PREACHING?

Whatever Happened to the Word?

Getting Back to the Pure, Unadulterated Preaching of Jesus Christ-Line Upon Line and Precept Upon Precept

A Thought-Provoking and Very Funny Call Back to Biblical Preaching

LUCIUS ALSTON

Copyright Page

PREACHING? Whatever Happened to the Word?

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This book uses humor, satire, pastoral reflection, and biblical instruction to encourage faithful preaching. Its purpose is correction with love, not cruelty toward ministers or congregations.

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Dedication

To every preacher who still trembles before the text, prays before speaking, studies when nobody is watching, refuses to manipulate the room, and believes that the Word of God does not need cosmetic surgery.

And to every congregation that still comes to church hungry enough to say, “Pastor, open the Bible and feed us.”

The Preacher's Covenant

Before we critique preaching, we must covenant to honor the sacredness of the calling. This book will laugh at foolish habits, but it will not laugh at the office God established. It will challenge performance, laziness, ego, manipulation, carelessness, and biblical shallowness. It will also honor courage, study, humility, prayer, clarity, compassion, and faithfulness.

The goal is not to produce colder sermons. The goal is to produce sermons with holy fire and biblical fuel. Fire without fuel flashes and disappears. Fuel without fire sits untouched. Biblical preaching requires both truth and the Spirit's power.

> *"Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine."* ***- 2 Timothy 4:2, KJV***

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Introduction: Has Anybody Seen the Sermon?

There was a time when people entered church carrying a Bible, a notebook, and the dangerous expectation that God might confront them before they went home. They did not come merely to feel better. They came to hear truth. They expected the preacher to open the Book, explain the Book, proclaim Christ from the Book, and then ask everybody in the room what they intended to do about what God had said.

Somewhere along the way, the sermon developed an identity crisis. It began dressing like a motivational speech, talking like a campaign rally, moving like a comedy special, posing like a social-media clip, and applying for a job as a personal success seminar. The sermon did not completely throw away the Bible. That would have been too obvious. It kept one verse nearby, the way some people keep a decorative Bible on the coffee table: visible enough to appear spiritual, but rarely opened long enough to disturb anything.

We now have sermons with excellent lighting and very little light. We have messages with motion graphics, bumper videos, theme music, dramatic entrances, coordinated colors, and a countdown clock. After all that preparation, the preacher stands up and announces, “I won’t be before you long.” That is the first miracle nobody in the room believes.

The problem is not excellence. God deserves excellence. The problem is substitution. Production can serve proclamation, but it cannot replace it. A microphone can make a weak idea louder, but it cannot make it biblical. A fog machine can create atmosphere, but it cannot create anointing. A viral clip can create attention, but it cannot create disciples. Only the truth of God,

faithfully proclaimed and empowered by the Holy Spirit, can pierce the heart, renew the mind, expose sin, reveal Christ, build faith, and form a holy people.

This book is not a funeral for creativity. It is a rescue mission for preaching. Preachers should be vivid. Jesus was vivid. He spoke of camels squeezing through needles, beams sticking out of eyeballs, whitewashed tombs, blind men leading blind men, houses collapsing in storms, lost coins, rebellious sons, corrupt judges, rich fools, persistent widows, and farmers throwing seed everywhere. Nobody can fairly accuse Jesus of being boring. But His images always carried truth. His creativity served revelation. His stories did not distract from God; they drove people toward decision.

The church does not need dull preaching. It needs deep preaching delivered clearly, courageously, compassionately, and memorably. It needs sermons strong enough to make the comfortable uncomfortable and gracious enough to make the broken believe they can come home. It needs preaching that can laugh without becoming silly, confront without becoming cruel, teach without becoming dry, celebrate without becoming shallow, and call for response without manipulating emotions.

We must also confess that congregations sometimes train preachers to give them less Bible. We reward excitement more quickly than explanation. We say, “He preached!” when we mean, “He got loud.” We say, “She tore the church up!” when nobody can identify the text she explained. We confuse volume with authority, repetition with depth, perspiration with preparation, and a key change from the organ with the movement of the Holy Spirit.

Let us be honest: sometimes the organ rescued a sermon that the study never met.

There is nothing wrong with celebration. There is something wrong when celebration becomes camouflage. A congregation can shout over an empty sermon just as easily as it can shout over a full one. Noise is not proof of nourishment. Babies make noise when they are hungry too.

The central question of this book is simple: What would happen if preachers returned to the text-not as a prop, but as authority; not as an opening ceremony, but as the source, structure, substance, and standard of the sermon? What would happen if we preached Christ instead of constantly preaching ourselves? What would happen if we trusted the Word enough to explain it carefully and trusted the Spirit enough to apply it powerfully?

This is a call back to the Book. It is also a practical manual. We will identify what has gone wrong, laugh at some of our strangest pulpit habits, recover the biblical theology of preaching, and build sermons line upon line and precept upon precept. We will learn how to study, interpret, structure, illustrate, apply, invite, and evaluate. We will also confront the preacher's character, because a sermon cannot be separated forever from the life of the person preaching it.

The goal is not merely to produce better sermons. The goal is to form faithful preachers who love Jesus, love Scripture, love people, and fear God more than they fear an empty room, a quiet response, a critical member, or a shrinking social-media audience.

So let us begin with the question many churches are afraid to ask: Has anybody seen the sermon?

Chapter 1: The Missing Person Report

> *"So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading."* - ***Nehemiah 8:8, KJV***

An Emergency Call from Heaven

Imagine a dispatcher answering a late-night call from heaven.

"Emergency services. What seems to be the problem?"

"We would like to report someone missing."

"Who is missing?"

"The sermon."

"When was it last seen?"

"It was standing behind a pulpit with an open Bible."

"Can you describe it?"

"Yes. It explained the text, pointed to Christ, exposed sin, offered grace, and called people to obedience."

"Any distinguishing features?"

"It had a backbone."

"Where do you think it went?"

"We are not sure. It entered a church carrying doctrine and has not been seen since."

The Sermon Has Not Disappeared Everywhere

This is satire, not surrender. Faithful preaching still exists. Around the world, pastors labor quietly in small congregations,

hospital rooms, prisons, storefront churches, rural chapels, military bases, college ministries, house churches, and crowded sanctuaries. They study the text, pray over names, preach Christ, bury saints, baptize converts, counsel families, and return to the desk every week. Most will never trend. Heaven knows their names.

But something has clearly shifted in many places. The sermon is increasingly judged by the wrong questions. Was it shareable? Was it short? Was it exciting? Did the crowd respond? Did the clip perform? Did the preacher look confident? These questions are not entirely irrelevant, but they are dangerously incomplete. The first questions must be: Was it true? Was the text handled faithfully? Was Christ proclaimed? Was the gospel clear? Were hearers called to repent, believe, obey, hope, endure, forgive, serve, and worship?

What Biblical Preaching Actually Does

Nehemiah 8:8 gives us a beautiful miniature of biblical proclamation. The leaders read from the Book distinctly, gave the sense, and caused the people to understand. They did not merely mention the passage. They made its meaning clear.

Biblical preaching begins with what God has said, seeks what God meant in context, announces that truth to the present congregation, shows its fulfillment and center in the redemptive work of God, and presses it upon the conscience with clarity and love.

The preacher is not a spiritual content creator looking for material. The preacher is a steward handling a treasure that belongs to another. The sermon is not the preacher's opportunity to show how clever the preacher is. It is the congregation's opportunity to hear what God has said.

The One-Verse Drive-By

A troubling habit appears when the preacher reads one verse, closes the Bible, and never returns. The verse functions like a ribbon-cutting ceremony. It officially opens the sermon but has no authority over what happens next.

The preacher says, “Turn with me to Psalm 23.” Everyone turns. “The Lord is my shepherd.” The Bible closes. Then the sermon becomes forty minutes about leadership lessons from a business conference, a difficult flight connection, an uncle who owned a lawn mower, and the preacher’s recent experience buying sneakers online.

At the end, the congregation knows the airline, the uncle, the lawn mower, and the shoes. David and the Shepherd have filed a missing-person report of their own.

A Loving Diagnostic

How do we know the sermon has gone missing? Ask the congregation after worship: What did the passage mean? What did you learn about God? What did you learn about Christ? What truth corrected you? What promise strengthened you? What command must you obey? What part of the gospel became clearer?

If the only answer is, “Pastor was on fire,” we may have admired the oven and missed the meal.

The issue is not whether people enjoyed the sermon. Truth can bring joy. The issue is whether enjoyment was attached to understanding and transformation. Biblical preaching aims at the mind, heart, will, imagination, memory, relationships, habits, and hope.

Back to the Book

The recovery begins with a humble decision: the text will govern the sermon. It will determine the main point, shape the structure, limit the claims, correct the preacher, and direct the application. We will not ask first, “What do I want to say?” We will ask, “What has God said here?”

That question sounds simple until the text disagrees with the preacher. Then we discover whether Scripture is truly authority or merely an assistant.

The preacher who returns to the Book may initially feel less impressive. The preacher will not be able to chase every clever thought. Some favorite stories will have to remain in the file. Some popular opinions will have to be surrendered. Some applause lines will disappear. But something better will emerge: the congregation will hear the voice of God through the faithful explanation of His Word.

Chapter 1: Back-to-the-Book Questions

- Could a listener reconstruct the passage's main idea from my sermon?

- Did the text shape my outline, or did I force the text into an outline I already wanted?

- Did I explain what the passage meant before I applied it?

- Did I make Christ and the gospel clearer?

- What would remain if every story, joke, and catchphrase were removed?

Chapter 2: When the Sermon Became a Show

> *"For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake."* ***- 2 Corinthians 4:5, KJV***

The Stage Is Not the Enemy

A platform is not sinful. A screen is not sinful. Lighting is not sinful. A camera is not sinful. Excellence in sound, design, and communication can help people hear and understand. The problem begins when the tools stop serving the message and the message starts serving the tools.

A church may spend hours perfecting a ninety-second opening video and nine minutes thinking through the sermon's application. We can rehearse the transition between songs, test every light cue, adjust every camera angle, and then walk into the pulpit with three unrelated ideas and a story about a dog.

The dog may be wonderful. The dog is not authorized to carry the sermon.

Performance Is a Demanding Master

When preaching becomes performance, the preacher begins measuring faithfulness by reaction. Silence feels like failure. A quiet congregation creates panic. The preacher reaches for louder volume, sharper jokes, bigger claims, or repeated phrases designed to pull a response from the room.

There is a difference between engaging hearers and controlling them. Engagement serves understanding. Control seeks validation. Engagement says, "Listen carefully because this truth matters." Control says, "Respond loudly so I can feel successful."

A faithful sermon may produce shouting, weeping, silence, conviction, laughter, repentance, questions, resistance, hope, or patient growth that becomes visible months later. The preacher cannot manufacture the proper response. The preacher must proclaim truth and trust God with the fruit.

The Celebrity Temptation

Paul wrote, “We preach not ourselves.” That sentence should be printed in large letters inside every pulpit, on every preaching tablet, and perhaps across the front-facing camera used for sermon clips.

The celebrity temptation does not begin with a stadium. It begins when the preacher subtly becomes the hero of every sermon. Every illustration proves the preacher was right. Every conflict ends with the preacher vindicated. Every testimony makes the preacher unusually spiritual. Every failure is old enough to be safe and polished enough to be impressive.

Jesus slowly becomes the assistant who helps the preacher achieve an inspiring life.

Biblical preaching reverses the arrangement. Christ is Lord. The preacher is a servant. The preacher’s personality matters, but it must function like a window, not a mirror. A window helps people see beyond it. A mirror keeps returning attention to the person standing in front of it.

Church or Late-Night Television?

Comedy can serve preaching. Humor can lower defenses, expose absurdity, build connection, and help truth remain in memory. Jesus used exaggeration and irony. The prophets used satire. Elijah suggested Baal might be on vacation or asleep. Scripture is not humorless.

But comedy becomes dangerous when laughter is the sermon's destination. A preacher can become so committed to landing the joke that the text becomes the setup and the congregation becomes the audience. When hearers leave remembering ten jokes and no truth, the comic succeeded and the preacher failed.

The test is not, "Was it funny?" The test is, "What did the humor reveal, clarify, or expose?" If the joke can be removed without affecting the sermon's truth, it may simply be decoration. Decoration is not always wrong, but a sanctuary cannot be built out of decorations.

Production Should Bow

Every element of worship should bow before the purpose of worship. Music should bow. Lighting should bow. Announcements should bow. Video should bow. Personality should bow. Tradition should bow. Technology should bow. The preacher should bow.

The sermon becomes a show when everything is arranged to make the preacher appear powerful. It becomes worship when everything is arranged to show that Christ is glorious.

The difference may not be visible in the first five minutes. Both can look polished. Both can sound confident. Both can generate applause. Time reveals the fruit. A show creates consumers who demand another experience. Biblical preaching forms disciples who carry a cross.

The Production Audit

- Does every creative element help people understand and respond to the truth?

- Would the sermon still stand if the electricity failed?

- Am I disappointed by a quiet response because truth was unclear-or because my ego was not fed?

- Do my illustrations reveal Christ, or repeatedly advertise me?

- Are we forming disciples or training religious consumers?

Chapter 3: Jesus Did Not Need a Smoke Machine

> *"And they were astonished at his doctrine: for his word was with power."* ***- Luke 4:32, KJV***

Power Without Props

Jesus preached on hillsides, in homes, beside the sea, in synagogues, in the temple courts, from a boat, at dinner tables, and while walking down roads. He had no wireless microphone, no LED wall, no countdown video, no personal logo, no branded notebook, and no team reminding the crowd when to applaud.

Yet people were astonished because His word carried authority. The authority did not come from presentation tricks. It came from who He was and from the truth He spoke.

This does not mean modern tools are useless. It means they are powerless to create what only God can give. We can amplify sound, but not authority. We can generate atmosphere, but not conviction. We can schedule a dramatic moment, but not revival.

The Fog of Confusion

A smoke machine can make a room look mysterious. Confusing preaching can do the same thing.

Some sermons sound deep because nobody understands them. The preacher uses technical vocabulary, unexplained Greek terms, theological labels, historical references, and sentences long enough to require rest stops. When the people look puzzled, the preacher assumes they are amazed.

Clarity is not the enemy of depth. Clarity is evidence that the preacher has done the hard work. Muddy water is not necessarily deep; sometimes it is just muddy.

Jesus spoke profound truth with fields, bread, fish, lamps, coins, doors, seeds, sheep, fathers, children, weddings, weather, and ordinary work. His language was accessible, but His claims were not shallow. A child could enter the picture while a scholar could spend a lifetime exploring its meaning.

Anointing Is Not a Vocal Technique

Many preaching traditions use rhythm, repetition, musical cadence, and celebration beautifully. These forms can carry biblical truth into the heart and memory of a congregation. But no technique should be confused with the anointing of the Holy Spirit.

A preacher can learn to breathe at the right moment, raise the pitch, repeat the phrase three times, turn sideways, wipe the forehead, and signal the musician. The room may respond because the form is familiar. Familiar response is not necessarily spiritual transformation.

The Holy Spirit does more than make people emotional. He glorifies Christ, convicts of sin, illuminates truth, produces repentance, gives assurance, creates holiness, strengthens faith, and forms love. Any alleged “anointing” that consistently leaves people impressed with the preacher but unchanged toward Christ deserves examination.

The Word Has Its Own Weight

The preacher’s task is not to make the Bible powerful. The Bible is not a weak battery waiting for the preacher to charge it. The preacher’s task is to handle it faithfully, explain it accurately, and deliver it courageously.

We sometimes decorate difficult texts because we do not trust them. We soften warnings, rush past doctrine, avoid judgment,

hide commands, and replace repentance with vague inspiration. We assume people will not tolerate the full counsel of God.

But starving people do not need a prettier menu. They need food.

The Word comforts precisely because it also confronts. Grace amazes because sin is real. The cross saves because judgment is deserved. Resurrection hope matters because death is an enemy. Remove the hard truths and the good news becomes sentimental advice.

Use the Tools-Do Not Trust the Tools

Use screens when they help. Use graphics when they clarify. Use video when it serves. Use microphones so people can hear. Prepare the room with excellence. But never confuse the servant with the source.

On the day the screen freezes, the microphone crackles, the lyric slides disappear, and the lights refuse to cooperate, the church should still possess everything necessary for worship: the gathered people of God, the Spirit of God, and the Word of God.

Jesus did not need a smoke machine. Neither does the truth.

Clarity Exercise

State the main point of your next sermon in one sentence a twelve-year-old can understand. Then state why it matters in one sentence. If you cannot do that, continue studying before adding another illustration, slide, quote, or story.

Chapter 4: Open the Bible Before You Open Your Mouth

> *"Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth."* - ***2 Timothy 2:15, KJV***

The Saturday-Night Miracle

Every preacher has faced a difficult week. Emergencies happen. Funerals come. Families need care. Bodies get tired. Minds become crowded. Grace is necessary.

But there is a difference between an emergency and a system. Some preachers have built an entire ministry around the Saturday-night miracle: "Lord, I have given You none of my attention all week. Please give me a revelation before morning."

The Lord is merciful. The congregation should not have to depend on that mercy every Sunday.

Preparation is not unbelief. Study is not the opposite of anointing. Prayer and study are partners. The Spirit who inspired Scripture is not offended when the preacher works carefully to understand it.

Read Before Research

The first commentary should be the text itself. Read the passage repeatedly. Read what comes before and after. Read the entire book when possible. Mark repeated words, contrasts, commands, promises, questions, causes, results, characters, movement, and tone.

Before asking what everyone else says, wrestle with what is actually there. Commentaries are gifts, but they should not

replace observation. Otherwise the preacher becomes a delivery service for borrowed insights.

One sign of shallow preparation is a sermon crowded with quotations but empty of explanation. The preacher introduces six scholars, three famous pastors, two psychologists, a leadership expert, and a poet. The biblical writer sits in the back waiting to be called.

Ask Better Questions

Good study asks disciplined questions: Who wrote? To whom? Why? What situation is addressed? What comes before and after? What literary form is this? What words or ideas repeat? What does the passage reveal about God, humanity, sin, grace, covenant, wisdom, worship, mission, judgment, hope, and redemption?

Then ask: What is the author's main claim? What response did the text demand from its first hearers? How does this passage relate to the whole story of Scripture? How does it point toward, prepare for, reveal, explain, or flow from the person and work of Jesus Christ?

Only after those questions should we ask, "How does this preach?" If we begin with "How can I make this exciting?" we may force the passage to perform tricks it was never written to perform.

Rightly Dividing

Paul's command to rightly divide the word of truth pictures careful, accurate work. The preacher is a workman. Workmen measure. Workmen sharpen tools. Workmen learn materials. Workmen do not cut randomly and blame the wood.

Bad interpretation often produces loud certainty. The preacher announces, "God told me," when the text has not said anything

close to the claim. That phrase can become spiritual armor protecting weak ideas from examination.

God will never be offended when His people test preaching by His written Word. The Bereans were called noble because they searched the Scriptures to see whether Paul's teaching was so. If the apostle Paul could be examined, Pastor Thunder should survive a Bible check.

The Sermon Starts with Surrender

The preacher must stand under the Word before standing over a congregation. The text must correct the preacher first. It must expose the preacher's pride, habits, fears, prejudices, ambitions, wounds, and blind spots.

A dangerous sermon is one the preacher uses only on other people. "Somebody in here needs to forgive," says the preacher who has not spoken to a sibling in six years. "You must be generous," says the preacher who never gives quietly. "Walk in humility," says the preacher whose entrance requires theme music.

The goal is not perfection before preaching. No imperfect person could preach. The goal is honesty, repentance, and submission. The preacher should be able to say, "This Word has already found me. Now let us stand beneath it together."

A Repeatable Weekly Rhythm

Monday: Recover, pray, and read the next passage without trying to build a sermon.

Tuesday: Observe the text, research context, and identify the main idea.

Wednesday: Trace the passage through the whole Bible and clarify its connection to Christ and the gospel.

Thursday: Build the sermon structure, applications, illustrations, and transitions.

Friday: Write or refine the manuscript or preaching notes. Remove everything that does not serve the main point.

Saturday: Pray, rehearse aloud, simplify, and rest.

Sunday: Preach the Word, love the people, trust the Spirit, and refuse to grade faithfulness by applause.

The Study Desk Checklist

- Have I read the passage enough to hear its argument and tone?

- Can I state the author's main point accurately?

- Have I checked historical, literary, and biblical context?

- Have I allowed the text to correct me?

- Is my application rooted in the text rather than personal preference?

- Is Christ proclaimed naturally and faithfully?

- Can every major claim be defended from Scripture?

Chapter 5: Stop Preaching Around the Text

> *"So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading." - Nehemiah 8:8, KJV*

The Scenic Route to Nowhere

Some sermons treat the biblical text like an airport runway: the preacher touches it briefly, gains speed, and then spends the next forty minutes flying wherever imagination wishes. The verse was read, so technically Scripture appeared. But reading a verse is not the same as preaching it.

A congregation should not need a private investigator to discover how the sermon came from the passage. If the title is "Three Ways to Win Your Tuesday," but the text is the feeding of the five thousand, something has gone missing-and it is probably the feeding of the five thousand.

