm, asks forgiveness, and accepts necessary repair.

Repentance is more than emotion. It produces changed direction and verifiable fruit.

Shared Leadership

Christ alone is the indispensable head of the Church. Shared leadership distributes wisdom, reduces isolation, develops others, and reminds the preacher that the ministry does not belong to one personality.

The Shepherd's Principle

**Humility creates room for truth,
accountability creates structures for safety,
and correction creates opportunities for
repentance and growth.**

For Reflection and Ministry Practice

145. Who can challenge you without risking immediate removal or retaliation?
146. What real information do your accountability structures receive?
147. How do you normally respond when criticism feels unfair?
148. Identify one leadership responsibility that should be shared rather than controlled.

CHAPTER 38

Preaching Through Pain

*“We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed;
we are perplexed, but not in despair. — 2
Corinthians 4:8, KJV”*

Preachers do not stand outside human suffering. They bury loved ones, receive diagnoses, experience betrayal, face financial strain, endure family conflict, carry disappointment, and sometimes enter the pulpit while their own hearts are breaking.

Pain can deepen preaching, but it can also distort it. The wounded preacher needs wisdom concerning when to speak, what to share, and when to step back.

Do Not Pretend

Congregations can sense false invulnerability. Appropriate honesty gives permission for believers to bring their whole lives before God. The Psalms demonstrate that faith can lament, question, cry, and still cling to God.

Faith is not pretending the wound does not hurt; it is refusing to let the wound become the final authority.

Do Not Bleed on the Congregation

There is a difference between preaching from a scar and preaching from an open wound. Raw pain may produce uncontrolled disclosure, indirect attacks, theological overstatement, or emotional dependence upon the congregation.

Not every true experience belongs in the sermon. Some pain belongs first in prayer, counseling, friendship, rest, and time.

Let Scripture Interpret the Pain

Pain naturally demands an explanation. The preacher must resist making personal experience the controlling lens for every text. Scripture should interpret the pain, not be forced to confirm the preacher's present emotion.

Receive Ministry

The person who ministers must also be ministered to. Seek pastoral care, licensed counseling where appropriate, medical care, grief support, and trusted companionship. Needing help is not failure.

Know When Not to Preach

There are moments when grief, trauma, illness, exhaustion, or crisis makes stepping aside the wisest and most faithful choice. Shared leadership allows the Word to continue while the preacher receives care.

Pain Can Produce Compassion

When healed and integrated, suffering can make the preacher gentler, slower to judge, more attentive to hidden burdens, and more honest about mystery. The sermon gains tenderness without losing truth.

Hope Without Clichés

Suffering people do not need shallow promises that everything will quickly improve. They need the crucified and risen Christ, the presence of God, the companionship of the Church, and the durable hope that suffering will not have the last word.

The Shepherd's Principle

**Pain can deepen the preacher's compassion
and hope when it is honestly processed,
wisely bounded, and submitted to Scripture.**

For Reflection and Ministry Practice

- 149. Are you preaching from a scar, an open wound, or unacknowledged pain?
- 150. What experiences should be processed privately before being shared publicly?
- 151. Who ministers to you when you are suffering?
- 152. What plan allows you to step away from preaching when health or crisis requires it?

CHAPTER 39

Avoiding Burnout and Spiritual Emptiness

“And he said unto them, Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place, and rest a while. — Mark 6:31, KJV”

Burnout is more than being tired after a demanding week. It can involve prolonged physical exhaustion, emotional depletion, cynicism, reduced effectiveness, loss of joy, and spiritual numbness. Ministers are especially vulnerable because the work is meaningful, endless, relational, and difficult to measure.

Burnout is not always caused by personal failure. It may arise from unrealistic expectations, understaffing, crisis, trauma, congregational conflict, financial pressure, or years of carrying too much. Yet wise stewardship can reduce the risk.

The Messiah Complex

The preacher is not the Savior. Jesus already holds that office. When leaders act as though every need requires their immediate response, they eventually damage themselves, their families, and the church.

**You are called to be faithful, not
omnipresent.**

Recognize the Warning Signs

Warning signs may include chronic fatigue, irritability, sleep disruption, dread of ministry, emotional withdrawal, compulsive escape, loss of empathy, resentment toward people, inability to pray, or persistent thoughts of quitting.

These signs should invite attention, not shame.

Sabbath and Rhythms of Rest

Rest is not laziness. It is an act of creaturely humility. A regular day away from ministry labor, periodic vacations, adequate sleep, exercise, nourishing food, and time in creation all support long-term faithfulness.

Sabbath should not become another performance target. It is a rhythm of stopping, receiving, worshiping, and remembering that God continues to rule while we rest.

Boundaries and Delegation

Not every phone call is an emergency. Not every meeting requires the pastor. Train leaders, define availability, establish crisis procedures, and allow capable people to serve.

Delegation is not abandonment. It is discipleship and shared stewardship.

Spiritual Emptiness

A preacher can keep producing sermons after the inner well feels dry. Ministry language continues, but communion with God fades. The solution is not merely a new series or vacation. It may require repentance, silence, spiritual direction, counseling, medical evaluation, and a season of reduced responsibility.

Professional Help

Depression, anxiety, trauma, substance dependence, and other health concerns should not be reduced to weak faith. Licensed mental health professionals and physicians can be gifts of common grace. Spiritual care and clinical care can work together.

Build a Sustainable Rule of Life

A rule of life is a realistic pattern for prayer, work, rest, relationships, study, exercise, recreation, and boundaries. It helps ministry become a marathon rather than a series of emergencies.

Finish Faithfully

The goal is not merely to survive another Sunday. It is to remain spiritually alive, emotionally honest, relationally present, and able to serve over time. Long ministry requires a pace that honors both calling and creaturehood.

The Shepherd's Principle

Rest, boundaries, shared leadership, honest care, and sustainable rhythms protect the preacher from treating exhaustion as faithfulness.

For Reflection and Ministry Practice

153. Which signs of burnout are present in your current life?
154. When is your protected weekly period of rest?
155. What tasks should be delegated, delayed, or discontinued?
156. Draft a sustainable rule of life for prayer, work, sleep, exercise, family, and renewal.

PART VII

DELIVERING THE WORD

*Communicating biblical truth with clarity, conviction,
pastoral wisdom, and disciplined presence.*

CHAPTER 40

Clarity Is a Spiritual Discipline

“Except ye utter by the tongue words easy to be understood, how shall it be known what is spoken? — 1 Corinthians 14:9, KJV”

Clarity is not a lesser gift for preachers who lack depth. It is an act of love. The preacher has not served the congregation merely by understanding the text privately. The truth must be communicated so that hearers can follow it, remember it, and respond to it.

A confusing sermon may contain accurate theology and still fail pastorally. If people cannot identify the main claim, understand the explanation, or recognize the required response, the preacher has placed unnecessary distance between the Word and the hearer.

Clarity Begins Before Delivery

Confusion in the pulpit often begins with confusion in the study. The preacher may not yet know the central point, may be carrying too much material, or may be trying to preach every discovery at once.

Before improving delivery, simplify the thought. State the sermon in one sentence. Identify the few movements necessary to establish it. Remove material that is interesting but not essential.

The preacher should do the hard work in the study so the congregation does not have to do unnecessary work in the pew.

Use Understandable Language

Biblical and theological terms should not be abandoned, but they should be defined. Words such as justification,

sanctification, covenant, atonement, sovereignty, and redemption carry great truth. Explain them plainly rather than assuming everyone understands them.

Avoid using complexity to create an appearance of scholarship. The goal is not to make hearers admire how much the preacher knows. It is to help them understand what God has said.

One Idea at a Time

Listeners cannot reread a spoken paragraph. Each movement should be developed before the sermon advances. Announce transitions, repeat the central claim strategically, and summarize major sections.

Repetition is not automatically dull. It becomes dull when nothing advances. Purposeful repetition anchors truth while the sermon continues to build.

Concrete Before Abstract

Abstract truth becomes clearer through examples, images, contrasts, and ordinary language. Explain what pride, grace, repentance, faith, holiness, and hope look like in actual life.

Concrete communication does not reduce theological depth. It gives depth handles.

Listen to Your Own Sermon

Read the message aloud. Record a rehearsal. Notice long sentences, unexplained terms, abrupt transitions, and sections where attention drops. Ask a trusted listener to summarize the message without seeing the notes.