Preaching around the text happens when the passage becomes a decoration rather than the source. The preacher arrives with a speech already built, searches for a verse that sounds supportive, and attaches it like a license plate. The result may be clever, emotional, and memorable, but it is not exposition.

Give the Sense

Nehemiah 8 gives a wonderfully plain description of faithful ministry: they read the Book distinctly, gave the sense, and caused the people to understand. That is not glamorous, but it is glorious. Read it. Explain it. Help people understand it.

The preacher is not called to hide the meaning beneath performance. The preacher is called to uncover the meaning with clarity. We do not stand between the people and the Word as

celebrities. We stand beside the Word as servants and say, “Look here. See what God has said.”

A biblical sermon can be creative, passionate, musical, humorous, and culturally alive. But every creative choice must serve the text. The outline should grow from the passage. The applications should rise from the passage. The invitation should answer the passage. Even the jokes should know where the text lives.

The Verse Is Not Your Employee

Scripture does not work for the preacher. The preacher works for Scripture. We may not drag a verse into our sermon, hand it a uniform, and order it to support our favorite opinion.

When the text corrects our planned point, the planned point must lose. When the passage refuses to fit the catchy title, the catchy title must be fired. When careful study reveals that our favorite interpretation was wrong, repentance is not embarrassment; it is faithfulness.

The safest preacher is not the one who never changes a sermon. It is the one who changes quickly when the Bible proves the sermon wrong.

A Simple Test

After preparing, cover your sermon notes and read only the passage. Could a thoughtful listener recover your main point from the text itself? If not, you may be preaching near the Bible rather than from it.

Another test is even simpler: underline every sentence in the sermon that directly explains, proves, applies, or illustrates the passage. If most of the page remains untouched, you have not written a sermon. You have written a speech with a Bible verse in the lobby.

Back-to-the-Book Exercise

Choose one paragraph of Scripture. Write one sentence stating what the author is saying. Write one sentence stating why it matters. Build no more than three movements, each tied to a phrase in the passage. Remove every point that cannot be traced back to the text.

Chapter 6: Context Is Not Optional

> *“Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation.” - 2 Peter 1:20, KJV*

The Kidnapped Verse

A verse without context is one of the most frequently kidnapped citizens in the church. It is removed from its neighborhood, separated from its family, forced into a strange sermon, and made to say things it never intended.

“I can do all things through Christ” becomes a guarantee that believers can win every competition. “Where there is no vision, the people perish” becomes a fundraising slogan for the pastor’s building project. “Touch not mine anointed” becomes a spiritual restraining order against accountability. Meanwhile, the original context sits in the back row waving both hands.

Context is not academic decoration. It is protection against making God say what God did not say.

Every Verse Has Neighbors

Words live in sentences. Sentences live in paragraphs. Paragraphs live in books. Books live in the story of Scripture. The faithful preacher meets the neighbors before announcing what the resident means.

Read what comes before. Read what follows. Ask who is speaking, to whom, under what covenant setting, in what historical circumstance, and for what purpose. Notice repeated words, contrasts, commands, promises, causes, results, and changes in tone.

The Bible is inspired down to its words, but those words were not dropped into a jar and shaken. God gave them through authors who made arguments, told stories, wrote poems, delivered prophecies, recorded letters, and proclaimed the gospel.

Genre Matters

Proverbs are not unconditional promises. Poetry uses imagery. Apocalyptic literature uses symbols. Narrative tells us what happened, not always what should happen. Letters answer real situations. Parables press a central truth and are not treasure maps where every donkey hair represents a committee.

A preacher who ignores genre can make the Song of Solomon sound like automobile maintenance and Revelation sound like this week's weather forecast.

Respecting genre does not weaken preaching. It allows the passage to speak with its God-given voice.

The Humility of Context

Context requires the preacher to admit that the first question is not, "What does this mean to me?" The first question is, "What did the inspired author communicate?" Personal application comes after faithful interpretation.

This is humbling because it limits our freedom to be impressive. We cannot simply announce the first idea that enters our mind. We must listen. And listening is one of the holiest disciplines a preacher can practice.

Context Checklist

- What comes immediately before and after the passage?

- Who is speaking, and who is being addressed?

- What kind of literature is this?

- What problem, question, or situation is being addressed?

- How does this passage fit the argument of the book?

- How does it relate to Christ and the whole story of Scripture?

- What would the first hearers have understood?

Chapter 7: The Fortune-Cookie Gospel

> *“For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified.” - 1 Corinthians 2:2, KJV*

Open, Read, Feel Better

The fortune-cookie sermon is small, sweet, vague, and impossible to disagree with. “Something good is coming.” “Your season is changing.” “People who doubted you will watch you rise.” The congregation says amen because nobody knows exactly what was said, but it sounded supportive.

There is nothing wrong with encouragement. Scripture encourages deeply. But biblical encouragement has bones. It is rooted in who God is, what Christ has done, what God has promised, and how believers are called to live. The fortune-cookie gospel offers pleasant sentences without the cross, repentance, holiness, suffering, judgment, resurrection, or discipleship.

It is possible to make people feel better for thirty minutes while leaving them spiritually unprepared for Monday.

Christ Is More Than a Life Coach

Jesus did not die and rise merely to help us become improved versions of ourselves. He came to save sinners, reconcile enemies to God, destroy the works of the devil, create a holy people, and reign as Lord.

When sermons reduce Jesus to a motivational assistant, the gospel becomes self-help with background music. The central question shifts from “How can I be reconciled to God?” to “How can God help me achieve my plans?”

The true gospel does not place Jesus inside our story as a supporting character. It places us inside His story as redeemed servants.

Good News Requires Bad News

Grace is not amazing when sin is treated as a minor inconvenience. The cross makes little sense when judgment disappears. Resurrection becomes inspirational symbolism when death is not an enemy and Christ is not Lord.

Faithful preaching names sin without delighting in shame. It announces judgment without pretending the preacher is superior. It proclaims grace without turning grace into permission. It calls for repentance because the King has come and mercy is available.

Encouragement with Scripture in It

Tell the weary saint that God is faithful-and show it in the text. Tell the grieving family that resurrection is coming-and preach Christ's empty tomb. Tell the ashamed sinner that forgiveness is real-and explain the blood of Jesus. Tell the persecuted believer that suffering is not wasted-and open Romans 8 or 1 Peter.

Biblical encouragement lasts because it rests on truth stronger than mood.

Diagnostic Questions

- Could this message be preached without the death and resurrection of Jesus?

- Did I name sin, grace, repentance, faith, and obedience where the text does?

- Are my promises actually promises God made?

- Did I encourage people with truth or merely flatter them?

- Will listeners leave admiring themselves or trusting Christ?

Chapter 8: Five-Thousand-Dollar Shoes and Two-Dollar Sermons

“Feed the flock of God which is among you…” - 1 Peter 5:2, KJV

The Outfit Was Exegeted

The preacher entered wearing shoes that required their own security detail. The suit was tailored. The watch knew the time in seven countries. The entrance music rose. The congregation stood. Then the sermon arrived wearing bedroom slippers.

This chapter is not an argument against excellence, nice clothing, fair compensation, or honoring pastors. It is an argument against polishing everything except the message.

A church may have pristine branding, cinematic announcements, premium lighting, and a preacher whose preparation can be summarized as, “I have been busy.” Sheep cannot eat branding.

Feed the Flock

Peter’s command is direct: feed the flock. Shepherds protect, guide, know, serve, and feed. The pulpit is not a weekly fashion runway or a personal publicity platform. It is a feeding place.

People arrive carrying grief, temptation, confusion, family pressure, hidden sin, unanswered prayer, fear of death, and hunger for God. They do not need the preacher to prove he is important. They need the preacher to open the storehouse of Scripture.

A sermon with substance honors the congregation. It says their souls are worth study, prayer, accuracy, and careful preparation.

Stewardship of Attention

Every minute a congregation gives a preacher is a stewardship. The preacher should not waste twenty minutes protecting an introduction that should have died on Thursday.

Length is not the enemy; emptiness is. A ten-minute sermon can be shallow, and a fifty-minute sermon can be rich. The question is whether the time is filled with truth, clarity, movement, and pastoral purpose.

Editing is an act of love. Cut the story that exists only because it makes you look impressive. Cut the fourth repetition after the point is clear. Cut the theological side road that proves you own books. Leave the congregation with the Word rather than evidence of your vocabulary.

Honor Without Idolatry

Churches should honor faithful leaders. Leaders should tremble when honor begins to replace accountability. The platform must never become so elevated that the Bible cannot reach it.

The preacher who demands luxury while offering leftovers has confused shepherding with celebrity. The answer is not manufactured poverty. The answer is visible stewardship, humility, integrity, generosity, and serious work in the Word.

The Value Test

Ask not, “Did I look successful?” Ask, “Did I feed them?” Not, “Did they celebrate me?” but, “Did they see Christ?” Not, “Was the clip shareable?” but, “Was the text understandable and obeyable?”

Chapter 9: The Holy Spirit Does Not Need Your Gimmicks

> *“He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you.” - John 16:14, KJV*

Manufacturing a Move

We cannot schedule the Holy Spirit between the second song and the offering, but some services appear determined to try. The lights dim. The keyboard holds one emotional chord. The preacher whispers, pauses, walks slowly, and announces, “Something just shifted.” Sometimes what shifted was the sound engineer changing keys.

The Holy Spirit truly moves. He convicts, comforts, empowers, illuminates, sanctifies, gives gifts, creates unity, and glorifies Christ. Because His work is real, we should be especially careful not to counterfeit it with manipulation.

Atmosphere Is Not Authority

Music can help people focus. Silence can create space for reflection. Skilled communication can remove distraction. But atmosphere cannot regenerate a heart. Volume cannot produce conviction. Repetition cannot force revelation.

A congregation may cry because a story is moving, because music is beautiful, because memories were stirred, or because the Spirit is applying truth. Tears alone do not tell us which happened. The test is not intensity in the moment but fruit over time: repentance, faith, love, obedience, holiness, perseverance, and a clearer vision of Christ.

Trust the Spirit's Chosen Instrument

The Spirit inspired Scripture and works through the Word. That does not make preaching mechanical. It makes preaching dependent. The preacher studies carefully, prays desperately, speaks plainly, and trusts God to do what human technique cannot.

When we do not trust the Word, we reach for pressure. We embarrass people into responding, extend invitations until somebody moves, imply that silence means rebellion, or promise miracles God has not promised. The preacher's job is to call faithfully, not manufacture statistics.

Spiritual Freedom Needs Biblical Order

Depending on the Spirit does not excuse disorder, laziness, or lack of preparation. "I just let the Lord use me" can sometimes mean, "I did not study and hope passion hides it." The Spirit who gives liberty also produces self-control.

Preparation builds the fireplace; the Spirit sends the fire. We cannot send the fire, but we should not arrive with wet wood and blame heaven.

A Better Prayer

Instead of praying, "Lord, make them respond to me," pray, "Lord, make Christ clear. Convict where conviction is needed. Comfort where comfort is needed. Save sinners. Strengthen saints. Guard me from exaggeration. Let the Word run freely, and let me disappear behind it."

Chapter 10: The Altar Call Is Not a Hostage Situation

> *“Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart…” - Acts 2:37, KJV*

Just One More Verse

The invitation began at 12:15. At 12:42 the organist had changed keys nine times, the choir had sung “Just As I Am” so often that everyone was becoming concerned about where the song lived, and the preacher was still saying, “There is one more.”

There may indeed be one more. God saves people at altars, in pews, in cars, at kitchen tables, in hospital rooms, and while reading Scripture alone. The problem is not invitation. The problem is manipulation.

Call for a Real Response

Biblical preaching demands response. Peter called hearers to repent and be baptized. Paul reasoned and persuaded. Jesus called people to follow Him. A sermon that explains truth but never presses the conscience is incomplete.

But the preacher must call people to respond to God, not to relieve the preacher’s anxiety. We do not measure the Spirit by how many bodies move toward the front. Some people walk forward without repentance. Others sit still while God shatters pride and creates faith.

Clarity Before Pressure

An invitation should make the response clear. What is the gospel? What does repentance mean? What does faith mean? What is the person being asked to do? Who will counsel them? What happens next?

Vague appeals create vague decisions. “Come get your blessing” may mean salvation, church membership, prayer, healing, financial breakthrough, or simply that the service needs an ending. Say what you mean.

If calling unbelievers to Christ, explain Christ. If calling believers to repentance, identify the biblical issue. If inviting prayer, do not imply that walking forward earns special access to God.

No False Promises

Do not promise that everyone who comes forward will be healed today, receive money this week, recover a marriage, conceive a child, or see a case dismissed. God can do miracles. Preachers cannot sign contracts on His behalf.

Offer the promises Scripture actually gives: Christ receives all who come to Him. Those who confess and believe are saved. God forgives the repentant. The Spirit indwells believers. Nothing separates God’s children from His love. Resurrection is coming.

Counseling Is Part of the Invitation

An altar call without follow-up can produce spiritual orphans. Churches need trained counselors, clear gospel materials, prayer, contact, baptism preparation, discipleship, and connection to the body.

The goal is not to count raised hands. The goal is to make disciples.

Invitation Checklist

- Was the gospel explained clearly?

- Was the requested response specific and biblical?

- Did I avoid emotional pressure and false promises?

- Are trained people ready to counsel and follow up?

- Am I willing to trust God when the visible response is quiet?

Chapter 11: Jesus Is Still the Sermon

“For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus’ sake.” - 2 Corinthians 4:5, KJV

The Groom Was Missing

Imagine attending a wedding where the flowers are perfect, the musicians are excellent, the decorations are breathtaking, and the reception menu deserves its own television show. Then somebody whispers, “Where are the bride and groom?” That is what happens whenever a sermon has polish, passion, personality, and practical advice but no clear proclamation of Jesus Christ.

A message may mention God, destiny, purpose, favor, relationships, leadership, money, mental strength, and personal improvement while leaving Christ standing outside His own pulpit. The sermon may be inspiring, but inspiration without Christ cannot save. The preacher’s task is not merely to help people cope with life. It is to announce the crucified and risen Lord who gives eternal life.

Christ Is Not a Closing Decoration

Some sermons treat Jesus like the parsley beside the meal. His name appears near the end so the message can qualify as Christian. But Jesus is not the garnish. He is the bread of life. He is not the final illustration after the real point has been made. He is the center that gives every biblical point its meaning.

This does not mean forcing the same sentence into every text or pretending every verse says exactly the same thing. It means preaching each passage within the Bible’s great story of creation, fall, promise, redemption, church, and new creation. Christ fulfills the law and the prophets, reveals the Father, bears sin, conquers death, sends the Spirit, builds His church, and will return as King.

The Sermon Test

Ask this uncomfortable question: Could a sincere motivational speaker, a moral philosopher, or a life coach deliver this message without changing very much? If the answer is yes, the sermon may contain wisdom but it has not yet become Christian preaching.

Christian preaching tells the truth about God, sin, grace, the cross, resurrection, repentance, faith, obedience, hope, judgment, and the kingdom. It does not merely say, “You can do better.” It says, “You cannot save yourself, but Christ saves completely.”

A Little Pulpit Comedy

A church member said, “Pastor, that sermon changed my life.” The pastor asked, “What did you learn about Jesus?” The member paused and replied, “I learned that I need to believe in myself.” Jesus had been demoted from Savior to motivational background singer.

Preach Christ from Every Kind of Text

From narrative, preach the God who acts in history and the human need that finds its final answer in Christ. From law, reveal God’s holiness, human guilt, wise obedience, and the One who fulfills righteousness. From wisdom, show life under God’s rule and Christ as the wisdom of God. From prophecy, proclaim God’s covenant faithfulness and the promised King. From the Epistles, teach the finished work of Christ and the life that flows from union with Him.

Back to the Book

- Where was Christ central in my most recent sermon?

- Did I explain what Christ has done, or merely mention His name?

- Could my sermon have been delivered in a non-Christian setting with only minor edits?

- Did I call hearers to trust, worship, and obey Christ?

Pulpit Workshop

Take your next sermon outline and underline every place where Christ's person, work, teaching, lordship, or promises are made clear. If nothing is underlined until the conclusion, rebuild the sermon.

The Preacher's Prayer

Lord Jesus, rescue me from preaching myself. Open my eyes to Your glory in Scripture, and make every message a faithful witness to who You are and what You have done. Amen.

Kingdom Challenge

Rewrite one major sermon point so that it moves clearly from the text to Christ and from Christ to the hearer's response.

Chapter 12: Stop Dating the Culture and Marry the Word

> *“Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away.” - Matthew 24:35, KJV*

The Trend Has Already Changed

Culture changes clothes before the preacher finishes his introduction. A sermon built entirely around what is trending may expire before the benediction. Yesterday’s viral phrase becomes today’s embarrassment, and the preacher who chased relevance discovers that relevance can run faster than he can.

The church must understand the age, but it must not take its orders from the age. The preacher listens carefully to the questions people are asking, then answers those questions with Scripture rather than surrendering Scripture to those questions.

The Lighthouse Does Not Chase Ships

A lighthouse is useful because it stays anchored while the sea moves. If the lighthouse decided to become more relatable by floating beside every ship, everybody would soon be lost. The pulpit must stand where God placed it: rooted in truth, shining into confusion, warning of danger, and guiding people toward safety.

Biblical preaching is not cultural ignorance. It should know the language, wounds, idols, fears, technologies, injustices, temptations, and false hopes of its hearers. But knowledge of culture serves exposition; it does not replace it.

Signs of a Culture-Driven Pulpit

- Celebrity quotations receive more explanation than Scripture.

- The sermon changes its convictions whenever public opinion changes.

- Every message begins with a trend and eventually visits a verse.

- The preacher knows the algorithm better than the argument of the text.

- Controversy is selected for clicks rather than pastoral necessity.

- Biblical words are avoided because somebody online might misunderstand them.

Contextualize the Message, Not the Truth

Paul spoke differently in a synagogue than he did at Athens, but he did not preach a different Lord. Wise preachers choose understandable words, relevant illustrations, and appropriate applications. They remove unnecessary barriers without removing the offense of the cross.

The goal is not to sound old merely because truth is old. The goal is to make ancient truth clear in the present moment. A preacher can explain justification using ordinary language, address artificial intelligence without worshiping novelty, confront racism without replacing the gospel with a party platform, and discuss sexuality without cruelty or cowardice.

When the Internet Becomes the Holy Ghost

Some preachers check reactions before convictions. If the clip performs well, it must have been anointed. If it receives criticism, it must have been persecution. But the algorithm is not the Holy Spirit, comments are not the judgment seat of Christ, and virality is not a fruit of the Spirit.

Back to the Book

- Does my preaching interpret culture through Scripture, or Scripture through culture?

- Which cultural idols am I tempted to excuse because they are popular?

- Which biblical truths am I tempted to overemphasize merely because they generate attention?

- Can listeners distinguish God’s command from my political or personal opinion?

Pulpit Workshop

Name one current issue your congregation faces. Write three columns: what culture says, what the biblical text says, and how Christ shapes the church’s response. Build the sermon from the second column, not the first.

The Preacher's Prayer

God of truth, make me compassionate toward people without becoming captive to the age. Give me courage to speak clearly and wisdom to speak fittingly. Amen.

Kingdom Challenge

Remove one trendy illustration from your next sermon and replace it with a clearer explanation of the passage.

Chapter 13: The Pulpit Is Not a Comedy Club

“A time to weep, and a time to laugh…” - Ecclesiastes 3:4, KJV

Humor Is a Servant

Humor can lower defenses, expose foolishness, make truth memorable, and help tired people listen. Scripture itself contains irony, exaggeration, wordplay, satire, and scenes that would have made the original hearers smile. Elijah asked the prophets of Baal whether their god was busy. Jesus described a man inspecting a speck while carrying a beam in his own eye. Paul wished certain troublemakers would finish the surgery they were promoting.

The Bible is not humorless. But biblical humor serves truth. It does not turn worship into open-mic night or make the preacher the weekly headliner.

Twenty Jokes and One Accidental Verse

A preacher told six stories, performed four impressions, teased the musicians, roasted the deacons, and explained what happened at the airport. Forty minutes later he read a verse and said, “You all know what that means.” Unfortunately, nobody did, including the verse.

Laughter can create the illusion that communication has occurred. The congregation feels engaged, the preacher feels successful, and the text remains unexplained. A sermon should never be judged by the number of laughs any more than a meal should be judged by the sound of the plates.

Never Make Pain the Punchline

The pulpit is dangerous when humor humiliates. Do not mock bodies, disabilities, singleness, poverty, mental distress, educational level, ethnic groups, spouses, children, or people who

trusted you with private pain. The preacher has authority in the room; that imbalance makes careless jokes heavier than they sound.

Self-deprecating humor is usually safer, but even that can become a strategy for fishing for compliments. Humor should create fellowship, not victims.

Let the Text Determine the Temperature

Some passages invite joy. Others require grief, reverence, warning, wonder, or silence. The crucifixion does not need a joke every ninety seconds to keep attention. Lament should be allowed to lament. Judgment should feel serious. Resurrection should rise with holy joy.

Mature preaching has emotional range. It does not force every passage into the preacher's favorite personality setting.

The Three-Question Humor Filter

- Does this humor help people understand or remember the truth?

- Could this joke wound someone already carrying shame?

- Will people remember the joke but forget the point?

Back to the Book

- Does humor support my message or compete with it?

- Have I ever used the pulpit to embarrass someone?

- Do I become uncomfortable when the room is quiet?

- Which passages require a different emotional tone from my usual style?

Pulpit Workshop

Review your next sermon manuscript. Mark every humorous moment with an H. Beside each one, write its purpose. Delete any joke whose only purpose is to prove you are funny.

The Preacher's Prayer

Lord, give me joy without foolishness, warmth without carelessness, and words that heal rather than humiliate. Let every laugh make room for truth. Amen.

Kingdom Challenge

Preach one section of your next sermon without rushing to fill every serious moment with humor.

Chapter 14: Expository Preaching Never Goes Out of Style

> *“They read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading.” - Nehemiah 8:8, KJV*

Read It, Explain It, Apply It

Expository preaching is not a sermon that contains many verses. It is preaching in which the main point of the biblical text becomes the main point of the sermon. The preacher reads the passage, explains what the inspired author communicates, shows how it fits Scripture’s larger story, and applies its truth to the hearers.

This approach is not a prison for creativity. It is a guardrail against making the Bible endorse whatever the preacher already wanted to say.

The GPS Preacher

He announced Genesis 12, visited Psalm 23, detoured through Ezekiel’s wheels, stopped briefly at a wedding in Cana, crossed into Revelation, and ended with Ruth. The congregation traveled the entire Bible and never learned why Abram left home. Even the Bible app whispered, “Recalculating.”

Cross-references can illuminate a text, but they should not kidnap it. The sermon’s listeners should know where they are, what the passage says, why it says it, and what obedience looks like.

Line Upon Line Requires Honest Work

The phrase “line upon line, precept upon precept” is often used to celebrate careful teaching. Ironically, in Isaiah 28 it also echoes the mocking speech of hearers who resisted God’s instruction and would experience judgment. That context itself proves the point:

faithful preaching must not merely repeat familiar phrases; it must investigate what they mean where God placed them.

Careful exposition asks about genre, grammar, historical setting, literary flow, repeated words, argument, covenant context, and canonical fulfillment. It distinguishes description from prescription, proverb from promise, and application from interpretation.

One Big Idea

A sermon becomes clearer when it can be expressed in one complete sentence. Not a slogan that sounds clever but says little. A real sentence: Because God has done this in the text, His people must believe, become, or do this.

Every supporting point should develop that controlling idea. Illustrations serve it. Applications grow from it. The conclusion presses it home. When a sermon has seven unrelated “points,” it may actually be seven sermon fragments sharing a ride.

Explanation Is Not Boring

Confusion is boring. Irrelevance is boring. Repetition without progress is boring. Clear explanation can be electrifying because people suddenly see what God has said. The goal is not to make the Bible interesting, as though divine revelation needs rescue. The goal is to remove the fog created by distance, ignorance, and poor handling.

Back to the Book

- Can I state the main point of my text in one sentence?

- Does my sermon structure arise from the passage or from a template I use every week?

- Have I confused a cross-reference tour with exposition?

- What part of the text have I avoided because it complicates my preferred message?

Pulpit Workshop

Choose one paragraph of Scripture. Write: the author’s main claim, the supporting reasons, the original audience’s situation, the connection to Christ, and three legitimate applications. Do not write the sermon title until this work is complete.

The Preacher's Prayer

God who speaks, make me patient with the text and honest about what I do not know. Help me give the sense so Your people may understand. Amen.

Kingdom Challenge

For your next message, limit yourself to one primary passage and make every major point traceable to it.

Chapter 15: Feed Sheep, Do Not Entertain Goats

“Feed my sheep.” - John 21:17, KJV

The Shepherd’s Assignment

Jesus did not tell Peter, “Impress My sheep.” He did not say, “Build your brand around My sheep,” “Use My sheep to prove your influence,” or “Keep My sheep excited enough to increase attendance.” He said, “Feed my sheep.”

Shepherding includes protection, guidance, correction, comfort, presence, and nourishment. In the pulpit, feeding means giving people the whole counsel of God in portions they can understand and obey.

Crowds Can Be Full and Souls Can Be Empty

A service may produce energy without producing maturity. People can shout, post clips, buy merchandise, repeat catchphrases, and remain unable to explain the gospel, resist temptation, forgive an enemy, endure suffering, or read Scripture responsibly.

Entertainment asks, “Did they enjoy the experience?” Shepherding asks, “Were they nourished for faithfulness?” Enjoyment is not evil, but it is a poor final measure of ministry.

Know the Flock

Expository preaching is not impersonal information transfer. The shepherd studies both text and people. He knows that one hearer is burying a parent, another is fighting addiction, another is hiding abuse, another is arrogant, another is exhausted from caregiving, and another has never understood grace.

The preacher cannot address every private circumstance in every sermon, but pastoral awareness shapes application. It keeps the sermon from floating six feet above real life.

A Balanced Diet

A congregation fed only encouragement becomes fragile. A congregation fed only rebuke becomes crushed or proud. A congregation fed only prophecy charts may know the beasts but not how to love its neighbor. A congregation fed only topical advice may know how to budget but not how Romans argues.

Healthy preaching includes doctrine, narrative, wisdom, lament, warning, gospel proclamation, ethics, mission, worship, suffering, hope, church life, family life, justice, holiness, and the coming kingdom. Preaching through books of the Bible naturally expands the diet and prevents the pastor's favorite subjects from becoming the entire menu.

Do Not Blame the Sheep for Your Cooking

Sometimes people resist sound doctrine. Sometimes, however, the preacher has confused depth with obscurity. Raw flour is not a meal. Study must be cooked into clarity. The sermon should not display everything the preacher discovered; it should serve what the congregation needs to understand the passage.

Back to the Book

- What spiritual diet has my congregation received during the last six months?

- Which biblical themes have I neglected?

- Do my applications reflect the actual lives of the people I serve?

- Am I preparing to feed people or to display my preparation?

Pulpit Workshop

List your last twelve sermon texts and themes. Identify missing genres, doctrines, and pastoral needs. Use the gaps to shape the next preaching series.

The Preacher's Prayer

Chief Shepherd, teach me to love Your people more than applause. Make my study a kitchen of grace and my pulpit a table where souls are fed. Amen.

Kingdom Challenge

Have one pastoral conversation this week with no intention of using the person as a sermon illustration. Listen simply to know the flock better.

Chapter 16: The Greatest Compliment a Preacher Can Receive

> *“For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God.” - Acts 20:27, KJV*

Not “You Killed It”

Modern compliments can sound slightly dangerous. “Pastor, you murdered that sermon.” “You destroyed the room.” “You killed it today.” One hopes the spiritual casualties recover by Tuesday.

There is nothing wrong with appreciating gifted communication. Encouragement strengthens tired ministers. But the greatest compliment is not, “You were amazing.” It is, “I understand God’s Word better, I see Christ more clearly, and I know how I must respond.”

Faithfulness Over Fame

A faithful preacher may serve a small congregation, labor in obscurity, preach through difficult years, and never become widely known. Heaven does not confuse visibility with value. The Lord’s measure is not whether the preacher became famous, but whether the servant handled the Word honestly, loved the flock, endured hardship, and pointed people to Christ.

Fame can be stewarded, but it cannot certify faithfulness. Large crowds listened to false prophets. Jeremiah often preached without favorable results. Noah’s visible response numbers would have troubled a modern growth consultant, yet Hebrews remembers his faith.

Three Audiences in Every Sermon

The preacher speaks before the congregation, before his own conscience, and before God. The congregation may applaud what conscience condemns. Conscience may feel anxious when God

approves. The final audience is the Lord who gave the Word and will judge its teachers with greater strictness.

This reality should not create paralyzing fear. It should create holy freedom. The preacher does not need to manipulate approval when God's approval is the goal.

What Fruit Should We Seek?

- Clearer understanding of Scripture.

- Deeper worship of the triune God.

- Repentance that produces changed conduct.

- Faith in Christ rather than dependence on the preacher.

- Love, holiness, courage, endurance, generosity, and mission.

- A congregation increasingly able to read the Bible for itself.

When the Preacher Disappears

The best sermon is not one in which the preacher becomes unforgettable. It is one in which the truth becomes unavoidable. Like John the Baptist, the preacher says in effect, "He must increase, but I must decrease."

A pulpit has succeeded when people leave talking about the greatness of Christ, the authority of Scripture, and the obedience God requires. The preacher may be thanked, but he does not need to remain the center of the conversation.

The Long Obedience of Preaching

One sermon rarely accomplishes everything. Faithful preaching works through accumulation: week after week, text after text, correction after correction, comfort after comfort. The Word forms a people slowly and powerfully. The preacher plants and waters; God gives the increase.

Back to the Book

- Which compliments secretly matter most to me?

- Would I preach with the same care if the sermon were never posted online?

- Do people depend increasingly on Scripture or increasingly on my personality?

- What would faithfulness look like in my present assignment?

Pulpit Workshop

Write a private definition of a successful sermon using only biblical categories. Read it before preparing and after delivering your next message.

The Preacher's Prayer

Lord, free me from the need to be impressive. Let me be accurate, courageous, compassionate, and faithful. May Christ increase through every word I speak. Amen.

Kingdom Challenge

After your next sermon, ask one trusted listener not whether they liked it, but what the text taught, what they learned about Christ, and what response they believe God requires.

PART FOUR

THE PREACHER'S CHARACTER, CHRIST, AND FINISH

Chapter 17

Preach Christ, Not Yourself

The Sermon Is Not an Autobiography

Paul wrote, “For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord” (2 Corinthians 4:5). That sentence should hang over every desk where sermons are prepared. The preacher may appear in an illustration, but the preacher must never become the destination.

Some messages begin with the text, take a forty-minute tour through the preacher’s childhood, wardrobe, vacation, enemies, favorite restaurant, and misunderstood greatness, then wave at Jesus while pulling into the parking lot. The congregation has learned everything except what God said.

A personal story can open a window. It must not build a mansion in the middle of the sermon. The test is simple: does the story make the truth clearer, or does it make the preacher look larger?

The Dog With Allergies

One patient church member finally said, “Pastor, I now know your dog has allergies, your aunt burns biscuits, and your first car had no air-conditioning. I still do not know what Romans 8 means.”

The preacher laughed. He should also have taken notes.

Humility does not require pretending that God has never worked in your life. It requires telling your story in a way that makes grace-not you-the hero.

Three Movements Toward Christ

A Christ-centered sermon identifies the human condition exposed by the passage, announces what God has done supremely in

Christ, and calls hearers to faith-filled obedience. This is not forcing the name of Jesus into every paragraph. It is recognizing that the whole Bible belongs to the redemptive story fulfilled in Him.

The sermon should make people less impressed with the messenger and more astonished by the Savior. John the Baptist's pulpit philosophy still works: "He must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:30).

Back to the Book

- Do my illustrations magnify grace or advertise me?

- Could listeners explain the passage without repeating my catchphrases?

- Where did Christ become necessary and beautiful in my last sermon?

Pulpit Workshop

Take your latest manuscript and mark every first-person reference. Remove any that do not clarify the text, establish pastoral connection, or magnify God's grace.

The Preacher's Prayer

Lord Jesus, rescue me from preaching myself. Make me transparent enough to be useful and small enough for You to be seen. Amen.

Kingdom Challenge

Preach one sermon this month in which every major movement deliberately directs attention from human need to the sufficiency of Christ.

Chapter 18

Let the Text Set the Agenda

The Preacher Is a Steward, Not an Editor

A faithful preacher does not approach Scripture asking, “How can I make this passage support what I already wanted to say?” The better question is, “What has God said here, and how must I submit my message to it?”

The text is not a launchpad for the preacher’s favorite subject. It is the authority that chooses the subject, defines the problem, reveals God’s character, and governs the application.

When every passage somehow becomes money, haters, destiny, leadership, or the preacher’s anniversary, the Bible has not been interpreted. It has been kidnapped.

The Same Sermon Wearing Different Clothes

Some preachers have twelve sermon titles but only one sermon. David fights Goliath, and the message is “Your season is coming.” Paul suffers in prison, and the message is “Your season is coming.” Jesus goes to Calvary, and somehow the message is still “Your season is coming.”

Eventually even the congregation knows the closing before the opening text is read.

The variety of Scripture protects the church from the narrowness of the preacher. Lament teaches what celebration cannot. Judgment says what inspiration will not. Wisdom, narrative, prophecy, Gospel, letter, and apocalyptic vision each shape the people of God differently.

Four Governing Questions

Before outlining, ask: What did the inspired author communicate to the original audience? How does the literary and historical context control the meaning? What does the passage reveal about God and humanity? How does this truth find fulfillment, clarification, or redemptive connection in Christ?

Only after answering those questions should the preacher ask how the congregation must believe, feel, repent, endure, worship, or act. Application grows from meaning. It does not replace meaning.

Back to the Book

- Did the passage choose my message, or did my message choose the passage?

- What element of the text makes me uncomfortable?

- Have I allowed the genre and structure to shape the sermon?

Pulpit Workshop

Write the main idea of your next passage in one sentence using the subject and emphasis of the text itself. Build every point under that sentence.

The Preacher's Prayer

God of truth, silence my favorite speeches long enough for me to hear Your chosen word for Your people. Amen.

Kingdom Challenge

Preach one text whose main emphasis is not naturally among your favorite themes.

Chapter 19

The Forgotten Ministry of Conviction

Not Every Sermon Should Feel Like a Spa Day

The gospel comforts the afflicted, but it also afflicts the comfortable. Scripture encourages, heals, strengthens, and assures. It also exposes, rebukes, corrects, warns, and calls sinners to repentance.

A congregation can be affirmed every week and never be transformed. People may leave feeling ten feet tall while their pride, greed, bitterness, lust, dishonesty, and unforgiveness remain completely undisturbed.

Biblical encouragement is not telling people they are fine. It is telling them there is grace sufficient to make them new.

Do Not Blame the Mirror

No sensible person becomes angry with a mirror for revealing spinach between the teeth. The mirror did not create the problem; it exposed it. Scripture serves that merciful purpose for the soul.

The preacher must not enjoy hurting people. Conviction is not cruelty, volume, humiliation, or naming private failures from the pulpit. It is the Spirit applying truth to conscience so that sinners run toward Christ rather than away from dignity.

The goal is not guilt without remedy. The pattern is sin exposed, Christ proclaimed, repentance invited, and grace offered.

Conviction With Tears

Jesus pronounced woes, but He also wept over Jerusalem. Paul warned night and day with tears. The faithful preacher can speak sharply without becoming harsh because the warning comes from love.

A surgeon who refuses to mention the tumor is not kind. A surgeon who enjoys cutting is not trustworthy. Biblical preaching tells the truth and carries the heart of the Great Physician.

Back to the Book

- Does my preaching name actual sins or only vague struggles?

- Do I offer gospel hope after exposing guilt?

- Can people hear love in my warnings?

Pulpit Workshop

Review your next sermon for four movements: revelation, conviction, gospel remedy, and obedient response. Strengthen whichever movement is missing.

The Preacher's Prayer

Holy Spirit, wound only to heal, expose only to restore, and make my preaching truthful without making my spirit cruel. Amen.

Kingdom Challenge

Include one clear, specific call to repentance in your next sermon, joined to an equally clear announcement of grace in Christ.

Chapter 20

The Shepherd Smells Like Sheep

Sermons Are Prepared Among People

The best preaching is born in the study, but it does not remain there. The shepherd knows the hospital room, the unemployment line, the family argument, the funeral home, the recovery meeting, the wedding rehearsal, the teenager's questions, and the widow's silence.

You cannot love "the congregation" as an idea while avoiding actual congregants. Sheep are inconvenient. They call at the wrong time, misunderstand simple instructions, wander into avoidable trouble, and occasionally bite the shepherd. That is why pastoral ministry requires more than public charisma.

People listen differently when they know the preacher has sat with them when no camera was present.

Do Not Use Wounds as Content

Pastoral knowledge deepens application, but it must never become pulpit gossip. The preacher who turns counseling sessions into sermon illustrations teaches the entire church to remain silent about pain.

Change identifying details, ask permission when appropriate, or do not use the story. The pulpit is not a weekly episode of "Guess Which Member I Am Talking About."

Confidentiality is not merely professional caution. It is pastoral love.

Application With Names and Faces in Mind

During preparation, imagine the grieving mother, the skeptical college student, the new believer, the exhausted caregiver, the

successful executive, the returning citizen, and the child listening beside a grandparent. Ask how the same truth meets each person without changing its meaning.

A shepherd does not prepare seven different Bibles. He brings one faithful Word to a flock with many wounds and stages of growth.

Back to the Book

- Do I know the actual burdens of the people I preach to?

- Have I confused public visibility with pastoral presence?

- Can members trust me with pain without fearing exposure?

Pulpit Workshop

List six real pastoral situations present in your congregation. Add one sentence of faithful application for each without revealing anyone’s identity.

The Preacher's Prayer

Chief Shepherd, give me Your heart for the people behind the faces. Keep me close enough to love them and wise enough to protect them. Amen.

Kingdom Challenge

Make one pastoral visit or personal call before your next sermon solely to listen, not to collect an illustration.

Chapter 21

The Pulpit Is Holy Ground

Before You Speak to People About God

Prayer is not the decorative ribbon placed around completed sermon notes. It is part of the work from the first reading of the text to the final “Amen.” Before speaking to people about God, speak to God about the people.

Study without prayer can produce accurate information with no spiritual tenderness. Prayer without study can produce intense feelings with no biblical substance. The preacher needs an open Bible and bent knees.

The prayer closet does not excuse careless exegesis, and the library does not replace dependence on the Spirit.

The Saturday-Night Emergency

There is a special kind of prayer prayed at 11:47 Saturday night: “Lord, give me a word.” Heaven may answer, “I gave you sixty-six books and six days.”

God is merciful in emergencies, but procrastination should not become a preaching method. Regular preparation creates room for meditation, pastoral sensitivity, revision, and prayerful absorption.

A sermon should spend enough time in the preacher to become conviction rather than merely content.

Praying the Sermon Through

Pray for understanding while observing the passage. Pray for humility while consulting resources. Pray for clarity while outlining. Pray for courage while writing hard applications. Pray

for compassion while naming sin. Pray for Christ to be seen while rehearsing. Pray for hearers by name before delivery.

Then preach as one who depends upon God, not as one who believes preparation has placed God in his debt.

Back to the Book

- Is prayer integrated into my preparation or added at the end?

- Where am I relying on technique more than God?

- Have I prayed specifically for the people who will hear?

Pulpit Workshop

Create a prayer page for your next sermon with headings for understanding, holiness, clarity, courage, compassion, and response. Write one prayer under each.

The Preacher's Prayer

Lord, make the study and the secret place one room. Let what I say publicly be born from what You have corrected privately. Amen.

Kingdom Challenge

Arrive early enough before your next preaching assignment to pray through the room and for the hearers without rushing.

Chapter 22

A Generation Starving for Scripture

Surrounded by Content, Hungry for Truth

Modern believers can consume sermons, clips, podcasts, devotionals, livestreams, reels, quotes, and debates from sunrise to midnight. Yet many cannot explain the argument of Romans, locate Habakkuk, describe the covenant with Abraham, or distinguish a proverb from a promise.

The problem is not access. It is depth. We are drowning in religious content and dehydrated for Scripture.

A three-minute clip may awaken interest, but it cannot carry the full weight of forming a disciple. The church must recover sustained attention to whole passages and whole books.

Trust the People to Grow

Some leaders assume congregations cannot handle doctrine, context, difficult texts, or sermons longer than a commercial break. Yet the same people learn complex sports statistics, workplace systems, recipes, streaming plots, investment terms, and phone features when they believe the knowledge matters.

Do not confuse unfamiliarity with inability. Teach vocabulary. Repeat important frameworks. Explain patiently. Invite questions. Give people maps of biblical books and show how paragraphs connect.

The preacher's task is not to make Scripture shallow. It is to make deep truth clear.

Preaching for Biblical Literacy

Preach consecutive series through books. Read substantial portions aloud. Explain where the text fits in the Bible's story.

Define repeated theological terms. Connect Sunday preaching to small groups, reading plans, and family discussion.

A mature church should not merely remember sermons. It should increasingly know how to read the Bible when the preacher is absent.

Back to the Book

- Does my preaching increase biblical literacy over time?

- Am I underestimating the congregation’s capacity to learn?

- What whole book should our church understand next?

Pulpit Workshop

Design a six-to-eight-week series through one short biblical book. Write the textual unit, main idea, doctrine, Christ connection, and application for each week.

The Preacher's Prayer

God of the Word, create hunger in us that entertainment cannot satisfy. Teach me to feed Your people with patience, depth, and clarity. Amen.

Kingdom Challenge

Begin announcing and preparing a consecutive expository series through a complete biblical book.

Chapter 23

Preach Until Jesus Is Seen

Christ-Centered Is Not Christ-Shaped Decoration

Adding “and that is why we need Jesus” to the final two minutes does not automatically make a sermon Christ-centered. Christ must be organically related to the passage and to the human need the passage reveals.