Clarity and the Holy Spirit

Dependence upon the Spirit is not permission for disorder. The Spirit who inspired Scripture is not honored when careless speech hides its meaning. Prayer and preparation work together.

The Shepherd's Principle

Clarity is spiritual stewardship: it removes avoidable obstacles so people can hear and respond to the Word of God.

For Reflection and Ministry Practice

157. State your next sermon in one sentence a teenager could understand.
158. Circle every theological term and decide whether it requires explanation.
159. Record five minutes of rehearsal and identify confusing sentences or transitions.
160. Ask one trusted person to summarize the sermon's main claim and response.

CHAPTER 41

Passion Without Performance

*“For the love of Christ constraineth us. — 2
Corinthians 5:14, KJV”*

Biblical preaching should not sound indifferent. The truth concerns God, sin, grace, judgment, salvation, suffering, resurrection, and eternity. A preacher who feels nothing may communicate that nothing important is happening.

Yet passion can be imitated. Volume can be increased, gestures enlarged, tears displayed, and emotional climaxes engineered without the heart being governed by the truth. The distinction between passion and performance lies in the source and purpose of the emotion.

Passion Is Truth Felt

Authentic passion grows when the preacher understands and believes the message. It is not one delivery style. Some preachers express conviction loudly; others carry quiet intensity. Both may be deeply passionate.

Performance asks, “How can I produce a reaction?” Passion asks, “How can I faithfully express the weight of this truth?”

Volume is not anointing, and calmness is not coldness. The issue is whether the delivery truthfully serves the message.

Do Not Manufacture the Moment

The preacher should not manipulate the congregation by repeating lines solely to force response, stretching music beneath every appeal, using false vulnerability, or presenting ordinary statements as spontaneous revelation.

Emotional response can be healthy, but it must arise from truth rather than technique alone.

Let the Text Set the Temperature

A lament should not be delivered like a victory celebration. A warning should not sound playful. A resurrection passage should not remain lifeless. Genre, tone, and purpose should shape delivery.

The preacher's emotion should be disciplined by the text rather than imposed upon it.

Avoid the Performance Trap of Comparison

Preachers often imitate voices, rhythms, gestures, phrases, and crescendos admired in others. Learning from skilled communicators is wise. Becoming a copy weakens authenticity and may distort the preacher's natural gifts.

Your voice should be trained, not borrowed.

Presence Over Display

Presence means the preacher is fully engaged with God, the text, and the people. The message is not recited as though the congregation were absent. Eye contact, attentive pacing, and genuine responsiveness help create presence.

Passion After Pain

Some seasons leave the preacher emotionally exhausted. Faithful delivery may feel less intense than usual. Do not counterfeit strength. Speak truthfully, receive support, and trust the Word's power beyond your emotional condition.

The Shepherd's Principle

Godly passion is the honest expression of truth believed deeply and delivered for the good of the hearer, not the glory of the speaker.

For Reflection and Ministry Practice

161. Where does your delivery become more concerned with reaction than understanding?
162. Does the emotional tone of your sermon match the tone of the text?
163. Which habits may be borrowed performances rather than authentic communication?
164. Rehearse one section at three intensity levels and choose the one that best serves the truth.

CHAPTER 42

Voice, Pace, Silence, and Emphasis

“The Preacher sought to find out acceptable words: and that which was written was upright, even words of truth. — Ecclesiastes 12:10, KJV”

The voice is one of the preacher’s primary instruments. It does not create the authority of the message, but it can help or hinder the congregation’s ability to receive it. Vocal discipline is therefore not vanity. It is stewardship.

Speak to Be Heard

Projection is not shouting. It is supported breath, clear articulation, and sufficient energy to carry words through the room. Microphones amplify sound, but they do not correct mumbling, rushed speech, or weak endings.

Good posture and breathing create a steadier voice. Tension in the jaw, shoulders, and throat can produce fatigue and strain.

Control the Pace

Rushing often comes from nervousness, overfilled notes, or fear of silence. Slow enough for people to process major truths. Accelerate only when the content and emotion naturally call for movement.

**The congregation is hearing the sermon for
the first time, even when the preacher has
lived with it all week.**

Use Silence

Silence allows truth to land. A pause after a question creates reflection. A pause after a painful statement shows respect. A pause before a central claim creates attention.

Silence becomes powerful when it is purposeful rather than caused by losing one's place.

Emphasize Meaning, Not Every Word

If every sentence is delivered at maximum intensity, nothing stands out. Emphasis should reveal structure and significance. Stress key words, vary pitch, and allow quieter delivery when intimacy or gravity requires it.

Articulation and Pronunciation

Practice names, locations, and unfamiliar biblical terms before entering the pulpit. Mispronunciation is not a moral failure, but preparation shows respect for the text and hearers.

Do not allow fear of imperfection to produce stiffness. Correct yourself briefly and continue.

Vocal Variety Without Theatrics

Variation keeps attention and reflects meaning. Monotone delivery can flatten a powerful text. Artificial vocal swings can distract from it. The goal is natural, disciplined range.

Care for the Voice

Rest, hydration, warm-up, and responsible microphone use matter. Persistent pain, hoarseness, or loss of range may require medical or vocal-professional attention. Preachers should not repeatedly injure the body in the name of passion.

The Shepherd's Principle

The trained voice serves the Word by making truth audible, intelligible, appropriately weighted, and easier to receive.

For Reflection and Ministry Practice

165. Record your full sermon and mark sections that are rushed, flat, or strained.

166. Practice purposeful pauses after the sermon's three most important statements.
167. Identify words and names that require pronunciation practice.
168. Create a brief vocal warm-up and hydration routine for preaching days.

CHAPTER 43

Humor That Helps Rather Than Hijacks

“A merry heart doeth good like a medicine. —

Proverbs 17:22, KJV”

Humor is part of human life and can serve preaching well. It can expose contradiction, release tension, make truth memorable, and help the congregation recognize itself without immediate defensiveness. Jesus used exaggeration, irony, and surprising images that likely carried humor for His hearers.

But humor is powerful, and power requires discipline. A laugh can build connection or wound a person. It can illuminate truth or make the sermon about the preacher’s entertainment ability.

Humor Must Serve the Message

Ask why the humorous line is present. Does it clarify the point, reveal human foolishness, create necessary relief, or prepare the hearer for truth? If it exists only because it reliably gets a laugh, it may not belong.

The pulpit can contain laughter without becoming a comedy stage.

Never Punch Down

Do not make vulnerable people the joke. Avoid humor that humiliates people because of disability, poverty, age, body size, education, ethnicity, grief, mental distress, or painful family circumstances.

The preacher’s authority makes pulpit humor especially difficult to challenge. That increases responsibility.

Be Careful With Marriage and Family Stories

Preachers sometimes gain laughs by embarrassing spouses, children, or relatives. Permission matters. Private frustrations

should not become public material merely because the story is effective.

Avoid Sexual and Crude Humor

Some subjects require direct teaching, but directness is not the same as vulgarity. Humor that lowers the moral tone of the room or creates discomfort should be rejected.

Laugh at Yourself Wisely

Self-deprecating humor can display humility, but constant self-mockery may weaken trust or become a strategy for reassurance. Tell the truth without turning yourself into a caricature.

Do Not Use Humor to Escape Gravity

Some preachers joke immediately after painful or convicting moments because silence feels uncomfortable. Let sorrow remain sorrowful. Let warning remain serious. The congregation does not need rescue from every weighty emotion.

Humor and Cultural Awareness

What one group finds harmless another may hear as insulting or exclusionary. Know the congregation and review jokes through the lens of love.

When a joke fails, do not punish the room or explain it repeatedly. Continue with grace.

The Shepherd's Principle

**Humor is useful when it clarifies truth,
protects dignity, fits the moment, and leaves
the message larger than the laugh.**

For Reflection and Ministry Practice

169. Does every humorous moment in your next sermon serve a clear purpose?

170. Could any person or group reasonably feel humiliated by the joke?
171. Have family members consented to stories involving them?
172. Remove the funniest line and ask whether the sermon becomes more or less faithful.

CHAPTER 44

The Invitation and the Call to Response

“Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said ... Men and brethren, what shall we do? — Acts 2:37, KJV”

Biblical preaching calls for response. God’s Word is not presented merely for admiration or analysis. It summons hearers to repent, believe, worship, obey, forgive, endure, serve, hope, confess, reconcile, and follow Christ.

The invitation is the point where the preacher makes that summons plain. It may occur throughout the sermon and be concentrated at the conclusion.

Response Must Arise From the Text

An invitation should answer the passage’s demand. A text calling believers to forgive should not end only with a generic membership appeal. A gospel passage should make faith and repentance clear. A lament may call for trust, prayer, and honest grief.

A clear sermon deserves a clear response.

Explain the Gospel

Do not assume people understand phrases such as “give God your heart,” “come to Jesus,” or “get saved.” Explain sin, grace, the cross, resurrection, repentance, faith, and the lordship of Christ in understandable language.

Multiple Responses May Be Present

The congregation includes unbelievers, new believers, mature saints, doubters, and wounded people. The conclusion can distinguish their responses without becoming cluttered.

For example: unbelievers are invited to trust Christ; believers are called to specific obedience; those needing prayer are offered pastoral support.

Avoid Manipulation

Do not use exaggerated promises, public pressure, endless repetition, selective lighting, emotional music, or fear of embarrassment to manufacture decisions. The Spirit convicts through truth.

Urgency is appropriate because eternity matters. Manipulation is inappropriate because people are not trophies.

Public and Private Response

Some traditions invite people forward. Others use cards, prayer rooms, conversations, or follow-up meetings. Scripture does not require one universal method.

Whatever the method, explain what the action means and ensure trained people are ready to provide biblical care.

Do Not Confuse Movement With Conversion

Walking an aisle, raising a hand, repeating words, or feeling emotion may accompany genuine faith, but none of these automatically saves. Salvation rests in Christ and is received through repentant faith.

Follow-Up Is Part of the Invitation

New believers need instruction, community, baptism, and discipleship. People responding to grief, addiction, abuse, or crisis may need qualified pastoral and professional support.

The invitation should open a path, not create a moment and then abandon the person.

The Shepherd's Principle

The biblical invitation clearly names the response God requires, presents Christ faithfully, rejects manipulation, and provides responsible follow-up.

For Reflection and Ministry Practice

173. What specific response does your next text require?
174. Can an unbeliever understand the gospel language in your conclusion?
175. Which elements of your invitation process could create unnecessary pressure?
176. What follow-up pathway awaits people who respond?

CHAPTER 45

Preaching to Children, Youth, Adults, and Elders

*“That the generation to come might know them,
even the children which should be born. — Psalm
78:6, KJV”*

A congregation often contains several generations listening at once. They share the same need for Christ and the Word, yet they do not share identical vocabulary, experiences, questions, or attention patterns. Faithful preaching seeks to nourish the whole household of faith.

Do Not Confuse Simplicity With Shallowness

Children can understand profound truth when it is communicated concretely. Adults also benefit from clarity. The preacher should not dilute doctrine but explain it through words, images, and applications people can grasp.

**A sermon clear enough for a child can still
be rich enough for a scholar.**

Preaching to Children

Use concrete language, brief explanations, visible images, and recognizable situations. Address children directly at times so they know the sermon includes them. Avoid frightening detail or public shaming.

Help parents continue the conversation after worship.

Preaching to Youth

Teenagers can detect performance and condescension quickly. Take their questions seriously. Address identity, belonging, sexuality, technology, anxiety, justice, friendship, pressure, and purpose through Scripture rather than slogans.

Do not build youth application entirely around what adults fear. Show the beauty and credibility of following Christ.

Preaching to Adults

Adults carry complex responsibilities involving work, marriage, singleness, parenting, money, caregiving, disappointment, and decision-making. Application should reach ordinary Monday life.

Avoid assuming all adults have the same family structure, education, income, or season.

Preaching to Elders

Older believers need more than nostalgic references. They need continued challenge, purpose, comfort, and preparation for faithful endurance. Honor their experience without treating them as spiritually finished.

Address grief, physical limitation, legacy, mentoring, mortality, and hope with dignity.

Intergenerational Preaching

Use illustrations from multiple generations. Explain cultural references. Celebrate the gifts each age brings. Resist language that caricatures the young as careless or the old as resistant.

The sermon can help generations see one another as members of one body rather than competing audiences.

Accessibility

Large-print notes, clear projection, quality sound, interpreters, captions, and thoughtful pacing may help people with visual, hearing, language, or cognitive needs. Accessibility is hospitality.

The Shepherd's Principle

Intergenerational preaching gives one biblical meal in a form that allows children, youth, adults, and elders to receive nourishment together.

For Reflection and Ministry Practice

177. Which generation is most naturally addressed in your preaching, and which is least visible?
178. Add one direct application for a child, teenager, adult, and elder to your next sermon.
179. Which cultural references require explanation or replacement?
180. What accessibility improvement would help more people receive the message?

CHAPTER 46

Preaching in the Digital Age

“Their sound went into all the earth, and their words unto the ends of the world. — Romans 10:18, KJV”

Digital technology has changed how sermons travel. A message preached to one congregation may be heard live across cities, replayed years later, clipped into seconds, quoted without context, or discovered by someone who has never entered the building.

This reach creates opportunity and responsibility. The preacher must serve the people physically present while recognizing that the message may also enter a wider and more fragmented environment.

Preach to the Room First

The local congregation is not a studio audience for online content. They are the flock entrusted to the preacher. Eye contact, pastoral awareness, and direct engagement should not be sacrificed to cameras.

The livestream is a window into worship, not the reason worship exists.

Understand the Permanence of Speech

Careless claims, unverified stories, private disclosures, and angry remarks can circulate indefinitely. Digital permanence should deepen preparation and restraint.

This does not require fearful preaching. It requires responsible preaching.

Clips and Context

Short clips can spread biblical truth, but they can also distort a sermon. Select excerpts that stand honestly on their own. Do not create misleading titles or edit statements to produce controversy.

Whenever possible, connect clips to the full message and biblical text.

Online Hearers Are Real People

People watching remotely may be sick, homebound, traveling, skeptical, isolated, or searching for hope. Address them with pastoral warmth without turning every sermon into an announcement to the camera.

Technology Should Be Reliable and Unobtrusive

Clear audio matters more than elaborate visuals. Train volunteers, test systems, protect recordings, and create backup plans. Avoid allowing technical display to overshadow Scripture.

Artificial Intelligence and Sermon Preparation

Digital tools can assist with organization, transcription, brainstorming, language comparison, and editing. They should not replace prayer, exegesis, theological judgment, pastoral knowledge, or the preacher's own voice.

Generated material must be verified. Private pastoral information should not be entered carelessly into external systems. Sources must be handled honestly, and the preacher remains accountable for every word delivered.

Metrics and the Soul

Views, likes, shares, and comments can become a new form of applause. These numbers may offer useful information, but they do not measure faithfulness or spiritual fruit fully.

The preacher must resist reshaping the message around algorithms, outrage, or online popularity.

Digital Ministry Needs Pastoral Pathways

Online hearers need ways to ask questions, receive prayer, connect with a local church, and pursue discipleship. Content distribution is not the same as shepherding.

The Shepherd's Principle

Digital tools should extend the ministry of the Word without replacing the local flock, compromising integrity, or surrendering the message to the demands of attention.

For Reflection and Ministry Practice

181. Does your current digital process help or distract from preaching to the local congregation?
182. How are clips selected and checked for context?
183. What standards govern the use of AI and other digital tools in sermon preparation?
184. What pastoral pathway is available to people who encounter the sermon online?

PART VIII

BUILDING A WORD-FED CHURCH

Moving beyond isolated sermons to create a congregation shaped by Scripture throughout the week, across generations, and over time.

CHAPTER 47

Creating a Preaching Calendar

“To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven. — Ecclesiastes 3:1, KJV”

A preaching calendar is not an attempt to control the Holy Spirit. It is a stewardship tool that helps the pastor feed the congregation intentionally rather than reactively. Without planning, the pulpit can become governed by emergencies, favorite topics, annual habits, or the preacher’s present mood.

A calendar creates room for prayerful balance. It allows the church to receive doctrine, gospel, wisdom, correction, comfort, mission, holiness, lament, and hope across the year.