The Old Testament anticipates Him through promise, pattern, covenant, sacrifice, kingship, priesthood, wisdom, suffering, and hope. The Gospels reveal Him. Acts proclaims Him. The letters explain life in Him. Revelation unveils His victory.

The preacher must avoid fanciful connections while refusing to preach the Bible as though its redemptive center never arrived.

From Moral Example to Gospel Power

A sermon on David and Goliath may tell hearers to face their giants. But before David becomes an example of courage, he is the anointed representative who defeats the enemy the fearful people could not defeat for themselves. That pattern prepares us to see a greater King.

Biblical characters can instruct us, but they cannot save us. Noah’s obedience, Ruth’s loyalty, Daniel’s courage, and Mary’s surrender all matter. Still, the final hope is not “try harder to be the hero.” It is trust and follow the true Hero.

Christ-centered preaching does not erase commands. It places obedience downstream from grace.

Make Him Necessary, Not Merely Mentioned

Ask what brokenness the passage uncovers, what divine provision it announces, and how Christ fulfills or secures that provision. Then show how union with Him changes identity, worship, relationships, endurance, and mission.

The goal is that hearers do not merely admire Jesus but see why they must trust Him, treasure Him, and obey Him.

Back to the Book

- Was Christ necessary to my sermon or merely mentioned?

- Did I connect grace to obedience?

- Did the passage govern the way I pointed to Jesus?

Pulpit Workshop

Take one Old Testament text and write three responsible roads to Christ: promise-fulfillment, redemptive pattern, and biblical theme. Choose the road most faithful to the text.

The Preacher's Prayer

Father, open the Scriptures so that hearts burn and Christ is recognized. Keep me from clever shortcuts and lead me along faithful roads to Your Son. Amen.

Kingdom Challenge

Rewrite the conclusion of one older sermon so that Christ becomes the sufficient answer to the need the text actually reveals.

Chapter 24

When the Chief Shepherd Appears

The Microphone Will Be Turned Off

One day the sanctuary will empty, the livestream will end, the clips will stop circulating, and every preacher will stand before the Chief Shepherd. The applause of admirers and criticism of opponents will both be strangely quiet.

The final question will not be whether the preacher was fashionable, viral, invited, quoted, branded, or introduced with impressive adjectives. The question will be faithfulness.

Did we preach the Word? Did we guard the gospel? Did we love the flock? Did we live what we proclaimed? Did we point people to Christ rather than build dependence on ourselves?

Hidden Faithfulness Counts

Many of heaven's finest preachers will never trend. They serve small congregations, preach funerals no one records, teach Wednesday Bible study to twelve people, visit hospitals, disciple children, and return to the text every week.

They may not have green rooms. Some barely have a room with functioning heat. Their sound system occasionally sounds demon-possessed. Their livestream freezes at the worst possible moment. Yet they open the Book and feed the people.

The Chief Shepherd does not confuse obscurity with failure.

Finish With the Bible Open

The calling is not to begin impressively but to finish faithfully. That requires repentance when ego grows, rest when the body weakens, accountability when temptation whispers, continued

learning when habits harden, and courage when truth becomes unpopular.

Let the final image of the faithful preacher be simple: an open Bible, a humble heart, a loved congregation, Christ exalted, and hands released from the results.

When the Chief Shepherd appears, may grace enable us to hear the words every servant longs for: “Well done, good and faithful servant.”

Back to the Book

- What definition of success will survive the judgment seat of Christ?

- Where do I need to repent before continuing to preach?

- What practices will help me finish faithful rather than merely visible?

Pulpit Workshop

Write a personal rule of life for preaching ministry covering Scripture, prayer, family, accountability, rest, money, sexuality, technology, and continued learning.

The Preacher's Prayer

Chief Shepherd, keep me faithful when noticed and when forgotten. Correct me, sustain me, and let me finish with clean hands, a soft heart, and Christ on my lips. Amen.

Kingdom Challenge

Read 2 Timothy 4:1-8 aloud before your next sermon and renew your commitment to preach the Word in season and out of season.

SPECIAL EXPANSION

THE PULPIT RECOVERY PROJECT

A Field Manual for Bringing the Bible Back to the Center

The chapters that follow move from diagnosis to recovery. They are designed for pastors, teachers, ministers in training, and congregations that are ready to exchange spiritual fast food for the nourishing Word of God. The tone remains humorous, but the purpose is holy: open the Book, explain the Book, preach Christ from the Book, and trust the God of the Book.

Bonus Chapter 1: The Funeral of Biblical Preaching

The Obituary

Biblical preaching died quietly in some churches after a long struggle with neglect. It was preceded in death by careful study, meaningful context, doctrinal courage, and the willingness to make people uncomfortable for their own spiritual good. It is survived by motivational speeches, inspirational talks, leadership lectures, political rants, prosperity formulas, and several very energetic presentations that have not opened a Bible since the opening prayer.

The funeral was well attended. The lighting was excellent. The music was flawless. The memorial video had drone footage. The preacher assigned to deliver the eulogy announced, “I will not be long,” and then spent fifty-two minutes telling stories about himself. Nobody noticed the irony.

On the front row sat an old deacon holding a worn Bible. He kept whispering, “I do not believe it is dead.” The ushers asked him to remain quiet. The program clearly said this was a celebration of life, not a revival.

When the Corpse Sat Up

Just before the benediction, an elderly preacher walked slowly to the pulpit. He did not have a theme song, an entourage, or a personal logo. He opened to 2 Timothy 4:2 and read, “Preach the word.” Then he opened Nehemiah 8:8 and read that they gave the sense and caused the people to understand. Then he opened Luke 24 and showed how Jesus opened the Scriptures and revealed Himself.

Something moved in the casket. The motivational speaker stopped smiling. The life coach dropped his notebook. The prosperity

prophet checked the exits. Biblical preaching sat up, cleared its throat, and asked, “Did somebody open the Book?”

The funeral became a revival because biblical preaching was never truly dead. It had only been neglected. Wherever a preacher trembles before the text, studies honestly, prays deeply, explains clearly, proclaims Christ, and calls people to repentance and faith, the Word rises again.

Recovery Assignment

Write the obituary of the sermon habits your ministry needs to bury. Be specific. Perhaps it is the long introduction that consumes the sermon, the verse used only as a launchpad, the pressure to produce viral clips, or the fear of preaching difficult truths. Then write a resurrection plan containing three concrete practices you will begin this week.

Back-to-the-Book Reflection

What must change in my preaching, preparation, or listening because of this chapter? Write one conviction, one practical action, and one prayer.

Bonus Chapter 2: The Hall of Faithful Preachers

John the Baptist: A Voice, Not a Brand

John did not introduce himself as a visionary, influencer, culture shifter, or international voice. He called himself a voice crying in the wilderness. A voice does not exist to admire itself. It carries a message. John understood that his ministry was temporary and Christ was supreme: “He must increase, but I must decrease.”

Modern preachers can learn from his holy refusal to become the point. John preached repentance plainly, confronted power courageously, and directed attention to the Lamb of God. He had no concern for maintaining access to Herod. He was more interested in faithfulness than invitations. The preacher who constantly protects a platform will eventually preach around every truth that threatens it.

Peter: Christ at the Center

At Pentecost, Peter did not preach twelve steps to discovering personal potential. He opened the Scriptures, explained what God had done in Christ, confronted the hearers with their guilt, announced the resurrection, and called for repentance. His sermon had biblical foundation, Christological center, moral seriousness, gospel promise, and a clear response.

Peter proves that Spirit-filled preaching and text-filled preaching are not enemies. The Holy Spirit did not cause Peter to abandon Scripture. The Spirit empowered him to explain Scripture with clarity and courage. When preachers claim spiritual spontaneity as an excuse for biblical carelessness, Pentecost stands up and objects.

Paul: Reasoning From the Scriptures

Paul reasoned, explained, persuaded, testified, and proclaimed. He adjusted his point of contact to the audience without changing the gospel. In a synagogue, he reasoned from the Scriptures. In Athens, he began with the altar to the unknown god, but he did not end with cultural observation. He moved to the Creator, repentance, judgment, and the risen Christ.

Contextualization is not dilution. It is building a clear bridge so the unchanged gospel can cross into the hearer's understanding. A bridge that never reaches Christ is simply a scenic walkway.

The Faithfulness Question

After studying any admired preacher, ask not merely, "How can I sound like this person?" Ask, "What convictions made this ministry faithful?" Imitating vocal rhythm produces an echo. Imitating biblical conviction produces a servant.

Back-to-the-Book Reflection

What must change in my preaching, preparation, or listening because of this chapter? Write one conviction, one practical action, and one prayer.

Bonus Chapter 3: Pulpit Confessions

Confession One: I Had More Points Than the Passage

I confess that my sermon had seven points, fourteen subpoints, three poems, two definitions, one acrostic, and a closing story involving an eagle. The passage had one main idea. I considered the passage underdeveloped.

Preachers often mistake complexity for depth. A sermon becomes stronger when it carries the main burden of the text with clarity. The goal is not to prove how much material we collected. The goal is to make God's message understandable, memorable, and unavoidable.

Confession Two: I Used "The Greek Says" to Win an Argument

I confess that I announced, "The Greek word here means," although I had not studied Greek since the first week of a free online course. The congregation nodded because nobody wanted to challenge a man holding a lexicon.

Original-language tools can clarify meaning, but they can also become pulpit decorations. Do not use Greek or Hebrew to create secret meanings unavailable to ordinary readers. Use language study to serve the text, not to manufacture authority.

Confession Three: My Story Ate the Sermon

I confess that I began with a personal illustration and became emotionally attached to it. The story required background, character development, weather conditions, and an explanation of what my aunt was wearing. By the time I returned to the text, the congregation had aged visibly.

A useful illustration turns on the light and steps out of the way. If people remember the story but cannot state the biblical truth, the illustration has become an escape artist.

Confession Four: I Said "I Am Closing" Without Repenting

The phrase "I am closing" must recover its plain meaning. It should indicate that the sermon is approaching its conclusion, not that the preacher has entered a fresh forty-minute season of inspiration. Integrity applies to time statements too. When a preacher says three closings, the congregation may begin praying for deliverance rather than transformation.

Confession Five: I Blamed the Congregation for My Lack of Preparation

I said, "Y'all are not helping me," when the truth was that I had not helped myself by studying. A quiet congregation is not always cold. Sometimes people are thinking. Sometimes they are confused. Sometimes the sermon has provided no reason to respond.

The preacher should not bully the room into creating evidence that the sermon is working. Explain the truth, embody conviction, invite response, and trust God.

Back-to-the-Book Reflection

What must change in my preaching, preparation, or listening because of this chapter? Write one conviction, one practical action, and one prayer.

Bonus Chapter 4: The Church Member Survival Guide

Interpreting Common Pulpit Announcements

When the preacher says, “This will be brief,” do not cancel your spiritual concentration, but you may wish to notify the restaurant. When the preacher says, “I have only three points,” remember that points sometimes reproduce. When the preacher removes his watch and places it on the pulpit, this does not necessarily mean he is monitoring time. It may mean time has officially surrendered.

Humor aside, congregations have responsibilities. Members should come ready to hear, bring a Bible, pray for the preacher, resist consumerism, and value truth more than entertainment. A church that demands constant novelty will eventually pressure its preacher to become a religious performer.

How to Encourage Better Preaching

Do not merely say, “Great sermon.” Tell the preacher what truth became clearer, what passage you now understand, or what application challenged you. Specific encouragement rewards faithful labor. Ask thoughtful questions after the sermon. Participate in Bible study. Support adequate preparation time. Protect the pastor from unnecessary Saturday emergencies that could have been handled on Tuesday.

Congregations also need courage to request substance. It is not disrespectful to hunger for Scripture. A mature church can lovingly say, “Pastor, help us understand the text. Teach us doctrine. Walk us through whole books. Do not assume we cannot learn.”

The Berean Pew

Acts 17 praises hearers who received the word eagerly and searched the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so. The ideal congregation is neither cynical nor gullible. It is eager and discerning. It honors the preacher without surrendering the Bible.

A healthy pulpit and a healthy pew strengthen one another. Faithful preaching forms mature hearers, and mature hearers encourage faithful preaching.

Back-to-the-Book Reflection

What must change in my preaching, preparation, or listening because of this chapter? Write one conviction, one practical action, and one prayer.

Bonus Chapter 5: The Preaching Workshop

Step One: Observe Before You Explain

Read the passage repeatedly. Record what is actually present before consulting commentaries. Identify repeated words, contrasts, commands, promises, causes, results, questions, changes in speaker, and movements in the argument. Ask what comes before and after. Determine the genre because poetry, narrative, prophecy, wisdom, epistle, and apocalyptic writing communicate differently.

Observation protects the preacher from answering questions the passage never asked. Many weak sermons are not false in every sentence; they are simply disconnected from the text in front of them.

Step Two: State the Main Idea

Complete this sentence: “The author is saying that…” Then complete: “The hearers should…” A clear sermon usually grows from a clear statement of the text’s truth and intended response. If the preacher cannot express the message in one sentence, the congregation will struggle to carry it into Monday.

The main idea should be specific enough to belong to this passage, yet clear enough for ordinary people to repeat. “God is good” may be true, but it is too broad unless the text specifically develops how His goodness is displayed.

Step Three: Build a Text-Shaped Outline

Let the structure of the passage influence the structure of the sermon. A narrative may move through scenes. An epistle may move through claims and reasons. A psalm may move from lament to trust. Avoid imposing three alliterated points merely

because preachers enjoy matching letters. Alliteration is a servant, not an apostle.

Each movement should explain a portion of the text, connect to the main idea, and advance the hearer toward response.

Step Four: Explain, Illustrate, Apply

Explanation answers, “What does this mean?” Illustration answers, “What does this look like?” Application answers, “What must we believe, value, stop, start, confess, endure, or hope because this is true?” These elements should work together. Explanation without application can become a lecture. Application without explanation becomes opinion. Illustration without either becomes entertainment.

Step Five: Preach Christ Responsibly

Do not force Jesus into every minor detail, but do not preach as though the passage stands outside the Bible’s redemptive story. Ask how the text relates to God’s promises, human sin, covenant, kingdom, sacrifice, grace, and fulfillment in Christ. Sometimes Christ appears through direct prophecy, type, promise, doctrine, contrast, or the larger canonical movement.

Christ-centered preaching is not attaching the cross to the final paragraph. It shows why the gospel is necessary and how the passage finds its fullest light in the person and work of Jesus.

Step Six: Cut What Competes

Remove material that may be interesting but does not serve the sermon. Cut the second illustration when one is enough. Cut the quotation you included mainly to prove you read the book. Cut the private information that belongs in pastoral confidence. Cut the angry paragraph written to one person in the room. Cut the extra ending.

Editing is not reducing anointing. It is removing clutter so the truth can breathe.

Back-to-the-Book Reflection

What must change in my preaching, preparation, or listening because of this chapter? Write one conviction, one practical action, and one prayer.

Bonus Chapter 6: The Greatest Sermons in Scripture

Moses: Remember and Choose

Deuteronomy records a preacher preparing a new generation to live faithfully. Moses reviews grace, explains covenant, warns against forgetfulness, and calls the people to choose life. His preaching shows that repetition can be pastoral when memory is spiritually necessary. He does not merely transfer information; he forms identity by reminding Israel who God is and what God has done.

Elijah: The Sermon With a Question

On Mount Carmel, Elijah asked, “How long halt ye between two opinions?” The sermon confronted divided loyalty. Elijah used memorable action, but the drama served a theological issue: Who is truly God? The fire did not validate Elijah’s personality. It vindicated the Lord. Modern preaching may use creativity, but the spectacle must never become the deity.

Jesus: Authority Without Performance

The Sermon on the Mount reveals authority, clarity, imagery, doctrine, ethical demand, heart examination, warning, and invitation. Jesus speaks of salt, light, birds, lilies, eyes, gates, trees, foundations, and secret prayer. His preaching is vivid without being shallow. He addresses outward conduct by exposing inward desire. He comforts the poor in spirit and warns those who say “Lord, Lord” without obedience.

Stephen: A Sermon That Cost Everything

Stephen traces Israel’s history to expose persistent resistance to God. He understands the story, applies it to the present, and

refuses to soften the truth when threatened. His courage does not make him cruel. As he dies, he prays for his killers. The preacher who speaks hard truth must also possess a soft heart.

Paul at Athens: Build the Bridge, Then Cross It

Paul begins with what the Athenians know, quotes their poets, and recognizes their religious searching. Yet he moves decisively to the Creator, human dependence, repentance, coming judgment, and resurrection. He demonstrates how to understand a culture without surrendering to it. Relevance is not stopping where the audience is comfortable. Relevance is making the truth clear enough that the audience understands why it must respond.

Back-to-the-Book Reflection

What must change in my preaching, preparation, or listening because of this chapter? Write one conviction, one practical action, and one prayer.

Bonus Chapter 7: If Jesus Visited Your Church This Sunday

The Questions That Matter

Imagine Jesus entering unnoticed and sitting near the back. He is not impressed by the parking signs, offended by the screen, or automatically pleased by simplicity. He looks deeper. Was the Father honored? Was Scripture handled truthfully? Was His gospel clear? Were the weak protected? Were the proud confronted? Were sinners invited to grace? Were believers equipped to obey?

He would not ask whether the preacher went viral. He would ask whether the preacher was faithful. He would not measure the room by volume alone. Some of the deepest work of God occurs in holy silence. He would not confuse an emotional response with a transformed life.

What Would He Hear?

Would Jesus hear His name used as a slogan or proclaimed as Lord? Would He hear the cross presented as the center of salvation or merely as a symbol of personal achievement? Would He hear repentance, forgiveness, resurrection, discipleship, justice, mercy, holiness, and hope? Would He hear a sermon that comforts the comfortable while crushing the wounded, or one that wounds false peace and binds up the brokenhearted?

What Would He See on Monday?

The final test would not end at the benediction. Would the sermon travel into homes, workplaces, schools, hospitals, barbershops, boardrooms, and private decisions? Would people forgive, confess, serve, give, resist temptation, seek justice, love enemies, and trust God because the Word was preached?

Preaching aims beyond Sunday admiration. It seeks Monday obedience.

The Invitation Back

This imagined visit is not designed to shame faithful preachers who feel inadequate. Every honest preacher knows the weight is beyond human strength. The invitation is not to become perfect. It is to return. Return to prayer. Return to study. Return to the gospel. Return to the people. Return to holiness. Return to the Book.

The Lord who commands preaching also supplies grace. Open the Scriptures again. Ask the Spirit for light. Do the hard work. Speak with love. Exalt Christ. Then release the results to God.

Back-to-the-Book Reflection

What must change in my preaching, preparation, or listening because of this chapter? Write one conviction, one practical action, and one prayer.

Bonus Chapter 8: Forty Pulpit Lines We Can Retire

Why Words Matter

Preachers inherit phrases that can become harmless habits, confusing clichés, or tools of manipulation. The answer is not lifeless language. It is truthful language. The following lines are offered with a smile and a request for discernment.

The Retirement List

1. “I was not going to say this.” If it should not be said, honor the original decision.
2. “God told me to tell you” when the statement is merely personal advice.
3. “Touch three people” as though revelation requires physical distribution.
4. “Y’all are not helping me” when the congregation is listening.
5. “I am closing” before beginning a new sermon.
6. “The Bible says somewhere” when chapter and verse are available.
7. “I do not need notes” as though preparation is unbelief.
8. “This is free” after every unrelated thought.
9. “Can I be real?” after forty minutes in the pulpit.
10. “I know I am right about it” instead of showing it from Scripture.
11. “Nobody wants to hear this” when the room is full of people hearing it.
12. “Your breakthrough is in your shout” when faith and obedience are missing.
13. “Everybody is not going to understand your anointing” as protection from accountability.
14. “Do not question the man of God” when the Bereans were praised for checking teaching.

15. “If you had faith, you would give…” as financial pressure.
16. “God is about to embarrass your enemies” when Jesus commands love for enemies.
17. “The devil does not want me to preach this” when the printer simply jammed.
18. “I feel my help coming” when the text has not yet arrived.
19. “This sermon is for somebody” instead of applying it to everybody under the text.
20. “You missed your chance to shout” as though the Spirit operates on a countdown.
21. “I do not know who this is for” when the sermon should be prepared for the congregation.
22. “The louder you praise, the bigger the blessing” as though grace is volume-based.
23. “God said it; I believe it; that settles it” without first establishing what God actually said.
24. “I am stepping on toes” when the aim should be reaching hearts and consciences.
25. “Tell your neighbor…” every four minutes.
26. “You cannot handle my truth” when the issue is God’s truth.
27. “They hated Jesus too” as an excuse for being rude.
28. “My haters are my elevators” when humility might be the needed transportation.
29. “The next seven days…” unless Scripture truly gives that timetable.
30. “Sow into this word” before people have had time to test the word.
31. “This is not for everybody” when Scripture addresses the whole church.
32. “I came with a word” while leaving the Bible closed.
33. “I am not a theologian” as though thinking accurately about God is optional.
34. “We do not need doctrine; we need Jesus” as though doctrine does not tell us who Jesus is.
35. “Do not judge” used to silence biblical discernment.
36. “God helps those who help themselves” presented as

Scripture.
37. “Everything happens for a reason” offered too quickly to grieving people.
38. “Just claim it” where Scripture calls for endurance.
39. “Your season is changing” without explaining faithfulness in every season.
40. “Amen, lights” when patient explanation would serve better.

Better Than a Catchphrase

The goal is not to create a church where nobody speaks spontaneously. The goal is to ensure our repeated language reflects Scripture, protects people, and points to Christ. Replace pressure with invitation, vagueness with clarity, superstition with truth, and personality with proclamation.

Back-to-the-Book Reflection

What must change in my preaching, preparation, or listening because of this chapter? Write one conviction, one practical action, and one prayer.

THE PREACHER'S RECOVERY WORKBOOK

Sermon Autopsy

What passage was preached?

_____

_____

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_____

What was the main idea?

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_____

How much of the sermon explained the text?

_____

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_____

Where was Christ proclaimed?

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What application was clear?

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What material distracted?

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What should be retained, revised, or removed?

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_____

Text-to-Sermon Worksheet

Passage and boundaries:

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_____

Historical and literary context:

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_____

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_____

Repeated words and key movements:

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Main idea of the text:

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Intended response:

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Connection to Christ and the gospel:

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Sermon title:

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_____

Introduction:

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Movement one - explanation, illustration, application:

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Movement two - explanation, illustration, application:

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Movement three - explanation, illustration, application:

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Conclusion and call to response:

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Monthly Pulpit Health Check

Did we preach through complete passages?

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Did the congregation grow in biblical understanding?

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Were difficult truths avoided?

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Was the gospel clear to unbelievers?

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Were applications specific and pastoral?

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_____

Did humor serve truth?

_____

_____

_____

_____

Did invitations avoid manipulation?

_____

_____

_____

_____

Did the preacher maintain prayer, rest, study, and accountability?

_____

_____

_____

_____

APPENDIX I

The Ten Commandments of Biblical Preaching

1. Open the Bible

Let the public reading and clear explanation of Scripture establish the authority of the sermon.

2. Honor the Context

Never make a verse say what its paragraph, book, covenant setting, and genre will not allow.

3. Preach Christ

Show responsibly how the passage belongs to the redemptive work fulfilled in Jesus.

4. Explain Before You Apply

Application without meaning becomes advice; meaning without application becomes unused information.

5. Depend on the Holy Spirit

Pray deeply, prepare carefully, and refuse to manipulate what only God can produce.

6. Love the People

Speak truth for their salvation and maturity, not for your performance or emotional release.

7. Tell the Whole Truth

Preach grace and judgment, comfort and correction, doctrine and duty, heaven and hell.

8. Live the Message

Do not ask the pulpit to conceal what private character contradicts.

9. Be Clear

Depth is not confusion. Work until ordinary hearers can follow extraordinary truth.

10. Leave the Results to God

Faithfulness belongs to the preacher; spiritual fruit belongs to God.

APPENDIX II

Fifty Questions Every Preacher Should Ask Before Saying “Amen”

1. What does this passage actually say?
2. What is the literary unit?
3. What comes before and after it?
4. Who wrote it, to whom, and why?
5. What genre am I preaching?
6. What repeated words or contrasts shape the passage?
7. What is the main idea in one sentence?
8. What does the text reveal about God?
9. What does it reveal about humanity?
10. What doctrine does it teach or assume?
11. How does it fit the Bible’s redemptive story?
12. How does it point responsibly to Christ?
13. Have I confused association with interpretation?
14. Did I consult reliable resources after doing my own observation?
15. Can I defend every major claim from the text?
16. Does my outline follow the text’s structure or logic?
17. Is my introduction serving the sermon or auditioning for attention?
18. Are my points clear, distinct, and memorable?
19. Have I explained difficult words?
20. Have I included enough Scripture reading?
21. Do my illustrations illuminate rather than distract?

22. Are my personal stories necessary?

23. Have I protected confidential information?

24. Is the humor kind and purposeful?

25. Have I avoided stereotypes and cheap shots?

26. Does every application grow from the passage?

27. Have I addressed the believer and the unbeliever?

28. Have I named sin specifically without humiliating people?

29. Have I announced grace as clearly as I have exposed guilt?

30. Have I shown what repentance and faith look like?

31. Does the sermon speak to mind, affections, conscience, and will?

32. Have I considered the grieving, doubting, young, old, poor, wealthy, new believer, and mature saint?

33. Is there false guilt I need to remove?

34. Is there false comfort I need to disturb?

35. What hope does the text provide?

36. What obedience does it require?

37. Is Christ necessary or merely mentioned?

38. Am I preaching myself?

39. Am I trying to impress other preachers?

40. Would I preach this the same way if it were never posted?

41. Have I prayed for understanding?

42. Have I prayed for holiness?

43. Have I prayed for specific hearers?

44. Is there anything in my life that makes this sermon hypocritical?

45. Do I need to apologize, confess, or seek accountability before preaching?

46. Can the sermon be shorter without becoming weaker?
47. Can the conclusion state the main truth and call for response?
48. Am I manipulating emotion or trusting truth?
49. What should people know, believe, feel, and do after hearing?
50. Can I release the results to God after saying Amen?

APPENDIX III

A One-Year Expository Preaching Plan

Weeks 1-8: The Gospel of Mark - The Servant King

- Mark 1:1-15 - The Good News Arrives
- Mark 1:16-45 - The Authority of Jesus
- Mark 2:1-17 - The Friend of Sinners
- Mark 4:1-20 - Hearing the Word
- Mark 4:35-41 - Lord of the Storm
- Mark 5:1-20 - No Chain Too Strong
- Mark 8:27-38 - Who Do You Say He Is?
- Mark 10:32-45 - Greatness Through Service

Weeks 9-14: Philippians - Joy With Chains On

- Philippians 1:1-11 - A Gospel Partnership
- Philippians 1:12-30 - The Gospel Advances
- Philippians 2:1-11 - The Mind of Christ
- Philippians 2:12-30 - Lights in the World
- Philippians 3:1-16 - Knowing Christ
- Philippians 4:1-23 - Peace, Contentment, and Generosity

Weeks 15-18: Jonah - Mercy for Runaways

- Jonah 1 - Running From God
- Jonah 2 - Prayer From the Deep

- Jonah 3 - The God of Another Chance
- Jonah 4 - When Grace Offends Us

Weeks 19-26: James - Faith With Work Clothes On

- James 1:1-18 - Wisdom in Trials
- James 1:19-27 - Doers of the Word
- James 2:1-13 - No Room for Favoritism
- James 2:14-26 - Living Faith
- James 3:1-18 - The Tongue and True Wisdom
- James 4:1-17 - Humble Yourselves
- James 5:1-12 - Patience and Justice
- James 5:13-20 - A Praying Community

Weeks 27-30: Ruth - Providence in Ordinary Faithfulness

- Ruth 1 - Bitter Roads and Loyal Love
- Ruth 2 - Grace in the Field
- Ruth 3 - Courage and Integrity
- Ruth 4 - Redemption at the Gate

Weeks 31-37: 1 Peter - Hope in Exile

- 1 Peter 1:1-12 - A Living Hope
- 1 Peter 1:13-25 - Be Holy
- 1 Peter 2:1-10 - A Chosen People
- 1 Peter 2:11-25 - Witness Under Pressure
- 1 Peter 3:1-17 - Hope With Gentleness
- 1 Peter 4:1-19 - Faithful in the Fire

- 1 Peter 5:1-14 - Shepherds, Suffering, and Grace

Weeks 38-43: Psalms for the Whole Soul

- Psalm 1 - The Rooted Life
- Psalm 23 - The Shepherd Is Enough
- Psalm 42 - Talking Back to Despair
- Psalm 51 - The Prayer of Repentance
- Psalm 73 - When the Wicked Seem to Win
- Psalm 130 - Hope From the Depths

Weeks 44-47: Advent - The Promised King

- Genesis 3:15 - The First Gospel Promise
- Isaiah 9:1-7 - Light in the Darkness
- Micah 5:1-5 - The Ruler From Bethlehem
- Luke 2:1-20 - Good News of Great Joy

Weeks 48-52: Cross, Resurrection, and Mission

- Mark 14:32-42 - Not My Will
- Mark 15:21-39 - The Crucified King
- Mark 16:1-8 - He Is Risen
- Acts 1:1-11 - You Will Be My Witnesses
- Revelation 21:1-8 - All Things New

APPENDIX IV

The Preacher's Weekly Study Guide

Monday: Live in the Text

Read the passage repeatedly in several reliable translations. Mark repeated words, commands, promises, questions, movements, surprises, and connections. Write observations before consulting commentaries.

Tuesday: Study the World of the Text

Investigate historical setting, literary context, genre, key words, grammar, theology, and canonical connections. Consult trustworthy commentaries and record where interpreters differ.

Wednesday: Find the Big Idea

State the author's main idea and intended response in one sentence. Build an outline that follows the text rather than merely sounding clever.

Thursday: Build Explanation, Illustration, and Application

Explain each movement, select illustrations that clarify, and develop applications for different hearers. Trace the responsible road to Christ.

Friday: Write, Cut, and Clarify

Draft the sermon. Remove repetition, insider language, unnecessary stories, and anything that competes with the main idea. Strengthen transitions and conclusion.

Saturday: Pray and Internalize

Read the manuscript aloud. Check timing. Reduce dependence on notes. Pray through every movement and for the congregation by name and circumstance.

Sunday: Preach and Release

Arrive prepared, rested, and prayerful. Read the text with honor, explain it clearly, call for response without manipulation, and entrust the fruit to God.

Monday After: Review Without Self-Torture

Note what was clear, what was confusing, where time was lost, and what pastoral follow-up is needed. Receive feedback, thank God, and begin again.

APPENDIX V

The Preacher's Covenant

By the grace of God, I covenant to stand under the authority of Scripture before I stand over a congregation.

- I will preach the Word in season and out of season.

- I will seek the meaning intended by the inspired text rather than use Scripture to decorate my opinions.

- I will proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and refuse to make myself the center of the sermon.

- I will depend upon the Holy Spirit through prayer while honoring Him through disciplined preparation.

- I will tell the truth about sin and the greater truth about grace.

- I will love the people enough to explain clearly, apply carefully, warn tenderly, and protect their confidences.

- I will pursue private holiness, honest accountability, healthy rest, and integrity with money, sexuality, power, and praise.

- I will remain teachable and continue growing in biblical knowledge and preaching skill.

- I will measure success by faithfulness rather than applause, crowds, invitations, clips, or comparisons.

- I will leave the results to God and return to the Book week after week until the Chief Shepherd appears.

Signed: _____

Date: _____

CONCLUSION

Open the Book Again

The church does not need less passion. It needs passion governed by truth. It does not need less creativity. It needs creativity serving clarity. It does not need lifeless lectures pretending to be exposition. It needs preachers whose minds have been disciplined by study, whose hearts have been broken in prayer, whose lives are being shaped by holiness, and whose mouths are filled with Christ.

The answer to shallow preaching is not nostalgia for a golden age that never existed. Every generation has battled pride, error, laziness, performance, and compromise. The answer is repentance and return: return to the text, return to context, return to the gospel, return to the prayer closet, return to the people, return to the cross.

Open the Bible before you open your mouth. Stay long enough to learn what it says. Bow low enough to let it correct you. Love people enough to make it plain. Trust the Holy Spirit enough to avoid tricks. Lift Jesus high enough that the preacher can disappear.

Then preach-not because you have manufactured a moment, but because God has spoken.

Line upon line. Precept upon precept. Christ above all. Until faith becomes sight and the Chief Shepherd says, ‘Well done.’

THE DEFINITIVE EDITION EXPANSION

The Preacher's Toolbox, Biblical Genres, History, and Practice

A call to return to biblical preaching is incomplete if it only tells ministers what is wrong. A faithful call must also put tools in their hands. The pages that follow are designed to move the reader from conviction to competence-from "I need to preach the Word" to "Here is how I can handle the Word more faithfully this week."

This section does not promise a shortcut. There is no microwave setting for spiritual depth. Sermons are not instant grits. The preacher must read, observe, pray, study, wrestle, simplify, and submit. Yet the work can be learned. Good habits can be developed. Weak habits can be corrected. The same Holy Spirit who inspired Scripture helps faithful servants understand and proclaim it, not by bypassing disciplined study but by sanctifying it.

Chapter 33

From Blank Page to Biblical Sermon

Every sermon begins with a text and a preacher who does not yet fully understand it. That is not a crisis. It is the normal beginning of honest preparation. The crisis begins when the preacher pretends to understand the passage before doing the work.

Start With the Passage, Not the Punch Line

Many preachers begin with something they want to say and search for a verse willing to cooperate. That reverses the order. The text is not an employee hired to support our idea. The text is the authority that gives us the idea.

Read Until the Furniture Moves

Read the passage repeatedly in several reliable translations. Read what comes before it and after it. Read the whole biblical book when possible. On the first reading, the room may look familiar. By the tenth, you begin noticing where the furniture actually sits: repeated words, contrasts, commands, promises, questions, surprises, and movement.

Observation Before Explanation

Write down what is present before deciding what it means. Who speaks? Who listens? What changes? What connects one sentence to another? What problem is addressed? What does the author emphasize? Observation is the preacher refusing to hurry past the evidence.

The Main Idea

A sermon should be able to answer two questions in one clear sentence: What is the biblical author saying? What must the

hearer understand or do because of it? If the preacher cannot state the message simply, the congregation will probably receive fog with three alliterated points.

Build the Bridge

Interpretation asks what the text meant in its original setting. Application asks how that truth confronts, comforts, corrects, and directs people now. A bridge must touch both banks. A sermon with no historical grounding floats. A sermon with no present application never arrives.

A Little Pulpit Humor

The preacher announced, “I have too much material and not enough time.” A deacon whispered, “Pastor, that has never stopped you before.” The goal is not merely to shorten sermons, but to make every minute serve the text.

Back to the Book

- What does this chapter reveal about my current preparation habits?
- Where am I most tempted to substitute personality, tradition, or urgency for careful explanation?
- What one practice will I change before my next sermon?

Pulpit Workshop

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2. Write the passage’s main idea in one sentence of twenty-five words or fewer.
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4. Remove one element that is interesting but does not serve the message.

5. Pray the text back to God before drafting the sermon.

The Preacher's Prayer

> *Lord, make me more eager to be faithful than impressive. Give me patience with the text, love for the people, courage in application, and joy in Christ. Amen.*

Chapter 34

A Complete Sermon Laboratory: Mark 2:1-12

Let us watch a sermon grow. Mark tells of four men carrying a paralyzed friend to Jesus, opening a roof, lowering him into the crowded house, and discovering that Jesus came to address a deeper paralysis than anyone could see.

Observe the Scene

The house is crowded. Access is blocked. Four friends refuse to let the obstacle become the conclusion. Jesus sees their faith. Before healing the man's body, He announces forgiveness. Scribes object in their hearts. Jesus exposes their reasoning, proves His authority, commands the man to rise, and leaves the crowd amazed.

Find the Tension

The visible problem is paralysis; the invisible problem is sin. The crowd wants a miracle; Jesus reveals His identity. The scribes correctly know that only God can forgive sins, but they fail to follow their own theology to its obvious conclusion: God is standing in the room.

State the Big Idea

Because Jesus has divine authority to forgive sins, desperate people should come to Him in faith and carry others to Him with determination.

Shape the Movements

Movement one: Love carries what cannot carry itself. Movement two: Jesus addresses the deepest need first. Movement three: Opposition may sit in the room while salvation is happening. Movement four: The forgiven life gets up and walks.

Preach Christ, Not Roof Repair

The sermon is not mainly about innovative architecture, loyal friendships, or refusing to quit, though those truths are present. The center is Jesus-the Son of Man with authority on earth to forgive sins. Do not leave the congregation admiring four friends while overlooking the Savior.

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Chapter 35

How Jesus Preached

Jesus never confused simplicity with shallowness. Children could remember His images, scholars could spend centuries exploring His words, sinners felt exposed, and weary people found hope.

He Preached With Authority

Jesus did not borrow importance from fashionable voices. He spoke as the One who knew the Father perfectly. Christian preachers do not possess His inherent authority, but they stand under the authority of His written Word.

He Asked Heart-Opening Questions

“What think ye of Christ?” “Why are ye fearful?” “Wilt thou be made whole?” His questions were not filler. They removed hiding places. A well-placed question can make a congregation participate in the sermon instead of merely observing it.

He Used Ordinary Things

Seeds, lamps, bread, coins, fish, weddings, weather, vineyards, fathers, sons. Jesus placed eternal truth in familiar containers. The preacher who cannot explain grace without six technical terms may understand the library but not yet the people.

He Applied Truth Personally

Jesus did not allow hearers to admire truth from a safe distance. “Go, and do thou likewise.” “Follow me.” “Repent ye, and believe the gospel.” Biblical preaching moves from information to invitation and obedience.

He Centered the Kingdom and the Cross

His messages announced God's reign, exposed false righteousness, welcomed repentant sinners, and moved steadily toward His death and resurrection. To imitate Jesus' preaching while avoiding Jesus' gospel is to copy the cadence and miss the Christ.

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Chapter 36

Why Sermons Are Forgotten Before Lunch

Some messages disappear faster than the church parking lot empties after benediction. Forgetfulness is not always the preacher's fault, but unclear preaching gives memory very little to hold.

No Clear Destination

A sermon can contain many true statements and still lack a message. A bus may have excellent seats and clean windows, but passengers need to know where it is going.

Too Many Main Points

When everything is important, nothing feels important. Three main movements are usually enough. Twelve points may prove that the preacher studied; they may also prove that the preacher did not edit.

The Introduction Ate the Sermon

Twenty minutes of jokes, biography, announcements, and warm-up can leave the text standing outside knocking. Introductions should create hunger for the passage, not become a separate television special.

Illustrations Became the Stars

A strong illustration opens a window. A weak sermon moves into the window and forgets the house. Tell only what serves the truth, and leave before the story receives its own offering.

No Monday-Morning Handles

People remember what they can practice. Give clear responses: confess, forgive, pray, reconcile, resist, serve, hope, speak, wait, trust. Application is not legalism; it is truth putting on work clothes.

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Chapter 37

Preaching Narrative Without Turning Everybody Into You

Biblical stories are not costume closets where every hearer chooses a hero to become. David and Goliath does not automatically mean your supervisor is Goliath, your promotion is the stone, and Friday is your valley.

Honor the Story's Place in Redemptive History

Ask where the event stands in God's covenant purposes. What has God promised? What is He revealing? How does the story advance the Bible's larger movement toward Christ?

Let Characters Be Characters

Observe motives, words, actions, consequences, and the narrator's evaluation. Do not baptize every detail into a secret symbol. Five stones are five stones unless the text tells us they represent five keys to financial freedom.

Find God's Activity

Narratives often reveal God through what He does, allows, promises, judges, rescues, or remembers. The hero of Scripture is finally God, even when faithful human servants are worthy examples.

Preach the Conflict and Resolution

Stories move through tension. Do not flatten them into abstract lectures. Let the congregation feel the famine, silence, fear, delay, danger, and surprise before announcing resolution.

Move From Them to Us Through Christ

Application should arise from the theological truth of the passage, not merely from superficial resemblance. Christ fulfills the story, transforms our identity, and shapes our obedience.

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The Preacher’s Prayer

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the people, courage in application, and joy in Christ. Amen.

Chapter 38

Preaching Psalms, Wisdom, and Poetry

Poetry does not merely tell the truth; it makes us feel the weight, beauty, ache, and hope of truth. Preaching poetry like a tax manual is a special kind of ecclesiastical vandalism.

Listen for Parallelism

Hebrew poetry often restates, contrasts, or develops an idea in paired lines. The second line may echo, sharpen, reverse, or complete the first. Explain the relationship rather than treating each line as an unrelated slogan.

Respect the Images

A tree planted by rivers, a shepherd's rod, bones out of joint, mountains skipping, tears in a bottle-images carry meaning. Do not rush to translate them into bland propositions before the congregation sees them.

Name the Emotion

Psalms give believers language for praise, fear, anger, grief, guilt, waiting, wonder, and confidence. Faith is not emotional denial. It is bringing the whole heart under God's truth.

Handle Proverbs as Wisdom, Not Mechanical Guarantees

Proverbs describe the grain of God's moral world. They are not vending-machine promises detached from the rest of Scripture. Wisdom recognizes patterns, exceptions, timing, and the fear of the Lord.

Lead to Christ

Jesus is the blessed Man of Psalm 1, the rejected King of Psalm 2, the Shepherd and Host of Psalm 23, and the risen Holy One of Psalm 16. Christ does not erase the psalm's original meaning; He brings its deepest hope into focus.

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Chapter 39

Preaching Prophets Without Newspaper Acrobatics

The prophets were covenant prosecutors, poets, pastors, and heralds of hope. They were not primarily hired to help modern preachers decode every headline before the evening news.

Start With Their World

Identify the audience, king, crisis, covenant violations, political pressures, and historical moment. A prophecy spoken to eighth-century Judah must first be heard in eighth-century Judah.