Begin With the Condition of the Flock

Planning begins with pastoral attention. What is the congregation facing? Where is biblical understanding weak? What sins are becoming normal? What fears are dominating? What opportunities for mission are opening? What seasons of grief, growth, transition, or conflict must be addressed?

The answers should influence the plan without making the sermon calendar a mirror of every immediate crisis.

A preaching calendar listens to the needs of the flock while remaining governed by the whole counsel of God.

Plan at Three Levels

A yearly horizon protects balance. A quarterly horizon allows adjustment. A weekly horizon supports detailed preparation.

The yearly plan may identify major books, doctrines, seasons, and ministry goals. The quarterly plan can respond to

developments in the church. The weekly plan determines the exact text, main claim, and pastoral emphasis.

Respect the Christian Year Without Becoming Captive to It

Christmas, Resurrection Sunday, Pentecost, baptism, communion, anniversaries, funerals, and community moments can provide meaningful opportunities. Yet special days should not fragment the pulpit into disconnected messages.

Even seasonal preaching should contribute to the church's long-term formation.

Build Around Biblical Books

Sequential series through biblical books provide stability and force the preacher to address themes he might otherwise avoid. The calendar should allow enough time for depth without stretching a series until the congregation loses the book's larger movement.

Include Doctrinal and Pastoral Series

Certain doctrines and pastoral concerns may require focused treatment: the gospel, prayer, suffering, marriage, justice, stewardship, spiritual gifts, evangelism, or Christian identity.

Topical preaching is strongest when it is built from carefully selected texts rather than a collection of isolated verses.

Leave Margin

A rigid calendar can become another form of control. Leave room for pastoral emergencies, national tragedy, congregational loss, special opportunities, and necessary repetition.

Planning should create freedom, not anxiety.

Review the Calendar

At the end of each quarter, ask what was preached, what was missed, and what fruit or confusion has appeared. Adjust with humility.

A calendar becomes valuable when it is treated as a living pastoral instrument rather than a decorative document.

The Shepherd's Principle

A preaching calendar helps the shepherd provide a balanced, timely, and sustainable biblical diet while remaining responsive to the Spirit and the flock.

For Reflection and Ministry Practice

185. List the major spiritual needs of your congregation for the next twelve months.
186. Which biblical books and doctrines would address those needs faithfully?
187. Where does your calendar need margin for unexpected pastoral moments?
188. Draft a one-year plan with yearly, quarterly, and weekly planning levels.

CHAPTER 48

Sequential Exposition and Thematic Series

“Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine. — 1 Timothy 4:13, KJV”

Sequential exposition and thematic preaching are not enemies. Both can serve the Church when the text remains authoritative and the preacher remains honest about what each method can and cannot do.

Sequential exposition usually follows a biblical book or sustained section in order. Thematic preaching gathers carefully interpreted passages around a doctrine, question, or pastoral concern.

The Strength of Sequential Exposition

Sequential preaching preserves context, reveals the logic of a biblical book, and brings the congregation into contact with themes the preacher may not have chosen. It reduces the temptation to select only comfortable texts.

It also teaches the church how to read Scripture as connected discourse rather than scattered sayings.

Sequential exposition lets the biblical author help set the agenda of the pulpit.

The Limits of a Poorly Designed Series

A series can move so slowly that the congregation loses the whole. It can become repetitive, overly technical, or detached from urgent pastoral needs. Not every verse requires an entire sermon.

The preacher must preserve the book’s movement and choose units that communicate complete thoughts.

The Strength of Thematic Series

Thematic preaching can address doctrine, discipleship, family life, suffering, cultural questions, or church vision with focus. It can bring several biblical witnesses into conversation.

It is especially useful when a congregation needs a clear framework for a subject spread across Scripture.

The Danger of Topical Preaching

Topical preaching can become a search for verses that support conclusions already chosen. The preacher may ignore context, avoid inconvenient texts, or present personal opinion as biblical consensus.

Each selected passage must be interpreted on its own terms before it contributes to the series.

A Healthy Rhythm

A church may spend one season in a Gospel, another in an Old Testament narrative, and another in a doctrinal or pastoral series. Psalms, wisdom, prophecy, epistles, and narrative should all find a place over time.

Variety can strengthen attention while continuity builds depth.

Decide the Unit Before the Title

Do not begin with a clever series title and then search for material. Begin with the text or theological purpose. Let the promotional language serve the biblical substance.

Finish Well

Every series needs a clear conclusion. Summarize the major themes, show how the parts fit together, call for response, and help the congregation carry the teaching forward.

The Shepherd's Principle

Sequential and thematic preaching both serve the Church when Scripture sets the meaning, structure, and boundaries of the message.

For Reflection and Ministry Practice

189. Which method currently dominates your preaching, and what imbalance may result?
190. How can your next sequential series preserve the movement of the whole biblical book?
191. How can your next thematic series avoid proof-texting?
192. Design a twelve-month rhythm that includes both sequential exposition and thematic teaching.

CHAPTER 49

Teaching the Church How to Listen

*“Take heed therefore how ye hear. — Luke 8:18,
KJV”*

Faithful preaching does not automatically produce faithful hearing. Jesus repeatedly warned His listeners to take care how they hear. The congregation has a spiritual responsibility before, during, and after the sermon.

A Word-fed church therefore teaches people not merely to attend preaching, but to receive, test, remember, discuss, and obey the Word.

Prepare Before Worship

Members can be encouraged to read the sermon text before Sunday, pray for the preacher, quiet distractions, and arrive expecting God to address them through Scripture.

Preparation turns worship from passive consumption into active participation.

**The sermon begins bearing fruit before
Sunday when the congregation begins
preparing to hear.**

Listen for the Text’s Main Claim

Many hearers remember stories or emotional moments but miss the message. Teach them to ask: What does the passage say? What is the central truth? What does this reveal about God? How does it point to Christ? What response is required?

These questions can be printed, taught in classes, or repeated from the pulpit.

Listen With Discernment

The Bereans received the word eagerly and examined the Scriptures. Discernment is not cynical suspicion. It is respectful testing.

Healthy pastors welcome congregations that know the Bible well enough to recognize faithful interpretation.

Take Useful Notes

Note-taking should capture structure, key texts, central truths, questions, and applications. It need not become transcription.

Churches can provide simple note guides that help adults, youth, and children engage at their level.

Resist Distraction

Digital devices can provide Bible access and note-taking, but they also provide endless escape. Congregations should be taught practical habits of attention.

Parents can help children grow into worship participation rather than assuming children are incapable of listening.

Discuss the Sermon

Conversation deepens memory. Families, small groups, ministry teams, and friends can ask what challenged, encouraged, confused, or required action.

The goal is not to review the preacher's performance. It is to respond to the Word.

Obey What Was Heard

Listening reaches completion in obedience. Encourage members to identify one concrete response, one truth to remember, one prayer to pray, or one conversation to have.

Hear With Grace

Every sermon will contain human limitation. Mature hearers receive what is faithful, test what is unclear, extend grace to the

preacher, and seek clarification rather than rushing to accusation.

The Shepherd's Principle

A Word-fed congregation learns to prepare, listen, test, remember, discuss, and obey the preached Word.

For Reflection and Ministry Practice

193. What habits currently shape how your congregation listens?
194. How could members receive the sermon text before Sunday?
195. What simple listening framework could be taught across all age groups?
196. Create a one-page sermon listening guide for your church.

CHAPTER 50

From Sunday Sermon to Weekly Discipleship

“And they continued stedfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers. — Acts 2:42, KJV”

A sermon should not disappear when the benediction is spoken. The preached Word can become the organizing center of discipleship throughout the week.

This does not require turning every church activity into a sermon replay. It means helping the congregation continue reflecting upon, practicing, and sharing the truth that was proclaimed.

Build a Sermon-to-Week Pathway

A simple pathway may include the Sunday sermon, a Monday summary, midweek questions, family discussion, small-group application, ministry-team reflection, and a closing prayer or devotional.

The pathway should reinforce the message without overwhelming members with content.

The goal is not more material. The goal is deeper obedience to the truth already received.

Create Multiple Entry Points

Some members prefer reading. Others learn through listening, discussion, visual summaries, or guided practice. The same sermon can generate a short devotional, study guide, audio clip, youth question, children’s activity, or prayer prompt.