Hear Judgment and Hope Together

The prophets expose idolatry, injustice, empty worship, sexual sin, violence, pride, and unbelief. Yet judgment is often framed by God's promise to preserve, restore, cleanse, shepherd, and reign.

Do Not Skip Social Righteousness

The prophets do not allow worship language to hide exploitation. Preaching prophetic texts faithfully may confront dishonest business, neglected poor people, corrupt leadership, racial hostility, and religious performance without righteousness.

Trace Promise to Fulfillment

Messianic hope, new covenant, Spirit outpouring, restored creation, faithful Shepherd, suffering Servant, and righteous King converge in Jesus. Fulfillment should be shown carefully, not announced vaguely.

Avoid Date-Setting

When a sermon requires a calculator, three conspiracy videos, and a chart longer than the sanctuary aisle, pause. The goal of prophecy is faithful hope and holy living, not speculative celebrity.

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Chapter 40

Preaching Epistles Without Reading Someone Else's Mail Badly

Letters were written to real churches with real problems. They contain doctrine, correction, affection, argument, commands, prayers, and gospel logic. The preacher must follow the author's thought rather than merely harvest favorite sentences.

Read the Whole Letter

Before preaching a paragraph, read the letter repeatedly. Note purpose, audience, repeated themes, turning points, and emotional tone. Romans 8 sounds even richer after Romans 1-7.

Follow the Connectors

Therefore, for, but, so then, because, if, since-small words carry large theological loads. They show how truth is built. A preacher who ignores "therefore" may give the congregation the command without the gospel foundation.

Distinguish Indicative and Imperative

The epistles often announce what God has done before commanding what believers must do. Identity precedes activity. Grace trains obedience; it does not eliminate it.

Explain Doctrine Clearly

Justification, reconciliation, adoption, sanctification, election, resurrection, union with Christ-do not avoid deep doctrines. Translate them. Illustrate them. Show why they matter in grief, temptation, marriage, work, fear, and worship.

Apply Corporately

Many “you” statements are plural. The letters form churches, not merely isolated individuals. Ask what the text requires of the congregation’s shared life, leadership, unity, discipline, generosity, and witness.

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Chapter 41

Preaching Revelation Without Losing the Congregation in the Beasts

Revelation was given to bless suffering churches, reveal Jesus Christ, expose counterfeit power, and strengthen faithful witness. It was not written to make ordinary believers feel stupid.

Begin With the Book's Purpose

Revelation unveils reality: the Lamb reigns, empires fall, worship matters, compromise is deadly, suffering is temporary, judgment is certain, and new creation is coming.

Respect Symbolism

Symbols are not invitations to unlimited imagination. Their meaning grows from the Old Testament, first-century context, and the book's own patterns. Let Scripture furnish the symbolic dictionary.

Keep the Lamb Central

The beast may be dramatic, but the Lamb is decisive. Do not preach evil with such fascination that Christ appears to be barely surviving His own book.

Preach to Endurance

The repeated call is to conquer by faithful witness, patient endurance, holiness, worship, and refusal to bow to idolatrous power.

End With Hope

The Bible closes not with saints escaping creation but with God dwelling with His people in renewed creation. Tears end. Death dies. The curse is removed. The throne stands. Jesus comes.

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The Preacher’s Prayer

> *Lord, make me more eager to be faithful than impressive. Give me patience with the text, love for*

the people, courage in application, and joy in Christ. Amen.

Chapter 42

A Brief History of Preaching: Voices That Point Beyond Themselves

Church history is not a museum of perfect preachers. It is a long testimony that God uses flawed servants who submit themselves to Scripture and their generation's need.

Apostolic Proclamation

The apostles preached the fulfillment of Scripture in the death and resurrection of Jesus, called hearers to repent and believe, formed communities, and taught the whole counsel of God.

Early Church Witness

Preachers such as John Chrysostom combined close exposition with moral courage. His "golden mouth" challenged luxury and neglect of the poor, proving that textual preaching can be both doctrinal and socially searching.

Reformation Recovery

Reformers returned the Bible to the center of worship and the language of ordinary people. The pulpit became a place where books of Scripture were opened consecutively and grace was distinguished from religious achievement.

Awakening and Evangelical Fire

Preachers across the Great Awakenings proclaimed new birth, repentance, judgment, and grace. Their strengths remind us that clear doctrine and urgent appeal belong together; their excesses warn us not to confuse visible excitement with lasting fruit.

The Black Preaching Tradition

Forged under slavery, segregation, exclusion, suffering, and resilient faith, Black preaching has joined biblical proclamation, communal memory, prophetic protest, celebration, lament, and hope. At its best, it makes the text live without allowing performance to replace truth.

The Modern Challenge

Today's preacher speaks amid algorithms, shortened attention, religious celebrity, political captivity, biblical illiteracy, and constant content. The answer is not to imitate the past mechanically, but to recover its deepest strength: God has spoken, Christ is Lord, and the preacher must be faithful.

A Little Pulpit Humor

The preacher announced, "I have too much material and not enough time." A deacon whispered, "Pastor, that has never stopped you before." The goal is not merely to shorten sermons, but to make every minute serve the text.

Back to the Book

- What does this chapter reveal about my current preparation habits?
- Where am I most tempted to substitute personality, tradition, or urgency for careful explanation?
- What one practice will I change before my next sermon?

Pulpit Workshop

1. Choose one passage related to this chapter's subject.
2. Write the passage's main idea in one sentence of twenty-five words or fewer.

3. List what must be explained, illustrated, applied, and connected to Christ.
4. Remove one element that is interesting but does not serve the message.
5. Pray the text back to God before drafting the sermon.

The Preacher's Prayer

> *Lord, make me more eager to be faithful than impressive. Give me patience with the text, love for the people, courage in application, and joy in Christ. Amen.*

Chapter 43

Preaching Mistakes We All Make

The safest preacher is not the one who believes he has no weaknesses. It is the one who can name them, laugh humbly, repent quickly, and keep learning.

The Encyclopedia Sermon

Everything learned during study is unloaded on Sunday. The congregation receives seventeen cross-references, six definitions, three historical controversies, and no clear message. Research is a pantry, not the meal.

The Rabbit Trail Olympics

A phrase reminds the preacher of a story, the story recalls an issue, the issue awakens a testimony, and forty minutes later the congregation is in another biblical book with no transportation home.

The Shouting Substitute

Passion is biblical. Volume can express urgency. But increased decibels cannot repair decreased clarity. The microphone is already working; the text needs explaining.

The Greek Flex

Original languages are valuable servants. They become poor showpieces. Use them when they clarify meaning, not when they merely prove that tuition was paid.

The Invisible Application

The sermon accurately explains first-century Ephesus and never reaches Tuesday morning in Newport News. The bridge was engineered but never opened.

The Borrowed Voice

Imitating another preacher's cadence, phrases, growl, or gestures may win recognition and lose authenticity. Learn from others, but preach through the voice God sanctifies in you.

A Little Pulpit Humor

The preacher announced, "I have too much material and not enough time." A deacon whispered, "Pastor, that has never stopped you before." The goal is not merely to shorten sermons, but to make every minute serve the text.

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Chapter 44

If Biblical Characters Visited Church Today

Humor can lower our defenses long enough for truth to enter. So let us imagine several biblical visitors taking a seat on Sunday morning.

Moses Checks the Worship Order

He appreciates the lighting, then asks, “When will the words of the covenant be read?” Someone explains that Scripture is included in a six-second transition slide. Moses quietly requests another tablet.

Ezra Waits for the Reading

He stands ready from morning until midday. The service director whispers, “We have seven minutes.” Ezra asks whether the people still intend to understand the Book.

Jeremiah Watches the Branding Video

He sees excellent drone footage, a powerful logo reveal, and a slogan about living your best life. Then he asks whether anyone still weeps over sin, injustice, and a nation forgetting God.

Peter Hears the Offering Introduction

After twenty-five minutes of fundraising creativity, Peter says, “Silver and gold have I none.” The finance committee does not invite him back.

Paul Opens Romans

The preacher announces a series called “Ten Ways to Win.” Paul raises his hand and asks whether they could first discuss wrath, grace, justification, union with Christ, the Spirit, Israel, and living sacrifice. The series is postponed.

The Bereans Bring Their Bibles

They listen eagerly and then examine the Scriptures. Nobody accuses them of dishonoring the preacher. Biblical authority welcomes biblical examination.

A Little Pulpit Humor

The preacher announced, “I have too much material and not enough time.” A deacon whispered, “Pastor, that has never stopped you before.” The goal is not merely to shorten sermons, but to make every minute serve the text.

Back to the Book

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The Preacher's Prayer

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PART VI

THE PREACHER'S NOTEBOOK

The following tools are designed to be copied, printed, or adapted for weekly use. A sermon is not improved merely because a worksheet exists, but good questions can slow the preacher down long enough to hear what the passage is actually saying.

The Text-to-Sermon Worksheet

1. Text and translation used:

2. Literary context: What comes before and after?

3. Historical context: Who wrote, to whom, when, and why?

4. Repeated words, contrasts, commands, promises, questions, and images:

5. The central problem or tension:

6. What the passage reveals about God:

7. What the passage reveals about humanity and sin:

8. How the passage relates to Christ and the gospel:

9. The author's main idea in one sentence:

10. The sermon's main idea in one sentence:

11. Primary movements or points:

12. Necessary explanation:

13. Helpful illustration:

14. Personal application:

15. Corporate application:

16. Invitation or response:

17. What can be removed without weakening the sermon?

18. What must be prayed over before preaching?

The Sermon Autopsy

Complete this after preaching, while the message is still fresh and before self-defense begins.

1. Did I read the text clearly and early?
2. Did the sermon's structure arise from the passage?
3. Could hearers state the main idea?
4. Did I explain difficult terms or assumptions?
5. Did my illustrations serve rather than overshadow truth?
6. Did I preach Christ naturally and faithfully?
7. Did I distinguish conviction from manipulation?
8. Did I give concrete application?
9. Did I honor the congregation's time?
10. Where did I sense unusual clarity or confusion?
11. What feedback should I invite from a trusted listener?
12. What will I change next week?

The Annual Preaching Planner

- Plan consecutive exposition through at least one biblical book.
- Balance Old and New Testament texts across the year.
- Include doctrinal, pastoral, evangelistic, ethical, lament, celebration, and mission emphases.
- Coordinate major church seasons without forcing every text into a holiday costume.
- Schedule difficult passages intentionally rather than avoiding them forever.
- Build rest weeks, guest preachers, and recovery time into the calendar.
- Review whether favorite themes are overrepresented and neglected doctrines are missing.

A Twelve-Month Genre Plan

January: Philippians: gospel joy and mature partnership

February: Ruth: providence, covenant kindness, and redemption

March: Selected Psalms of lament and trust

April: Mark 14-16: cross and resurrection

May: James: hearing and doing the Word

June: Genesis 12-22: promise, faith, and failure

July: Parables of Jesus

August: Amos: worship, justice, and repentance

September: Ephesians: identity and church life

October: 1 Peter: holiness and hope under pressure

November: Psalms of thanksgiving and praise

December: Isaiah and Luke: promise and incarnation

FINAL CONCLUSION

Open the Book

There will always be another trend, another conference, another platform, another strategy, another personality, and another method. Some will be useful. Some will be harmless. Some will quietly ask the preacher to trust technique more than truth.

When every trend has come and gone, the Word of our God will still stand. The church has never needed cleverness more than truth. She has never needed performers more than shepherds. She has never needed celebrities more than servants. She needs men and women who tremble at Scripture, study with discipline, pray with dependence, love people deeply, proclaim Christ plainly, and leave the results to God.

Open the Book. Read the text. Read what surrounds the text. Ask what the author said and why it mattered. Follow the argument. Feel the poetry. enter the story. Hear the warning. Receive the promise. Trace the road to Christ. Then stand before the people as a servant under authority.

Do not apologize for depth. Explain it. Do not confuse obscurity with scholarship. Make truth plain. Do not hide cowardice beneath kindness or cruelty beneath boldness. Speak the truth in love. Do not manipulate people into appearing changed. Trust the Spirit to use the Word He inspired.

And when the sermon is finished, do not ask first whether they applauded, posted, shouted, or invited you back. Ask whether the passage was honored, Christ was exalted, sinners were called, saints were fed, sufferers were comforted, proud hearts were challenged, and the church was strengthened to obey.

> *Open the Book. Preach Christ. Feed God's people.*
> *Line upon line. Precept upon precept. Until faith*

becomes sight and the Chief Shepherd says, "Well done, good and faithful servant."

THE PREACHER'S LIBRARY EDITION

This expanded library section is designed for the preacher who wants more than inspiration. It is a field manual for the study, the pulpit, the pastor's office, the difficult week, the discouraging Sunday, and the long obedience of ministry. The governing conviction remains simple: the preacher does not create the message. The preacher receives the text, studies it honestly, proclaims Christ clearly, applies truth lovingly, and leaves the results to God.

The following chapters are not permission to become mechanical. They are guardrails that protect spiritual vitality from becoming disorder, and protect careful preparation from becoming lifeless. Fire and faithfulness belong together. The Spirit who empowers preaching is the Spirit who inspired Scripture.

PART VII

ONE HUNDRED PULPIT PRINCIPLES

Principle 1: Stay with the text long enough for the text to confront you.

A sermon should not be the first time the congregation meets the passage, nor should preparation be the first time the preacher slows down before it. Read until assumptions are exposed and the main burden becomes clear.

Principle 2: The outline serves the passage.

Three matching letters may be memorable, but alliteration is not inspiration. Let the structure arise from the author's movement rather than forcing every text into your favorite mold.

Principle 3: Read the Scripture early.

Do not make the congregation travel through ten minutes of weather reports, sports commentary, and childhood memories before discovering what God said.

Principle 4: Clarity is a form of love.

Confusion may impress people for a moment, but it rarely feeds them. The goal is not to sound deep. The goal is to make deep truth understandable without making it shallow.

Principle 5: One main idea is enough.

A sermon with seven unrelated burdens usually leaves the hearer carrying none. Decide what the passage is saying and make every element serve that truth.

Principle 6: Context is part of the text.

A verse separated from its paragraph can become a hostage forced to say whatever the preacher needs. Release it back into its argument.

Principle 7: Explain before you apply.

Application without explanation becomes religious advice. Show why the instruction grows from the passage before telling people what to do.

Principle 8: Application must become concrete.

“Do better” is not application. Name the habits, conversations, decisions, fears, loyalties, and acts of obedience the text addresses.

Principle 9: Christ is not a decorative conclusion.

Do not preach a moral lesson for thirty minutes and then attach Jesus during the final ninety seconds. Show how the text fits the gospel honestly.

Principle 10: The invitation should agree with the sermon.

Do not preach patient endurance and then manufacture panic. The response should arise from the truth just proclaimed.

Principle 11: Volume cannot repair vagueness.

If the proposition is unclear at speaking level three, it remains unclear at speaking level eleven.

Principle 12: Emotion must serve truth.

Tears, laughter, silence, celebration, and conviction can be holy responses. They become dangerous when the preacher tries to produce them without biblical substance.

Principle 13: Do not borrow a testimony you cannot verify.

A moving story does not become true because it preaches well. Integrity matters more than emotional effect.

Principle 14: Use commentaries after observation.

Let the passage question you before you ask scholars to answer everything. Commentaries are wise counselors, not substitute eyes.

Principle 15: Study the difficult words.

Do not hide uncertainty behind speed. Define terms, trace arguments, and admit where faithful interpreters differ.

Principle 16: Do not parade original languages.

Greek and Hebrew should clarify the congregation's Bible, not advertise the preacher's education.

Principle 17: A cross-reference is not a rabbit trail.

Use other texts to illuminate the passage, not to escape it.

Principle 18: Illustrations are windows, not rooms.

Let people look through the illustration toward truth. Do not invite them to move in and forget the sermon.

Principle 19: Personal stories require discipline.

Tell only what serves the passage, protects others, and does not make you the hero of every sermon.

Principle 20: Humor should lower defenses, not lower holiness.

A well-placed laugh can prepare the heart. Mockery, cruelty, and constant performance can empty the pulpit of gravity.

Principle 21: Preach to the people in front of you.

Do not aim every rebuke at an imaginary church across town. Shepherd the congregation God has entrusted to you.

Principle 22: Remember the wounded listener.

Every room contains grief, shame, fear, trauma, disappointment, and hidden struggle. Speak truth without using pain as a prop.

Principle 23: Remember the unbeliever.

Do not assume everyone understands church vocabulary. Explain sin, grace, repentance, faith, and the work of Christ.

Principle 24: Remember the mature saint.

Do not confuse accessibility with shallowness. Give seasoned believers something worthy of meditation.

Principle 25: Remember the child.

One clear image or sentence can follow a young listener for years. Plainness is not childishness.

Principle 26: Preach the whole counsel of God.

Favorite themes become distortions when neglected truths disappear from the pulpit.

Principle 27: Do not avoid hard passages forever.

A preaching calendar reveals courage. The texts repeatedly postponed may expose the subjects repeatedly feared.

Principle 28: Do not weaponize the pulpit.

The sermon is not a coded response to the person who criticized you on Tuesday.

Principle 29: Never preach private information publicly.

Pastoral confidence is sacred. A sermon illustration is not permission to betray trust.

Principle 30: Correction requires tears as well as courage.

The prophet who never grieves may love winning more than restoration.

Principle 31: Grace is not softness toward sin.

Grace tells the truth about sin and announces the sufficiency of Christ.

Principle 32: Conviction is not condemnation.

Conviction points toward repentance and hope. Condemnation merely crushes.

Principle 33: Do not promise what God has not promised.

Faithful preaching does not guarantee every healing, promotion, marriage, business, or timeline.

Principle 34: Do not turn Proverbs into contracts.

Wisdom describes God's moral order; it is not a vending machine that eliminates mystery and suffering.

Principle 35: Lament belongs in the pulpit.

A church that can only celebrate will not know how to suffer faithfully.

Principle 36: Joy belongs in the pulpit.

Seriousness is not the same as sadness. The gospel creates deep, durable joy.

Principle 37: Repentance belongs to preachers too.

The pulpit is weakened when the preacher speaks as though every warning is for someone else.

Principle 38: Character carries the sermon.

Gift may attract attention, but integrity determines whether the message can be trusted over time.

Principle 39: Private prayer is public preparation.

The congregation eventually hears whether the preacher has only handled notes or has also wrestled with God.

Principle 40: Rest is not laziness.

Exhaustion can make every text feel dull and every person feel irritating. Sabbath protects love.

Principle 41: Start earlier than Saturday night.

The Holy Spirit can work in emergencies, but procrastination should not become a theology of dependence.

Principle 42: Let the sermon simmer.

Early study allows truth to travel through the week, meet real life, and mature before Sunday.

Principle 43: Write the main idea in one sentence.

If you cannot state it, the congregation will probably not discover it.

Principle 44: Cut what you love when it does not serve.

The best unused story may belong in another sermon.

Principle 45: Rehearse for clarity, not theater.

Practice helps remove verbal clutter, test transitions, and honor time.

Principle 46: Know where you are going.

A sermon should not end because the preacher ran out of breath.

Principle 47: Do not announce every ending.

“I am closing” loses meaning after the fourth resurrection.

Principle 48: Honor the congregation’s time.

Length is not automatically depth, and brevity is not automatically faithfulness. Say what the text requires, no more and no less.

Principle 49: Leave room for silence.

Not every holy moment needs background music or another sentence.

Principle 50: Do not fear a quiet response.

Some of the deepest work of God happens without applause.

Principle 51: Do not confuse shouting with transformation.

A loud Sunday can still produce an unchanged Monday.

Principle 52: Do not confuse quietness with rejection.

The seed may be entering soil you cannot see.

Principle 53: Feedback is a gift.

Invite trusted people to tell you what was clear, unclear, faithful, distracting, or missing.

Principle 54: Do not build your identity on compliments.

Praise can intoxicate as quickly as criticism can wound.

Principle 55: Do not build your identity on criticism.

One disappointed listener is not the final court of heaven.

Principle 56: Learn from other preachers without becoming them.

Imitation can teach technique, but God did not call you to wear another person's voice.

Principle 57: Credit your sources.

Borrowed insight becomes theft when presented as personal discovery.

Principle 58: Never fake spiritual authority.

"God told me" should not be used to end questions, control people, or protect weak interpretation.

Principle 59: Say "I do not know" when necessary.

Honest limits are more trustworthy than confident invention.

Principle 60: Distinguish doctrine from speculation.

Not every interesting possibility deserves pulpit certainty.

Principle 61: Teach people how to read the Bible.

A sermon should not merely give conclusions; it should model faithful interpretation.

Principle 62: Let repeated exposition build literacy.

Preaching through books teaches context, patience, doctrine, and the shape of biblical thought.

Principle 63: Topical preaching still needs textual discipline.

A subject does not excuse a collection of disconnected verses.

Principle 64: Narrative is not merely an example.

Honor plot, tension, character, covenant, and the narrator's theological purpose.

Principle 65: Poetry must be heard as poetry.

Images are meant to awaken imagination, not be flattened into technical prose.

Principle 66: Prophecy is more than prediction.