Adaptation should preserve the sermon’s meaning rather than reduce it to a slogan.

Equip Families

Provide parents and caregivers with age-appropriate questions. Encourage families to discuss one main truth, one Scripture, and one action during a meal, drive, or bedtime routine.

Family discipleship does not require a seminary lecture at the kitchen table.

Align Small Groups

Small groups can revisit the passage, clarify questions, share honest struggles, and identify practical obedience. Leaders should receive guidance early enough to prepare.

The group should not become a second sermon but a place where truth becomes personal and communal.

Connect Ministry to the Message

If the sermon addresses mercy, the church may identify a service opportunity. If it addresses reconciliation, leaders may create space for honest conversation. If it addresses prayer, the congregation may practice prayer together.

Application becomes credible when the church's structures support what the pulpit proclaims.

Use Digital Tools Wisely

Email, text, websites, podcasts, and social media can extend access. Use them to summarize and reinforce, not to create a constant flood.

Protect attention. A few consistent resources are stronger than many abandoned initiatives.

Evaluate Fruit

Ask whether members can remember the main truth by midweek, whether conversations are occurring, whether practices are changing, and whether ministries are aligning with Scripture.

Weekly discipleship turns the sermon from an event into a shared journey.

The Shepherd's Principle

The sermon becomes more formative when the church intentionally carries its truth into family life, small groups, prayer, service, and daily obedience.

For Reflection and Ministry Practice

197. What currently happens to the sermon after Sunday?
198. Which one or two weekly tools would most help your congregation?
199. How can families and small groups engage the message without feeling overloaded?
200. Design a seven-day sermon-to-discipleship pathway using one recent sermon.

CHAPTER 51

Training the Next Generation of Preachers

“And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also. — 2 Timothy 2:2, KJV”

A faithful preaching ministry thinks beyond the present preacher. Paul instructed Timothy to entrust truth to people who would teach others also. Four generations are visible in one verse: Paul, Timothy, faithful servants, and those they would teach.

Succession is not merely replacing a personality. It is transmitting doctrine, character, method, and pastoral responsibility.

Identify Calling and Character

Not everyone who enjoys speaking is called to preach. Potential ministers should be observed over time. Do they love Scripture? Are they teachable? Do they serve when unseen? Is their life credible? Do they care for people?

Gift should be encouraged, but character must be examined.

The church should never place public gifting ahead of proven faithfulness.

Create a Training Path

A preaching cohort may include biblical interpretation, doctrine, sermon structure, delivery, pastoral ethics, church history, observation, and supervised practice.

Training should move from classroom instruction to real ministry under guidance.

Give Safe Opportunities

Emerging preachers need places to practice: devotionals, youth gatherings, Bible studies, prayer services, nursing homes, outreach settings, and occasional pulpit assignments.

Responsibility should increase as faithfulness and competence develop.

Provide Honest Feedback

Applause alone does not train. Feedback should address biblical accuracy, clarity, structure, application, delivery, timing, and pastoral tone.

Critique should be specific, respectful, and connected to growth.

Teach Them to Study

Young preachers are especially vulnerable to copying popular voices, building sermons from clips, or mistaking charisma for preparation. Give them a repeatable study process.

Require them to show how the outline arises from the text.

Share the Pulpit Without Surrendering Stewardship

Senior leaders should create opportunity without abandoning oversight. The pulpit belongs to Christ, not to a family line, friendship circle, or personal brand.

Prepare for Transition

Churches should discuss leadership development before crisis makes it urgent. A healthy pastor wants the ministry to remain faithful after his own season ends.

Legacy is not measured by how indispensable the leader appeared. It is measured by how faithfully others were prepared.

The Shepherd's Principle

Faithful preachers multiply the ministry of the Word by identifying, forming, correcting, and releasing the next generation.

For Reflection and Ministry Practice

201. Who in your congregation shows evidence of teaching or preaching gifts?
202. What character qualifications should be observed before public opportunity?
203. What supervised pathway could move a learner from study to service?
204. Create a six-month preaching cohort with instruction, practice, and feedback.

CHAPTER 52

Measuring Fruit Without Worshiping Numbers

“I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. — 1 Corinthians 3:6, KJV”

Churches need honest evaluation. Attendance, giving, baptisms, participation, and digital reach can reveal important realities. Yet numbers can become idols when they are treated as the final measure of faithfulness.

Paul distinguished human responsibility from divine increase. Ministers plant and water. God gives growth.

What Numbers Can Tell Us

Numbers may reveal whether people are attending, returning, responding, serving, giving, or engaging. Trends can expose barriers, decline, or opportunity.

Ignoring data can become a spiritualized form of irresponsibility.

Numbers are useful servants but dangerous masters.

What Numbers Cannot Tell Us

Numbers cannot fully measure repentance, faithfulness in suffering, reconciliation, private holiness, generosity, prayer, biblical understanding, courage, or love.

A crowded room may contain shallow discipleship. A small congregation may be producing deep and lasting fruit.

Measure Formation

Ask whether members understand the gospel, read Scripture, pray, serve, give, reconcile, resist false teaching, care for the vulnerable, and bear witness to Christ.

These measures require stories, observation, conversation, and time.

Measure the Preaching Ministry

Review whether the text was handled faithfully, Christ was proclaimed, application was clear, the whole counsel was represented, and the congregation was equipped to respond.

Not every sermon will produce visible immediate results. Some seeds emerge years later.

Avoid Comparison

Comparison turns another church's fruit into your condemnation or your excuse. Ministry contexts differ. Faithfulness should be learned from others without copying their identity.

Receive Both Encouragement and Warning

Growth does not automatically prove faithfulness, and decline does not automatically prove failure. Yet neither should be dismissed. Ask what the fruit may be revealing.

Report With Integrity

Do not exaggerate attendance, conversions, reach, or impact. Honest reporting protects trust and disciplines the leader's ego.

Trust God With the Harvest

The preacher must labor diligently and release the need to control outcomes. Some hearers respond immediately. Others resist. Some understand later. The Word may accomplish work the preacher never sees.

Final evaluation belongs to the Chief Shepherd.

The Shepherd's Principle

Healthy ministry evaluation uses numbers honestly, examines spiritual formation deeply, and leaves the increase in the hands of God.

For Reflection and Ministry Practice

205. Which numbers do you currently track, and what can they truly reveal?
206. What forms of spiritual fruit are presently invisible to your reporting?
207. How can sermon faithfulness be evaluated without reducing preaching to performance?
208. Create a balanced ministry dashboard that includes both quantitative and qualitative evidence.

PART IX

THE PREACHER'S TOOLBOX

*Practical instruments for sermon preparation,
evaluation, planning, and lifelong growth.*

CHAPTER 53

One Hundred Principles of Faithful Preaching

*“The words of the wise are as goads, and as nails
fastened by the masters of assemblies. —
Ecclesiastes 12:11, KJV”*

Principles are not substitutes for Scripture, prayer, or pastoral wisdom. They are compact reminders that help the preacher recover direction when preparation becomes crowded, ministry becomes pressured, or habits begin to drift.

The following one hundred statements summarize the convictions developed throughout this book. They may be used for personal review, mentoring, preaching cohorts, ministerial training, or annual evaluation.

The Calling and the Shepherd

1. The sheep belong to Christ; the preacher serves under His authority.
2. Love for Christ must become care for Christ's people.
3. The preacher is a steward, not an owner.
4. A pulpit is a place of service, not self-exaltation.
5. A full room is not the same as a fed flock.
6. Shepherds know people, not merely attendance totals.
7. Faithfulness may require saying what is unpopular.
8. Courage without compassion wounds; compassion without courage abandons.
9. The preacher must be willing to warn with tears.
10. Ministry success is finally evaluated by the Chief Shepherd.

Scripture and Interpretation

11. The text must govern the sermon.
12. A verse without context can become a pretext.
13. Observation must come before explanation.
14. The text cannot mean today what it never meant when first given.

15. Genre controls how a passage should be read.
16. Scripture interprets Scripture.
17. Word studies must remain under sentence and context.
18. Background information should illuminate, not impress.
19. Difficult texts deserve courage, humility, and care.
20. Honest uncertainty is better than fabricated certainty.

Christ and the Gospel

21. The Christian sermon should help people see Jesus.
22. Christ must be more than a closing mention.
23. The cross is the center, not decoration.
24. Resurrection belongs in Christian preaching all year.
25. Good advice is not the same as good news.
26. Every command must be related to grace.
27. Moral application without the gospel becomes moralism.
28. The Old Testament belongs to the one redemptive story fulfilled in Christ.
29. Christ-centered preaching must never force artificial allegory.
30. The preacher should exalt Christ without flattening the original text.

Doctrine and the Whole Counsel

31. Doctrine is truth arranged for understanding and life.
32. Grace must not erase holiness.
33. Holiness must not erase grace.
34. Love does not silence judgment.
35. Judgment should be preached with tears, not delight.
36. Heaven is more than escape; it is life with God.
37. Hell should never become theatrical material.
38. The Old Testament should not be reduced to moral heroes.
39. The congregation needs both milk and meat.
40. Balance is measured across a ministry, not within one sermon.

Study and Structure

41. Enter the study praying.
42. The preacher is the first hearer of the sermon.
43. Read the text repeatedly and aloud.
44. Write observations before opening commentaries.
45. State the main claim in one sentence.
46. One clear sermon is stronger than five competing thoughts.
47. The outline should reveal the text's movement.
48. Transitions are bridges for the hearer.
49. The introduction should lead to the text, not delay it.
50. The conclusion should press response, not restart the sermon.

Illustration and Application

51. Illustrations are windows, not destinations.
52. Never sacrifice truth for a dramatic story.
53. Protect private information entrusted in pastoral care.
54. Humor should help, never humiliate.
55. Application must grow from interpretation.
56. Apply to mind, heart, action, and hope.
57. Avoid assuming every hearer shares the same life circumstance.
58. Specific application is stronger than "do better."
59. Application must be rooted in grace.
60. The preacher should stand under the application too.

Delivery

61. Clarity is a spiritual discipline.
62. Passion should arise from truth, not performance.
63. Volume is not the same as authority.
64. Pace gives the congregation time to think.
65. Silence can carry weight.
66. Emphasis should reveal meaning, not manufacture emotion.
67. Eye contact communicates presence.
68. Rehearsal is stewardship, not unbelief.
69. Time the sermon before preaching it.
70. Prepare the final sentence.

Character and Health

71. Character must carry what charisma attracts.
72. The private life is part of sermon preparation.
73. A gifted preacher still needs accountability.
74. Confession should come before exposure.
75. Rest is not betrayal of the calling.
76. Boundaries protect ministry and family.
77. Burnout is not proof of faithfulness.
78. Wise counseling can be an instrument of grace.
79. Pain should be processed before it is preached.
80. The preacher is a sheep before being a shepherd.

Congregational Formation

81. Teach the Church how to listen.
82. The sermon should continue beyond Sunday.
83. Families need simple pathways for discussing the Word.
84. Small groups should reinforce rather than replace preaching.
85. Digital tools should deepen discipleship, not multiply noise.
86. Train future preachers before transition becomes urgent.
87. Applause alone does not train emerging ministers.
88. Share opportunity without surrendering stewardship.
89. A preaching calendar helps protect balance.
90. Sequential and thematic preaching can serve together.

Evaluation and Legacy

91. Numbers are useful servants but dangerous masters.
92. Attendance cannot measure private holiness.
93. Growth does not automatically prove faithfulness.
94. Decline does not automatically prove failure.
95. Evaluate both the sermon and the preaching ministry.
96. Receive correction without surrendering conviction.
97. Do not compare another church's fruit with your assignment.
98. Plant faithfully, water diligently, and trust God for increase.
99. Legacy is measured by who was formed, not merely who was impressed.
100. Feed the sheep until the Chief Shepherd appears.

The preacher does not need a new calling every week. The preacher needs renewed faithfulness to the calling already received.

The Shepherd's Principle

Memorable principles become useful only when they drive the preacher back to Scripture, prayer, character, and pastoral obedience.

For Reflection and Ministry Practice

209. Choose ten principles that most challenge your present ministry.
210. Choose ten principles that should be taught to emerging preachers.
211. Identify one principle that should change your next sermon-preparation process.
212. Review these principles annually and write evidence of growth or drift.

CHAPTER 54

Twelve Complete Sermon Blueprints

“And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people. — Nehemiah 8:5, KJV”

A blueprint is not a finished sermon. It is a disciplined map showing how a text may move from interpretation to proclamation and application. The following twelve models cover multiple genres, pastoral needs, and preaching purposes.

Blueprint 1: Expository Narrative

Text: Mark 4:35-41. Main claim: The presence of Christ does not prevent every storm, but His authority gives faith a reason to resist fear. Movements: the command to cross, the crisis on the sea, the cry of the disciples, the command to the storm, and the question of Jesus. Christ connection: the One asleep in the boat is Lord over creation. Applications: fear, prayer, trust, and awe.

Blueprint 2: Doctrinal Sermon

Text: Romans 5:1-11. Main claim: Justification by faith gives believers peace with God, access to grace, hope in suffering, and assurance through Christ. Movements: peace, standing, hope, love, reconciliation. Applications: stop trying to earn acceptance; endure suffering with hope; rest in Christ's finished work.

Blueprint 3: Old Testament Biography

Text: Genesis 39. Main claim: God's presence sustains faithful obedience even when obedience appears to produce loss. Movements: favor in service, temptation, refusal, false accusation, faithfulness in prison. Christ connection: Joseph points forward to the righteous sufferer whom God vindicates. Applications: integrity, sexuality, injustice, endurance.

Blueprint 4: Psalm of Lament

Text: Psalm 13. Main claim: Biblical faith brings honest sorrow to God, asks boldly for help, and chooses trust before circumstances change. Movements: complaint, petition, confidence. Christ connection: Jesus enters godforsakenness and opens the way for confident prayer. Applications: grief, depression, waiting, worship.

Blueprint 5: Wisdom Sermon

Text: Proverbs 4:20-27. Main claim: A guarded heart produces a directed life. Movements: receive wisdom, guard the heart, discipline speech, focus the eyes, establish the path. Christ connection: Christ is the wisdom of God and renews the heart. Applications: attention, media, speech, habits, direction.

Blueprint 6: Prophetic Sermon

Text: Amos 5:21-24. Main claim: God rejects worship that is disconnected from justice and righteousness. Movements: rejected festivals, silenced songs, demanded justice. Christ connection: Jesus fulfills righteous worship and forms a people of mercy and truth. Applications: hypocrisy, public worship, economic treatment, community responsibility.

Blueprint 7: Gospel Invitation

Text: Luke 19:1-10. Main claim: Jesus seeks and saves the lost, and grace produces visible repentance. Movements: Zacchaeus seeks a view, Jesus calls his name, the crowd complains, repentance appears, salvation is announced. Applications: hidden longing, social shame, money, restitution, faith.

Blueprint 8: Epistle Command

Text: Philippians 2:1-11. Main claim: The mind of Christ transforms a self-centered church into a humble, united people. Movements: the appeal to unity, the command to humility, the example of Christ, the exaltation of Christ. Applications: conflict, status, service, leadership, worship.

Blueprint 9: Funeral Message

Text: John 11:17-27. Main claim: Jesus meets grieving people with presence, truth, and resurrection hope. Movements: Martha's grief, Jesus' promise, Jesus' identity, Martha's confession. Applications: honest sorrow, Christian hope, faith in Christ, future resurrection.

Blueprint 10: Ordination or Leadership Charge

Text: 2 Timothy 4:1-5. Main claim: The minister must preach the Word faithfully in every season because Christ will judge and people will turn toward easier voices. Movements: solemn charge, enduring command, coming resistance, personal vigilance. Applications: courage, patience, doctrine, endurance.

Blueprint 11: Stewardship Sermon

Text: 2 Corinthians 8:1-9. Main claim: Christian generosity grows from grace before it becomes an amount. Movements: Macedonian example, voluntary giving, self-giving, Christ's generosity. Applications: worship, planning, sacrifice, transparency, care for the poor.

Blueprint 12: Resurrection Celebration

Text: 1 Corinthians 15:50-58. Main claim: Because Christ gives victory over death, believers can labor steadfastly without believing their work is wasted. Movements: transformation, victory, thanksgiving, steadfast service. Applications: grief, courage, holiness, ministry endurance.