The prophets expose idolatry, injustice, false worship, covenant betrayal, judgment, and hope.

Principle 67: Epistles are arguments, not quote collections.

Follow the logic from doctrine to exhortation.

Principle 68: Revelation was written to form faithful witnesses.

Do not turn hope-filled resistance into a chart contest.

Principle 69: The Old Testament is Christian Scripture.

Preach it in its own context and within the whole story that culminates in Christ.

Principle 70: Do not find Jesus by ignoring the author.

Christ-centered preaching is not imaginative word association. Follow covenant, promise, pattern, office, sacrifice, kingdom, and fulfillment.

Principle 71: The cross corrects triumphalism.

Christian victory passes through suffering, self-denial, and resurrection hope.

Principle 72: The resurrection prevents despair.

The final word over faithful labor is life.

Principle 73: The Spirit glorifies Christ.

Dependence on the Spirit will not make the biblical text less central.

Principle 74: Prayer and preparation are friends.

Prayer is not an excuse for carelessness, and study is not a substitute for dependence.

Principle 75: Preaching is pastoral care in public.

The sermon addresses souls, not merely subjects.

Principle 76: The pulpit must not replace personal shepherding.

Some wounds require a conversation, not a generalized Sunday sentence.

Principle 77: Preach funerals with honesty and hope.

Do not canonize the deceased or minimize grief. Proclaim Christ to the living.

Principle 78: Preach weddings beyond romance.

Name covenant, sacrifice, fidelity, community, and grace.

Principle 79: Preach communion with wonder.

Familiarity should deepen meaning, not empty it.

Principle 80: Preach baptism as gospel drama.

Center union with Christ, new life, public allegiance, and the church's witness.

Principle 81: Special days should not control Scripture.

Honor occasions without dressing every passage in a holiday costume.

Principle 82: Political passion must not become another canon.

The pulpit belongs to Christ, not a party, candidate, ideology, or nation.

Principle 83: Address public sin biblically.

Silence can be cowardice, but outrage without exegesis is not prophecy.

Principle 84: Refuse contempt.

You cannot faithfully call people to Christ while training the congregation to despise neighbors.

Principle 85: Name injustice without abandoning the gospel.

Biblical justice and reconciliation grow from God's character and Christ's reign.

Principle 86: Preach money without manipulation.

Teach stewardship, generosity, contentment, exploitation, debt, compassion, and worship without turning giving into a transaction with God.

Principle 87: Preach sexuality with truth and tenderness.

Do not surrender biblical conviction or forget the dignity, wounds, temptations, and need for grace present in every hearer.

Principle 88: Preach suffering without clichés.

Do not rush grief or explain mysteries God has not explained.

Principle 89: Preach healing without blaming the sick.

Pray boldly, hope deeply, and refuse to make unanswered prayer proof of defective faith.

Principle 90: Preach success as stewardship.

Achievement is not salvation, and influence is not identity.

Principle 91: Preach failure through the gospel.

Some consequences remain, but shame need not have the final word.

Principle 92: Preach holiness as beautiful.

Obedience is not divine harassment. It is life ordered toward love of God and neighbor.

Principle 93: Preach mission as participation in God's work.

The church does not invent the mission; it joins the sending God.

Principle 94: Preach the church as a people, not a product.

Members are not customers and pastors are not religious content providers.

Principle 95: Make disciples, not fans.

Fans repeat phrases. Disciples learn truth, practice obedience, endure correction, and follow Christ.

Principle 96: Faithfulness is measurable differently from fame.

Numbers may matter, but they cannot reveal motives, depth, endurance, love, or heaven's final verdict.

Principle 97: A small room is still holy ground.

Do not save your best preparation for larger invitations.

Principle 98: A familiar text still deserves fresh study.

What you preached before may not be what this congregation needs to hear now.

Principle 99: Your first sermon is not your final form.

Growth requires patience, reading, listening, practice, correction, and time.

Principle 100: Your last sermon should still sound teachable.

Longevity does not remove the need for humility.

Principle 101: Protect your family from the pulpit.

Do not mine spouses and children for material they did not consent to provide.

Principle 102: Protect the congregation from your ego.

The sermon exists for their formation, not your validation.

Principle 103: Finish with hope.

Even severe warning should reveal the mercy, justice, kingdom, and sufficiency of God.

Principle 104: Leave the results to God.

You are responsible for faithfulness, clarity, love, courage, and integrity. You are not sovereign over response.

Principle 105: Open the Book again next week.

The calling is renewed one text, one prayer, one congregation, and one act of faithfulness at a time.

PART VIII

THE SERMON CLINIC

Clinic 1: The Commentary Parade

Diagnosis: The message quotes six scholars, three dictionaries, and two ancient rabbis, but the congregation never hears a clear explanation of the verse.

Prescription: Use research to settle meaning, then translate the insight into plain speech. Mention a source only when it genuinely helps the hearer.

Rehabilitation Exercise: Rewrite one paragraph of research into two sentences a teenager could understand.

Clinic 2: The Invisible Main Idea

Diagnosis: Every statement is true, but no statement governs the sermon. The hearer collects fragments instead of receiving a message.

Prescription: Write one complete sentence that states the passage's central claim and required response. Make every movement support it.

Rehabilitation Exercise: Circle every section that does not directly serve the main idea. Cut or relocate it.

Clinic 3: The Testimony Takeover

Diagnosis: A personal story begins as an illustration and becomes the emotional center of the sermon. Christ and the text become supporting characters.

Prescription: Shorten the story, remove self-congratulation, and explicitly return the listener to the passage.

Rehabilitation Exercise: Retell the story in ninety seconds and end with one sentence linking it to the text.

Clinic 4: The Application Fog

Diagnosis: The preacher explains the passage accurately but concludes with “Let us do better.” No one knows what obedience looks like.

Prescription: Move from principle to practice. Name one action, one attitude, one relationship, and one community implication.

Rehabilitation Exercise: Write four Monday-morning applications for four different hearers.

Clinic 5: The Hostage Invitation

Diagnosis: The sermon ends, but music, repeated appeals, public pressure, and escalating promises continue until someone responds visibly.

Prescription: Invite clearly, explain the gospel, allow appropriate space, and refuse to manufacture what only the Spirit can produce.

Rehabilitation Exercise: Draft an invitation that is urgent without being manipulative.

Clinic 6: The Rabbit Trail Olympics

Diagnosis: The sermon begins in Romans, visits Noah, detours through David, checks on the four horsemen, and returns with no map.

Prescription: Limit cross-references. State why each one is necessary and return immediately to the primary text.

Rehabilitation Exercise: Remove every cross-reference that does not clarify a word, theme, promise, or fulfillment.

Clinic 7: The Shouting Substitute

Diagnosis: Intensity rises whenever explanation weakens. The congregation is told that something is powerful but is not shown why.

Prescription: Lower the volume, slow the pace, and explain the connection. Let understanding create appropriate emotion.

Rehabilitation Exercise: Mark one emotional paragraph and add the missing biblical reasoning.

Clinic 8: The Encyclopedia Sermon

Diagnosis: Everything learned during preparation is poured into one message. The preacher confuses accumulation with nourishment.

Prescription: Select what the congregation needs to understand and obey this text today. Save the rest for teaching notes or another sermon.

Rehabilitation Exercise: Cut the manuscript by twenty percent without losing the central argument.

Clinic 9: The Private Fight in Public

Diagnosis: A recent conflict appears in the sermon through vague accusations that everyone recognizes.

Prescription: Handle personal conflict personally. Preach the passage to the whole church, including yourself.

Rehabilitation Exercise: Ask a trusted leader whether any section sounds targeted or retaliatory.

Clinic 10: The Gospel Appendix

Diagnosis: The sermon offers moral improvement and adds “Jesus died for you” at the end without connection to the text.

Prescription: Trace how the passage exposes need, reveals God's character, advances promise, or finds fulfillment in Christ.

Rehabilitation Exercise: Write a gospel connection that grows naturally from the passage rather than interrupting it.

PART IX

CONVERSATIONS IN THE PREACHER'S OFFICE

Saturday-Night Panic

Young Preacher: I have read the passage twelve times and still do not have a sermon.

Older Pastor: Good. At least you have stopped pretending the first clever thought was the message.

Young Preacher: That is not comforting.

Older Pastor: Then begin with what is certain. What problem is the author addressing? What does the passage reveal about God? What response does it require?

Young Preacher: I wanted a powerful title first.

Older Pastor: A title is a label on the meal. Cook the food first.

Mentor's Note: The goal of pastoral mentoring is not to make the younger preacher dependent on another personality. It is to train judgment, deepen character, strengthen habits, and keep Christ above the preacher's need to impress.

After a Bad Sunday

Young Preacher: It felt flat. I stumbled, missed a page, and nobody seemed moved.

Older Pastor: Was the text handled honestly?

Young Preacher: Yes, though not as clearly as I wanted.

Older Pastor: Then learn what clarity requires and refuse the fantasy that one difficult sermon ends your calling. Farmers do not dig up seed on Monday to see whether Sunday worked.

Mentor's Note: The goal of pastoral mentoring is not to make the younger preacher dependent on another personality. It is to train judgment, deepen character, strengthen habits, and keep Christ above the preacher's need to impress.

The Compliment Hangover

Young Preacher: People said it was my best sermon.

Older Pastor: Receive kindness and keep your shoes on the ground.

Young Preacher: Should I not celebrate?

Older Pastor: Celebrate grace. Then ask whether the praise is making you more grateful or more addicted.

Mentor's Note: The goal of pastoral mentoring is not to make the younger preacher dependent on another personality. It is to train judgment, deepen character, strengthen habits, and keep Christ above the preacher's need to impress.

The Criticism Letter

Young Preacher: One member said I was too direct.

Older Pastor: Were you biblical, accurate, and loving?

Young Preacher: I think so.

Older Pastor: Then examine your tone, correct what is wrong, and do not surrender truth to avoid discomfort. Also remember: "I think so" is an invitation to ask someone trustworthy.

Mentor's Note: The goal of pastoral mentoring is not to make the younger preacher dependent on another personality. It is to train judgment, deepen character, strengthen habits, and keep Christ above the preacher's need to impress.

Writer's Block

Young Preacher: Nothing sounds fresh.

Older Pastor: Freshness is not the same as novelty. The congregation does not need a new gospel. They need the old truth seen clearly in this text and faithfully addressed to this moment.

Young Preacher: So what do I do?

Older Pastor: Observe again. Pray again. Walk away for an hour. Return and write the simplest true sentence you can.

Mentor's Note: The goal of pastoral mentoring is not to make the younger preacher dependent on another personality. It is to train judgment, deepen character, strengthen habits, and keep Christ above the preacher's need to impress.

Family and Ministry

Young Preacher: The church always needs something.

Older Pastor: Yes, and your family also needs a pastor who knows when he is husband, father, son, brother, or friend.

Young Preacher: What if someone is disappointed?

Older Pastor: Someone will always be disappointed. Faithfulness is not unlimited availability.

Mentor's Note: The goal of pastoral mentoring is not to make the younger preacher dependent on another personality. It is to train judgment, deepen character, strengthen habits, and keep Christ above the preacher's need to impress.

PART X

WHEN PREACHERS LOSE THEIR WAY

Preaching for Applause

Applause is not evil, but it is a dangerous compass. Once affirmation becomes oxygen, the preacher begins avoiding texts that confront, exaggerating moments that excite, and measuring faithfulness by immediate reaction. Recovery begins by naming the hunger, returning identity to Christ, inviting honest accountability, and practicing hidden service that receives no platform.

- Warning sign: defensiveness whenever trusted people ask honest questions.
- Recovery practice: confess specifically, submit to appropriate accountability, and rebuild slowly.
- Gospel hope: failure need not be final when repentance is real and truth is honored.

Building a Personality Cult

The congregation slowly learns that loyalty to Christ is demonstrated by unquestioned loyalty to the preacher. Language becomes possessive, criticism becomes betrayal, and the leader's preferences gain the force of doctrine. Recovery requires shared leadership, transparent governance, financial accountability, permission for questions, and public insistence that Christ alone is Head of the church.

- Warning sign: defensiveness whenever trusted people ask honest questions.
- Recovery practice: confess specifically, submit to appropriate accountability, and rebuild slowly.

- Gospel hope: failure need not be final when repentance is real and truth is honored.

Charisma Without Character

Gift can carry a person farther than integrity can sustain. The pulpit may remain powerful while private life becomes hollow. Recovery is not image repair. It is truth-telling, repentance, appropriate consequences, pastoral care, and a willingness to step away when necessary.

- Warning sign: defensiveness whenever trusted people ask honest questions.
- Recovery practice: confess specifically, submit to appropriate accountability, and rebuild slowly.
- Gospel hope: failure need not be final when repentance is real and truth is honored.

Neglecting the Secret Place

Sermon production can continue after communion with God has weakened. The preacher reads for material, prays for public effect, and mistakes ministry activity for spiritual health. Recovery begins with Scripture that is not being prepared for others, prayer that has no audience, confession, worship, and rest.

- Warning sign: defensiveness whenever trusted people ask honest questions.
- Recovery practice: confess specifically, submit to appropriate accountability, and rebuild slowly.
- Gospel hope: failure need not be final when repentance is real and truth is honored.

Chasing Every Trend

A new method arrives every month promising relevance, growth, reach, or revival. Tools can help, but trend addiction trains the church to believe that power always lives in the next technique.

Recovery asks which practices serve the mission, which merely create motion, and whether the Word and prayer still govern the ministry.

- Warning sign: defensiveness whenever trusted people ask honest questions.
- Recovery practice: confess specifically, submit to appropriate accountability, and rebuild slowly.
- Gospel hope: failure need not be final when repentance is real and truth is honored.

Forgetting the Chief Shepherd

The preacher begins to act as owner rather than steward. Burdens become unbearable because every outcome feels personal. Recovery remembers that the church belongs to Christ, the sheep are His, the Word is His, the power is His, and the final evaluation is His.

- Warning sign: defensiveness whenever trusted people ask honest questions.
- Recovery practice: confess specifically, submit to appropriate accountability, and rebuild slowly.
- Gospel hope: failure need not be final when repentance is real and truth is honored.

PART XI

THE JOY OF PREACHING

The call to preach is weighty, but it is not meant to become joyless. There is wonder in watching an ancient text become living bread for present people. There is joy when a grieving saint hears hope, when a skeptic sees Christ clearly, when a young believer learns to read Scripture, when a family chooses reconciliation, and when a congregation grows steady through years of faithful exposition.

The Privilege of Handling the Word

The preacher stands in a long line of witnesses and opens a Book not authored by the church, controlled by the preacher, or exhausted by one lifetime. Every week offers another opportunity to discover that the text is deeper than memory and more relevant than fashion.

The Joy of Slow Fruit

Not every result arrives during the invitation. Some sermons become sentences remembered in hospital rooms, temptations, funerals, decisions, and private prayers years later. The preacher may never know which word became an anchor. That hiddenness protects humility and encourages perseverance.

The Joy of a Faithful People

A congregation that brings Bibles, asks honest questions, receives correction, encourages its leaders, serves neighbors, and grows in love is not a small success. It is evidence of grace. The preacher is not performing for an audience but laboring among a people who are also gifts from God.

The Joy of Becoming Smaller

Mature preaching does not require the preacher to disappear as a person, but it does make self-display less necessary. The deepest joy comes when hearers leave saying less about the speaker and more about the Savior.

PART XII

THINGS NEVER FOUND IN THE BIBLE

“Blessed are those who finish before noon, for theirs is the buffet.”

Not there. Jesus did not measure faithfulness by restaurant traffic. Honor time, but do not turn the clock into lord.

“And Paul wrote the church, ‘Please like, share, and subscribe.’”

Not there. The apostles sought witnesses and disciples, not merely engagement metrics.

“Where two or three agree with the pastor, there is unity.”

Not there. Biblical unity is centered in Christ and truth, not unquestioned agreement with one personality.

“Give, and God will return exactly ten times the amount by Friday.”

Not there. Generosity is worship, not a guaranteed investment scheme.

“Touch not mine anointed means never ask a leader a question.”

Not there. Spiritual authority does not erase accountability.

“The Lord helps those who help themselves.”

Not there. That familiar line is not Scripture. The gospel announces grace to those who cannot save themselves.

“God will never give you more than you can handle.”

Not there. Scripture promises God’s faithfulness in temptation, but suffering often exceeds self-sufficiency so that we learn dependence.

“Follow your heart, because it is always right.”

Not there. Scripture calls the heart powerful, needy, and in need of renewal.

“Everything happens for a reason that the preacher can explain in three points.”

Not there. God is sovereign, but not every mystery has been disclosed to us.

“If the microphone squeals, the anointing has arrived.”

Not there. Sound problems are usually sound problems.

“The longer the sermon, the deeper the doctrine.”

Not there. Length and depth are not synonyms.

“A loud congregation is automatically a transformed congregation.”

Not there. Biblical fruit is seen in love, holiness, justice, endurance, truth, and obedience.

“Never let context interfere with a good sermon.”

Not there. Context is what prevents a good speech from becoming a bad use of Scripture.

“The pastor’s vacation is evidence of spiritual decline.”

Not there. Rest existed before burnout became a badge of honor.

“The preacher must be the hero of every illustration.”

Not there. Christ is sufficient. The preacher can survive being ordinary.

PART XIII

THE PREACHER'S DESK

Funeral Message Framework

1. Name the reality of death without pretending grief is unbelief.
2. Honor the person truthfully without preaching them into heaven based on sentiment.
3. Choose a primary text that proclaims God's character, human mortality, Christ's victory, and resurrection hope.
4. Speak directly to the living: grieve, remember, repent, believe, reconcile, and hope.
5. Keep the gospel clear and avoid using the family's pain as a pressure tactic.

Wedding Message Framework

6. Ground marriage in covenant rather than ceremony alone.
7. Explain love as patient, truthful, sacrificial action.
8. Address mutual service, fidelity, forgiveness, community, and dependence on grace.
9. Keep the couple central enough to be personal, but Scripture central enough to be lasting.
10. Bless the marriage without promising a conflict-free future.

Communion Meditation Framework

11. Read the institution text or a passage that interprets the cross.
12. Name remembrance, participation, self-examination, unity, gratitude, and hope.
13. Explain the bread and cup without turning the moment into either superstition or empty routine.
14. Invite repentance and reconciliation.
15. End with Christ's sufficiency and promised return.

Baptism Devotional Framework

16. Explain baptism as obedience and public allegiance.
17. Connect it to union with Christ in death and resurrection.
18. Celebrate grace rather than human achievement.
19. Address the congregation's responsibility to disciple and support the baptized believer.
20. Call the candidate to lifelong faithfulness, not merely a memorable day.

Revival Preparation Guide

21. Define revival biblically before scheduling events.
22. Begin with prayer, repentance, reconciliation, and renewed attention to Scripture.
23. Choose preachers and leaders for character and faithfulness, not only drawing power.
24. Plan hospitality, follow-up, counseling, discipleship, and care for new believers.
25. Evaluate fruit after the music stops: repentance, restitution, renewed prayer, mission, holiness, and love.

A Four-Week Christmas Series

- Week 1 - Promise: Isaiah 9:1-7, light for people walking in darkness.
- Week 2 - Preparation: Luke 1:26-38, humble surrender to God's word.
- Week 3 - Incarnation: John 1:1-18, the Word made flesh.
- Week 4 - Worship and Witness: Luke 2:8-20, good news for all people.

A Four-Week Resurrection Series

- Week 1 - The King Approaches: Mark 11:1-11.
- Week 2 - The Cross: Mark 15:21-39.
- Week 3 - The Empty Tomb: Mark 16:1-8.
- Week 4 - Resurrection Life and Mission: Colossians 3:1-17.

Invitation Language That Respects the Hearer

“You have heard the good news of what God has done in Jesus Christ. Turn from sin and entrust yourself to Him. You may speak with a pastor or mature believer today. Do not confuse delay with neutrality, but do not confuse public pressure with saving faith. Christ receives all who come to Him.”

A FINAL WORD TO THE PREACHER

If this book causes one preacher to open the Bible more carefully, one congregation to hear Christ more clearly, one sinner to understand grace, one wounded believer to recover hope, or one weary pastor to find fresh joy in faithful work, every page will have served its purpose.

Close the laptop when the tools have done their work. Silence the noise when research becomes avoidance. Open the Scriptures again. Read slowly. Pray honestly. Love the people in front of you. Walk into the pulpit without pretending to be the Savior. You are a witness. You are a steward. You are a servant under the Word.

Preach the Word. Preach Christ. Line upon line. Precept upon precept. With courage, humor, humility, tears, intelligence, patience, and hope. Then leave the results to God.

THE MASTER'S CLASS ON PREACHING

This section is written for the long road. It moves beyond sermon construction into the inner life of the preacher: the ordinary Sundays, hidden temptations, awkward mistakes, private prayers, seasons of criticism, and quiet joys that shape a lifetime of ministry. The recurring question is not, 'How can I look impressive?' but, 'How can I remain faithful to Christ, His Word, and His people?'

The humor is affectionate, but the warning is serious. A preacher can learn techniques and still lose tenderness. A minister can build a platform and neglect a soul. The Master's Class therefore returns repeatedly to the same five practices: open the Bible, tell the truth, exalt Christ, love the people, and depend on the Holy Spirit.