The Blueprint Test

Every blueprint should answer seven questions: What does the text say? What does it mean? What is its central claim? How does it relate to Christ? What human need does it expose? What response does it require? How will the hearer follow the sermon?

Blueprints create discipline, but the preacher must still live with the text until the message becomes more than a structure.

The Shepherd's Principle

A sermon blueprint is strongest when every movement arises from the text and every application leads the hearer toward faithful response to Christ.

For Reflection and Ministry Practice

213. Choose one blueprint and expand it into a complete sermon manuscript.
214. Identify which genre you preach least often and prepare from that blueprint.
215. Compare the blueprint with the biblical text and remove any point not supported by the passage.
216. Develop one original blueprint using the seven-question test.

CHAPTER 55

A One-Year Whole-Counsel Preaching Plan

*“For I have not shunned to declare unto you all
the counsel of God. — Acts 20:27, KJV”*

A one-year plan cannot exhaust Scripture, but it can establish balance. The model below combines sequential exposition, Old and New Testament texts, doctrine, pastoral care, mission, and the Christian calendar.

Quarter One: Foundations and Identity

January: four sermons from Ephesians 1 on identity in Christ, grace, adoption, redemption, and the Church. February: four sermons from Genesis 1-3 on creation, human dignity, marriage, sin, and promise. March: a four-week gospel series from Mark 8-10 on discipleship, the cross, service, and faith.

Quarter Two: Cross, Resurrection, and New Life

April: Palm Sunday, the cross, resurrection, and resurrection living. May: four sermons from Romans 6-8 on union with Christ, freedom from sin, life in the Spirit, suffering, and assurance. June: four wisdom sermons from Proverbs on speech, work, money, and relationships.

Quarter Three: Worship, Justice, and Mission

July: four Psalms covering praise, lament, confession, and trust. August: four sermons from Amos and Micah on worship, justice, leadership, and mercy. September: a missions series from Acts 1-4 on witness, Spirit, community, courage, and generosity.

Quarter Four: Endurance, Hope, and the Coming King

October: four sermons from 1 Peter on exile, holiness, suffering, and witness. November: thanksgiving, generosity,

contentment, and remembrance. December: Advent sermons on promise, incarnation, kingdom, and the return of Christ.

The Supporting Rhythm

Use midweek teaching for doctrines that need expansion. Use small groups to revisit application. Use seasonal devotionals to reinforce major themes. Include at least one Old Testament and one New Testament extended series each year.

The Annual Audit

At year's end, review whether the congregation heard clearly about God, Christ, the Spirit, Scripture, creation, sin, salvation, holiness, the Church, relationships, money, justice, suffering, mission, resurrection, judgment, and hope.

**A preaching plan should be complete enough
to guide the pastor and flexible enough to
remain pastoral.**

The Shepherd's Principle

**A whole-counsel plan intentionally exposes
the congregation to the breadth of Scripture
while preserving room for pastoral
responsiveness.**

For Reflection and Ministry Practice

217. Adapt the model to the actual seasons and needs of your congregation.
218. Identify which major doctrine is missing from your current annual plan.
219. Choose one Old Testament and one New Testament book for sequential treatment.
220. Schedule quarterly reviews before the year begins.

CHAPTER 56

The Pastor's Study Checklist

“Study to shew thyself approved unto God. — 2

Timothy 2:15, KJV”

A checklist cannot create spiritual life, but it can prevent avoidable neglect. The following sequence is designed to guide the preacher from first encounter with the text to post-sermon review.

Before Study

Pray for illumination. Read the text aloud. Read the surrounding context. Identify the genre. Write initial observations. Name the congregation's present pastoral realities without forcing them into the text.

Interpretation

Identify author, audience, setting, and purpose. Mark repeated words, contrasts, commands, promises, reasons, and movement. Study important words in context. Compare translations. Consult reliable commentaries after personal observation. Distinguish certainty from probability.

Theological Placement

Locate the passage within the biblical story. Identify what it reveals about God, humanity, sin, covenant, salvation, Church, or hope. Trace legitimate connections to Christ. State the gospel relationship.

Sermon Design

Write the text idea. Write the sermon idea. Identify the purpose. Build the outline from the text. Plan transitions. Select only necessary illustrations. Develop applications for multiple hearers. Prepare the invitation or call to response.

Manuscript or Notes

Write for the ear. Simplify long sentences. Define unfamiliar terms. Verify quotations and stories. Protect confidential information. Remove unnecessary material. Prepare the first and final sentences.

Rehearsal

Read or preach aloud. Time the message. Mark pauses and emphasis. Test visual aids and Scripture display. Practice difficult names or terms. Confirm that the main point remains clear.

Spiritual Readiness

Confess known sin. Pray for the congregation. Release personal resentment. Ask whether the tone is loving and courageous. Submit the outcome to God.

After Preaching

Record immediate observations without condemning yourself. Note unclear sections, timing issues, responses, and follow-up needs. Save the sermon and sources. Revisit later with greater emotional distance.

**A checklist supports faithfulness when it
leads to deeper attention rather than
hurried box-checking.**

The Shepherd's Principle

**A repeatable study process helps the
preacher bring prayer, interpretation,
theology, structure, application, and
delivery into one faithful act of
proclamation.**

For Reflection and Ministry Practice

221. Which checklist stage is currently strongest in your preparation?
222. Which stage is most frequently skipped?
223. Turn this chapter into a printed one-page worksheet for weekly use.
224. Review one recent sermon using every checklist section.

CHAPTER 57

The Sermon Evaluation Guide

*“Let every man prove his own work. — Galatians
6:4, KJV”*

Evaluation is not self-condemnation. It is a disciplined way to learn, receive correction, and grow. The goal is not to create a perfect sermon score but to ask whether the message faithfully served the text, Christ, and the congregation.

Biblical Faithfulness

Was the passage interpreted in context? Did the main claim arise from the text? Were difficult details handled honestly? Were cross-references used responsibly? Was anything said with greater certainty than the text permits?

Theological Soundness

Was God represented faithfully? Was Christ central where the passage leads to Him? Were grace and obedience held together? Did the sermon align with the whole witness of Scripture?

Structure and Clarity

Could hearers follow the movement? Was the main idea stated and reinforced? Did the introduction lead to the message? Did the conclusion press one clear response? Were transitions effective?

Pastoral Wisdom

Did the sermon address real people rather than an imaginary audience? Was the tone compassionate and courageous? Were the vulnerable protected? Did application avoid public targeting?

Gospel and Application

Did the sermon announce what God has done before demanding what people must do? Were applications specific, varied, and possible to understand? Were unbelievers and believers both addressed appropriately?

Delivery

Was the voice understandable? Was pace appropriate? Did emotion arise naturally from truth? Did humor serve the message? Did notes help or hinder presence? Was the length disciplined?

Integrity

Were sources acknowledged? Were stories truthful? Was confidential information protected? Was the sermon shaped by prayer and personal submission?

Fruit and Follow-Up

What questions emerged? What follow-up teaching is needed? What response was visible, and what fruit may require time? What should be retained, revised, or removed?

A Simple Rating Scale

Use four categories: faithful and strong; faithful but needing refinement; unclear or incomplete; unfaithful to the text. Written comments are more valuable than numbers alone.

**Evaluation should produce repentance,
learning, and hope—not vanity when praised
or despair when corrected.**

The Shepherd's Principle

Healthy evaluation examines biblical faithfulness, theological soundness, clarity, pastoral wisdom, application, delivery, and integrity while trusting God with fruit.

For Reflection and Ministry Practice

- 225. Evaluate one recent sermon using every category.
- 226. Invite one trusted leader and one mature congregant to offer feedback.
- 227. Identify one recurring strength and one recurring weakness.
- 228. Create a six-month growth goal based on the evaluation.

CHAPTER 58

Recommended Study Resources

“Bring with thee...the books, but especially the parchments. — 2 Timothy 4:13, KJV”

Tools do not replace the Spirit, Scripture, or disciplined thinking. They help the preacher ask better questions, test conclusions, understand context, and communicate clearly. A useful library grows over time and should reflect both depth and breadth.

A Reliable Bible Base

Use several responsible translations for comparison while choosing one primary translation for public reading. Include a study Bible known for sound notes, a wide-margin Bible for observation, and access to the original languages when possible.

Commentaries

Build a layered collection: one-volume background resources, introductory commentaries, pastoral or expository commentaries, and technical works for difficult passages. Consult more than one voice, especially where interpretation is disputed.

Biblical Theology and Systematic Theology

Biblical theology traces themes across the storyline of Scripture. Systematic theology organizes doctrine. Preachers need both so individual texts remain connected to the whole counsel of God.

Language Tools

Use trustworthy lexicons, grammars, concordances, and software. Avoid building major claims from simplified word-study tools or from a single root definition.

Historical and Cultural Resources

Bible dictionaries, atlases, introductions, ancient-background resources, church history, and primary historical documents can clarify the world of the text and the Church's interpretation through time.

Homiletics and Pastoral Care

Study sermon structure, delivery, application, pastoral theology, ethics, counseling, spiritual formation, and leadership. Preaching skill cannot be separated from pastoral wisdom.

Diverse Voices

Read across centuries, cultures, denominations, ethnic traditions, and ministry settings while testing all voices by Scripture. A narrow library can produce blind spots.

Digital and Artificial Intelligence Tools

Search software, databases, transcription, outlining, and language assistance may improve efficiency. Artificial intelligence may help organize questions, compare structures, or edit clarity. It must never replace original study, source verification, theological judgment, prayer, or the preacher's own voice.

Never submit confidential pastoral information to digital systems without appropriate protection. Never present generated material as personal work without review. Verify every quotation, historical claim, and citation.

Build Slowly and Use Deeply

A smaller library used carefully is better than a large library displayed but unread. Record which resources are most reliable for particular purposes. Revisit foundational works rather than chasing constant novelty.

The best tool is the one that helps the preacher return to the text with clearer eyes and greater humility.

The Shepherd's Principle

Study resources serve faithful preaching when they deepen engagement with Scripture, widen wisdom, expose blind spots, and remain under prayerful judgment.

For Reflection and Ministry Practice

229. Audit your current library by category and identify the largest gap.
230. Choose one resource to study deeply rather than purchasing several superficially.
231. Create a written policy for the ethical use of digital and AI tools in sermon preparation.
232. Identify three voices outside your usual tradition that could broaden your understanding.

CONCLUSION

Feed Them Until the Chief Shepherd Appears

“And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away.” — 1 Peter 5:4, KJV

The work of preaching is both ordinary and eternal. Week after week, the preacher returns to the text, returns to prayer, returns to the people, and stands again to speak. Some Sundays feel powerful. Others feel quiet. Some messages appear to bear immediate fruit. Others seem to disappear into silence. Yet the command remains: feed the sheep.

The preacher does not control the appetite of every hearer, the response of every heart, the length of every season, or the visibility of every result. The preacher can study faithfully, live honestly, speak clearly, love courageously, and trust God with the increase.

The Church does not need a pulpit emptied of personality. It needs personality surrendered to Christ. It does not need preaching without emotion. It needs emotion governed by truth. It does not need less excellence. It needs excellence offered as service rather than performance.

The call is to preach the whole counsel of God: grace and holiness, love and judgment, cross and resurrection, doctrine and devotion, comfort and correction, heaven and earth, present obedience and future hope. The sheep need the whole meal.

The preacher must also remember that he or she is not the Savior. Christ builds His Church. Christ seeks the lost. Christ heals the wounded. Christ gives the Spirit. Christ raises the dead.

Christ will return. The preacher is a witness, herald, teacher, servant, watchman, and shepherd under authority.

One day the last sermon will be preached. The notes will be closed. The pulpit will be occupied by another. The recordings will age. The applause will fade. What will remain is the Word of the Lord and the fruit God chose to produce through faithful service.

Until that day, open the Book. Explain the text. Show them Christ. Call for faith. Teach obedience. Comfort the broken. Warn the wandering. Strengthen the saints. Train another preacher. Love the people. Guard your life. Trust the Spirit.

Feed the lambs. Feed the sheep. Feed them again. And continue until the Chief Shepherd appears.

APPENDICES

PRACTICAL MINISTRY
RESOURCES

*Reusable planning, preparation, training, and
evaluation tools for the local church.*

Appendix A — One-Year Preaching Calendar
Worksheet

Use this worksheet to map books, doctrines, congregational
needs, seasons, and follow-up pathways.

	Primary Text/Series	Whole-Counsel Emphasis	Congregational Need	Weekly Follow
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Appendix B — Weekly Sermon Preparation Worksheet

Text and translation:

Date and service:

Author, audience, setting, and genre:

Immediate and book context:

Key observations:

Main claim of the text:

Theological themes:

Connection to Christ and the gospel:

Human need or fallen condition:

Sermon purpose:

Main sermon claim:

Outline and transitions:

Illustrations and verification:

Applications for unbeliever, new believer, mature believer, and sufferer:

Invitation or call to response:

Opening sentence:

Final sentence:

Estimated length:

Prayer concerns:

Post-sermon review:

Appendix C — Sermon Evaluation Form

Rate each area: 4 = faithful and strong; 3 = faithful but needing refinement; 2 = unclear or incomplete; 1 = unfaithful or unsupported.

	Rating	Evidence	Next Step
Interpretation and context			
Scriptural claim			
Text and gospel			
Theological soundness			
Structure and clarity			
Illustrations			
Application			
Moral tone			
Delivery			
Credibility and sourcing			
Invitation or response			
Prayer and discipline			

Appendix D — Emerging Preacher Training Covenant

- I commit to pursue holiness before visibility, biblical faithfulness before originality, service before status, and teachability before opportunity.
- I will prepare my own work, acknowledge sources, protect confidential information, receive correction, and submit public ministry to appropriate pastoral oversight.
- I will not use the pulpit to settle private disputes, build a personal following against the local church, imitate another preacher's identity, or substitute digital content for prayerful study.
- I will care for my family, body, mind, and spiritual life as part of ministerial stewardship.
- I understand that public opportunity may increase, pause, or be withdrawn according to character, readiness, doctrine, and the needs of the church.

Name: _____

Mentor: _____

Church: _____

Training period: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix E — Twelve-Month Preacher Development Plan

th	Primary Focus	Required Practice	Mentor Review
th 1	Prayer and spiritual discipline	Study, assignment, and supervised ministry	Comments and next s
th 2	Observation and context	Study, assignment, and supervised ministry	Comments and next s
th 3	Interpretation and main idea	Study, assignment, and supervised ministry	Comments and next s
th 4	Christ-centered preaching	Study, assignment, and supervised ministry	Comments and next s
th 5	Doctrine and whole counsel	Study, assignment, and supervised ministry	Comments and next s
th 6	Outline and transitions	Study, assignment, and supervised ministry	Comments and next s
th 7	Illustrations and application	Study, assignment, and supervised ministry	Comments and next s
th 8	Voice, pace, and delivery	Study, assignment, and supervised ministry	Comments and next s
th 9	Pastoral care and ethics	Study, assignment, and supervised ministry	Comments and next s
th 10	Preaching difficult texts	Study, assignment, and supervised ministry	Comments and next s
th 11	Funeral, wedding, and special occasion preaching	Study, assignment, and supervised ministry	Comments and next s
th 12	Final sermon, evaluation, and commissioning	Study, assignment, and supervised ministry	Comments and next s

Appendix F — Whole-Counsel Annual Audit

Mark each theme as clearly addressed, partially addressed, or needing attention.

Theme	Clearly Addressed	Partially Addressed	Needs Attention
Character of God	☐	☐	☐
Creation and human dignity	☐	☐	☐
God and judgment	☐	☐	☐
God and promise	☐	☐	☐
Incarnation and work of Christ	☐	☐	☐
Salvation and atonement	☐	☐	☐
Conversion and return	☐	☐	☐
Holy Spirit	☐	☐	☐
Grace and justification	☐	☐	☐
Sanctification and holiness	☐	☐	☐
Scripture and doctrine	☐	☐	☐
Prayer and worship	☐	☐	☐
Church and community	☐	☐	☐
Marriage and family	☐	☐	☐
Work and money	☐	☐	☐
Justice and integrity	☐	☐	☐
Peace and mercy	☐	☐	☐
Grief and lament	☐	☐	☐
Mission and evangelism	☐	☐	☐
Death, resurrection, heaven, and hell	☐	☐	☐