PART XIII

THE PULPIT DIARY

Diary Entry 1: The First Sermon

I preached everything I knew in twenty-two minutes. Unfortunately, I only knew eleven minutes. The congregation survived. God was kind. I learned that calling is not confirmed by pretending to be finished; it is strengthened by study, humility, and another faithful Sunday.

Diary Entry 2: The Pronunciation Victory

I spent twelve hours preparing. Mrs. Johnson thanked me for pronouncing Habakkuk correctly. I wanted praise for the outline. God gave me a lesson in humility and one correctly pronounced prophet.

Diary Entry 3: Too Biblical

Someone complained that the sermon was too biblical. I stared for several seconds because I had not prepared an answer for that particular emergency.

Diary Entry 4: The Missing Page

Page four disappeared during the sermon. So did point two. The church did not collapse. I discovered that knowing the text is safer than depending entirely on paper.

Diary Entry 5: The Quiet Sunday

Nobody shouted. Nobody ran. Nobody posted a clip. A grieving man later whispered, “That passage kept me alive today.” Heaven may measure Sundays differently than social media.

Diary question: What is God teaching me about faithfulness in this season?

Diary Entry 6: The Long Introduction

I used fifteen minutes to explain why the sermon would be short. This is the kind of contradiction only a preacher can deliver with confidence.

Diary Entry 7: The Child Who Listened

A child repeated one sentence from the sermon word for word. Adults forgot the outline. I remembered that clarity is not a lesser form of depth.

Diary Entry 8: The Compliment

They called it powerful. By bedtime I had mentally added “internationally renowned” to my biography. The Lord graciously allowed the next sermon to humble me.

Diary Entry 9: The Criticism

One letter said I was too direct. Another said I was not direct enough. I placed them beside each other and decided to return to the text.

Diary Entry 10: The Hospital Room

A sermon illustration I almost removed became the very thing a family remembered beside a hospital bed. The preacher plants without knowing where the seed will travel.

Diary question: What is God teaching me about faithfulness in this season?

Diary Entry 11: The Empty Pew

I prepared for a crowd and preached to thirty-seven people. Christ was present, the text was true, and thirty-seven souls were not a small assignment.

Diary Entry 12: The Borrowed Story

The illustration was perfect. It was also unverifiable. I removed it and slept better. Truth does not need fictional reinforcement disguised as fact.

Diary Entry 13: The Saturday Panic

At 10:43 p.m. the sermon still looked like loose groceries. I promised God I would start earlier next week. God has heard this promise before.

Diary Entry 14: The Monday Regret

Every preacher should wait twenty-four hours before resigning. Monday emotions are not always reliable ecclesiology.

Diary Entry 15: The Old Bible

The binding broke, several pages loosened, and notes crowded the margins. I realized the Bible looked more prepared for ministry than I did.

> *Diary question: What is God teaching me about faithfulness in this season?*

Diary Entry 16: The Funeral

I preached resurrection hope to a room that did not need cleverness. Grief has a way of asking whether the preacher truly believes the words he uses every Sunday.

Diary Entry 17: The Wedding

The couple wanted seven minutes. I had twenty-eight pages. Love required editing.

Diary Entry 18: The Technical Failure

The screen went black. The microphone died. The Bible still worked.

Diary Entry 19: The Sermon Title

I found a brilliant title and spent three days trying to locate a passage willing to cooperate. The passage declined.

Diary Entry 20: The Rabbit Trail

I left the text to make one quick point and returned twelve minutes later carrying three cross-references and no clear memory of where I had been.

> *Diary question: What is God teaching me about faithfulness in this season?*

Diary Entry 21: The Difficult Text

I wanted a more comfortable passage. The congregation needed this one. Faithfulness often begins where preference ends.

Diary Entry 22: The Apology

I discovered that I had misstated a fact. Correcting it publicly did not weaken the pulpit. Pretending would have.

Diary Entry 23: The New Believer

A new Christian asked what “sanctification” meant. I had used the word six times and explained it zero times.

Diary Entry 24: The Seasoned Saint

An older member said, “Pastor, do not entertain us. Feed us.” I wrote it inside the front cover of my Bible.

Diary Entry 25: The Trend

Everyone attended a conference and returned with the same vocabulary. Six months later the slogans changed. The Word remained.

> *Diary question: What is God teaching me about faithfulness in this season?*

Diary Entry 26: The Prayer Closet

I realized I had spent more time arranging points than praying for people. The outline was polished; the heart was not.

Diary Entry 27: The Family Dinner

The church could reach me at any hour. My family could barely reach me across the table. Ministry without boundaries can become disobedience wearing a clerical collar.

Diary Entry 28: The Small Group

A member asked a question that exposed a weak part of the sermon. I resisted defending myself and learned more than I taught.

Diary Entry 29: The Invitation

No one came forward. Later two people requested prayer privately. The Spirit does not always follow our preferred traffic pattern.

Diary Entry 30: The Repeated Sermon

I preached the same favorite idea from another text. The congregation noticed before I did.

> *Diary question: What is God teaching me about faithfulness in this season?*

Diary Entry 31: The Joke That Failed

I waited for laughter. Silence arrived early and stayed late. The text graciously rescued the sermon.

Diary Entry 32: The Hard Conversation

A member disliked the message because it confronted a cherished sin. Love did not require retreat; it required truth without cruelty.

Diary Entry 33: The Conference Speaker

He preached with extraordinary skill. I returned home tempted to imitate his voice. God had called me to faithfulness, not impersonation.

Diary Entry 34: The Hidden Fruit

Years later someone quoted a sentence I did not remember saying. God had kept the seed after I forgot the sermon.

Diary Entry 35: The Weary Week

I did not feel powerful. I simply opened the text and told the truth. Sometimes obedience arrives without emotional fireworks.

> *Diary question: What is God teaching me about faithfulness in this season?*

Diary Entry 36: The Empty Notes

After forty years, I finally learned that people rarely remember my outline. They never forget when Jesus met them through His Word.

Diary Entry 37: The Last-Minute Addition

The sentence I added in the hallway became the least clear paragraph in the sermon. Urgency is not always inspiration.

Diary Entry 38: The Public Success

Attendance grew, invitations increased, and private prayer shrank. Success can become a test more dangerous than obscurity.

Diary Entry 39: The Unseen Pastor

He served a small church for decades, preached faithfully, visited the sick, and never became famous. Heaven is not confused about greatness.

Diary Entry 40: The Final Sermon

One day another preacher will stand where I stood. The pulpit was never mine. The Word was entrusted, not owned.

> *Diary question: What is God teaching me about faithfulness in this season?*

PART XIV

SATAN'S FAVORITE SERMON

Satan's favorite sermon is not always openly heretical. Obvious error can awaken discernment. His preferred sermon may be polished, positive, emotionally satisfying, and spiritually harmless. It never exposes sin, never announces the holiness of God, never explains the cross, never calls for repentance, and never requires obedience. Everyone leaves affirmed. Hell remains untroubled.

It may contain Bible words without biblical weight. It may mention purpose while ignoring the One who gives purpose; promise victory without defining faithfulness; celebrate destiny without discussing discipleship; and offer grace without the wounds of Christ. The danger is not that every sermon must sound angry. The danger is that a sermon can sound Christian while carefully avoiding the claims of Christ.

The Anatomy of a Harmless Sermon

- A verse is displayed but never explained.
- Sin is renamed as inconvenience, negativity, or low self-esteem.
- Jesus appears as an inspirational assistant rather than crucified and risen Lord.
- Repentance is replaced by vague self-improvement.
- The hearer is never asked to trust, obey, forgive, confess, endure, serve, or surrender.
- The preacher promises outcomes Scripture never guaranteed.
- Emotional response is treated as spiritual transformation.

The Gospel Disturbance

Faithful preaching disturbs false peace because the gospel tells the truth: God is holy, humanity is sinful, Christ has died and

risen, grace is offered freely, repentance and faith are commanded, and the Lordship of Jesus rearranges life. This message comforts the crushed and confronts the proud. It wounds in order to heal and empties the sinner of self-righteousness in order to fill the believer with hope.

Back to the Book

- Does my preaching name sin clearly without becoming self-righteous?
- Is Christ's saving work central or merely attached?
- What response did the text itself require?

Pulpit Practice

26. Review three recent sermons for gospel clarity.
27. Rewrite one application so that it calls for a specific response.
28. Ask a trusted listener whether the sermon offered both conviction and hope.

The Preacher's Prayer

Lord Jesus, save me from sermons that impress people while leaving souls untouched. Give me courage to proclaim the whole gospel with truth, tears, clarity, and hope. Amen.

PART XV

LETTERS TO YOUNG PREACHERS

Letter 1: Before Your First Sermon

Dear Young Preacher,

Do not attempt to prove that you belong in the pulpit. Open the text, say what it says, and let your dependence on God be visible. Your first sermon does not need to contain your entire future ministry. The goal is not a flawless ministry but a faithful one: quick to repent, willing to learn, anchored in Christ, and governed by Scripture.

With hope for your calling,
A Fellow Servant

> *Key Scriptures: 2 Timothy 4:1-5; 1 Timothy 4:12-16; 1 Peter 5:1-4.*

Letter 2: When Nobody Knows Your Name

Dear Young Preacher,

Obscurity is not abandonment. Use the hidden years to build habits strong enough to survive visibility. Learn Scripture, serve people, honor leaders, and allow character to grow before opportunity expands. The goal is not a flawless ministry but a faithful one: quick to repent, willing to learn, anchored in Christ, and governed by Scripture.

With hope for your calling,
A Fellow Servant

> *Key Scriptures: 2 Timothy 4:1-5; 1 Timothy 4:12-16; 1 Peter 5:1-4.*

Letter 3: When They Applaud

Dear Young Preacher,

Receive encouragement without drinking it as identity. Compliments are gifts, not oxygen. Thank people, thank God, and return to the study. The goal is not a flawless ministry but a faithful one: quick to repent, willing to learn, anchored in Christ, and governed by Scripture.

With hope for your calling,
A Fellow Servant

> *Key Scriptures: 2 Timothy 4:1-5; 1 Timothy 4:12-16; 1 Peter 5:1-4.*

Letter 4: When They Criticize

Dear Young Preacher,

Do not accept every criticism as truth or reject every criticism as attack. Listen for evidence, examine your heart, consult wise people, correct what is wrong, and keep preaching faithfully. The goal is not a flawless ministry but a faithful one: quick to repent, willing to learn, anchored in Christ, and governed by Scripture.

With hope for your calling,
A Fellow Servant

> *Key Scriptures: 2 Timothy 4:1-5; 1 Timothy 4:12-16; 1 Peter 5:1-4.*

Letter 5: Love Difficult People

Dear Young Preacher,

Sheep bite, leaders misunderstand, and wounded people sometimes wound others. Love does not mean enabling abuse, but it does mean refusing contempt. The goal is not a flawless ministry but a faithful one: quick to repent, willing to learn, anchored in Christ, and governed by Scripture.

With hope for your calling,
A Fellow Servant

> *Key Scriptures: 2 Timothy 4:1-5; 1 Timothy 4:12-16; 1 Peter 5:1-4.*

Letter 6: Protect Your Family

Dear Young Preacher,

Do not sacrifice the people closest to you on the altar of public ministry. Your spouse and children should not receive only the exhausted leftovers of your calling. The goal is not a flawless ministry but a faithful one: quick to repent, willing to learn, anchored in Christ, and governed by Scripture.

With hope for your calling,
A Fellow Servant

> *Key Scriptures: 2 Timothy 4:1-5; 1 Timothy 4:12-16; 1 Peter 5:1-4.*

Letter 7: Guard Your Money

Dear Young Preacher,

Be transparent, accountable, and content. Financial secrecy can destroy years of faithful ministry in one season. The goal is not a flawless ministry but a faithful one: quick to repent, willing to learn, anchored in Christ, and governed by Scripture.

With hope for your calling,
A Fellow Servant

> *Key Scriptures: 2 Timothy 4:1-5; 1 Timothy 4:12-16; 1 Peter 5:1-4.*

Letter 8: Guard Your Body

Dear Young Preacher,

Sleep, movement, food, medical care, and rest are not distractions from ministry. You preach through a body that requires

stewardship. The goal is not a flawless ministry but a faithful one: quick to repent, willing to learn, anchored in Christ, and governed by Scripture.

With hope for your calling,
A Fellow Servant

> *Key Scriptures: 2 Timothy 4:1-5; 1 Timothy 4:12-16; 1 Peter 5:1-4.*

Letter 9: Never Stop Learning

Dear Young Preacher,

Read beyond your favorite voices. Study theology, history, culture, language, pastoral care, and the lives of faithful saints. Learning should deepen humility, not decorate ego. The goal is not a flawless ministry but a faithful one: quick to repent, willing to learn, anchored in Christ, and governed by Scripture.

With hope for your calling,
A Fellow Servant

> *Key Scriptures: 2 Timothy 4:1-5; 1 Timothy 4:12-16; 1 Peter 5:1-4.*

Letter 10: Never Stop Praying

Dear Young Preacher,

Public words become thin when private communion disappears. Pray when preparation is fruitful and when it is dry. The goal is not a flawless ministry but a faithful one: quick to repent, willing to learn, anchored in Christ, and governed by Scripture.

With hope for your calling,
A Fellow Servant

> *Key Scriptures: 2 Timothy 4:1-5; 1 Timothy 4:12-16; 1 Peter 5:1-4.*

Letter 11: Do Not Copy a Voice

Dear Young Preacher,

Admire faithful preachers, but do not become an imitation. God can use your redeemed personality, vocabulary, history, and cadence. The goal is not a flawless ministry but a faithful one: quick to repent, willing to learn, anchored in Christ, and governed by Scripture.

With hope for your calling,
A Fellow Servant

> *Key Scriptures: 2 Timothy 4:1-5; 1 Timothy 4:12-16; 1 Peter 5:1-4.*

Letter 12: Preach the Hard Texts

Dear Young Preacher,

Do not build a ministry from favorite verses alone. Difficult passages train courage and protect the church from a selective Bible. The goal is not a flawless ministry but a faithful one: quick to repent, willing to learn, anchored in Christ, and governed by Scripture.

With hope for your calling,
A Fellow Servant

> *Key Scriptures: 2 Timothy 4:1-5; 1 Timothy 4:12-16; 1 Peter 5:1-4.*

Letter 13: Admit What You Do Not Know

Dear Young Preacher,

Honest limits strengthen trust. Study diligently, distinguish certainty from inference, and refuse to manufacture answers. The goal is not a flawless ministry but a faithful one: quick to repent, willing to learn, anchored in Christ, and governed by Scripture.

With hope for your calling,
A Fellow Servant

Key Scriptures: 2 Timothy 4:1-5; 1 Timothy 4:12-16; 1 Peter 5:1-4.

Letter 14: Handle Confidentiality

Dear Young Preacher,

A private counseling conversation is not free sermon material. Protect people even when the story would preach wonderfully. The goal is not a flawless ministry but a faithful one: quick to repent, willing to learn, anchored in Christ, and governed by Scripture.

With hope for your calling,
A Fellow Servant

Key Scriptures: 2 Timothy 4:1-5; 1 Timothy 4:12-16; 1 Peter 5:1-4.

Letter 15: Do Not Weaponize the Pulpit

Dear Young Preacher,

If one person needs confrontation, speak to that person. Do not make the whole congregation listen to a coded argument. The goal is not a flawless ministry but a faithful one: quick to repent, willing to learn, anchored in Christ, and governed by Scripture.

With hope for your calling,
A Fellow Servant

Key Scriptures: 2 Timothy 4:1-5; 1 Timothy 4:12-16; 1 Peter 5:1-4.

Letter 16: Stay Near the Suffering

Dear Young Preacher,

Hospital rooms, funerals, unemployment, addiction, grief, and disappointment will teach you to preach promises without clichés. The goal is not a flawless ministry but a faithful one:

quick to repent, willing to learn, anchored in Christ, and governed by Scripture.

With hope for your calling,
A Fellow Servant

> *Key Scriptures: 2 Timothy 4:1-5; 1 Timothy 4:12-16; 1 Peter 5:1-4.*

Letter 17: Do Not Despise Small Churches

Dear Young Preacher,

A small congregation is not a rehearsal for a real ministry. Every soul is eternal, every sermon matters, and every act of shepherding counts. The goal is not a flawless ministry but a faithful one: quick to repent, willing to learn, anchored in Christ, and governed by Scripture.

With hope for your calling,
A Fellow Servant

> *Key Scriptures: 2 Timothy 4:1-5; 1 Timothy 4:12-16; 1 Peter 5:1-4.*

Letter 18: Build a Team

Dear Young Preacher,

Shared leadership is not weakness. Invite accountability, develop others, and refuse to make the church dependent on one personality. The goal is not a flawless ministry but a faithful one: quick to repent, willing to learn, anchored in Christ, and governed by Scripture.

With hope for your calling,
A Fellow Servant

> *Key Scriptures: 2 Timothy 4:1-5; 1 Timothy 4:12-16; 1 Peter 5:1-4.*

Letter 19: Repent Quickly

Dear Young Preacher,

When you sin, do not manage appearances. Tell the truth, accept consequences, seek restoration, and remember that grace never requires deception. The goal is not a flawless ministry but a faithful one: quick to repent, willing to learn, anchored in Christ, and governed by Scripture.

With hope for your calling,
A Fellow Servant

> *Key Scriptures: 2 Timothy 4:1-5; 1 Timothy 4:12-16; 1 Peter 5:1-4.*

Letter 20: Finish Well

Dear Young Preacher,

Do not merely begin with fire. Build a life capable of steady obedience, teachability, tenderness, and truth until your final sermon. The goal is not a flawless ministry but a faithful one: quick to repent, willing to learn, anchored in Christ, and governed by Scripture.

With hope for your calling,
A Fellow Servant

> *Key Scriptures: 2 Timothy 4:1-5; 1 Timothy 4:12-16; 1 Peter 5:1-4.*

PART XVI

THE PREACHER'S HALL OF SHAME

The Longest Introduction Award

The congregation forgot the passage before it was read.

Biblical correction: Read the text early and let the sermon begin where God has spoken.

The Frequent Flyer Award

Seventeen Bible books visited; none explained.

Biblical correction: Use cross-references as lights, not escape routes.

The Invisible Jesus Award

Sixty minutes of inspiration and no clear Christ.

Biblical correction: Make the person and work of Christ central, not ceremonial.

The Olympic Rabbit Trail Medal

The sermon began in Genesis and ended near the maps.

Biblical correction: State one main idea and remove everything that does not serve it.

The Shouting Substitute Trophy

The volume rose whenever clarity fell.

Biblical correction: Explain the truth before demanding a response.

The Greek Parade Ribbon

Every original-language word marched across the stage. The verse remained unexplained.

Biblical correction: Use language tools to illuminate, not intimidate.

The Four Closings Lifetime Award

The preacher landed the plane, took off again, and requested another runway.

Biblical correction: Plan the conclusion and conclude once.

The Testimony Takeover Prize

The preacher became the hero of every illustration.

Biblical correction: Use personal stories sparingly and keep Christ in the center.

The Prophecy Weather Channel Award

Every headline became proof that Tuesday was the end.

Biblical correction: Interpret Scripture carefully and reject sensational certainty.

The Most Creative Title Award

“The Zebra in Your Spirit” drew attention. Nobody, including the preacher, knew what it meant.

Biblical correction: Choose titles that serve the text rather than compete with it.

The Commentary Dump Medal

Fifteen scholars were quoted. The congregation never heard the preacher explain the passage.

Biblical correction: Digest research and serve a clear meal.

The Emotional Hostage Award

Music, repetition, and pressure continued until someone moved.

Biblical correction: Invite sincerely and trust the Spirit with visible results.

PART XVII

THE PREACHER'S HALL OF FAITH

The Rural Pastor

He preached to a small congregation for thirty-five years, knew every family, buried generations, welcomed children, and kept opening the Book. His greatness was measured in steadiness.

> *Hall of Faith principle: Character over charisma. Scripture over style. Shepherding over self-promotion.*

The Bivocational Preacher

She worked all week, studied at night, served without applause, and refused to offer the congregation leftovers. Her sacrifice turned limited time into disciplined devotion.

> *Hall of Faith principle: Character over charisma. Scripture over style. Shepherding over self-promotion.*

The Hospital Chaplain

He carried short passages into rooms where long explanations would not fit. He learned that one clear promise spoken gently can become a lifeline.

> *Hall of Faith principle: Character over charisma. Scripture over style. Shepherding over self-promotion.*

The Prison Minister

The room had locks, uniforms, and suspicion. He preached dignity, repentance, forgiveness, and new life without reducing anyone to the worst thing they had done.

> *Hall of Faith principle: Character over charisma. Scripture over style. Shepherding over self-promotion.*

The Church Planter

There was no platform, no polished building, and no crowd. There was prayer, Scripture, folding chairs, and the belief that Christ builds His church.

> *Hall of Faith principle: Character over charisma. Scripture over style. Shepherding over self-promotion.*

The Older Pastor

His pace slowed, but his words carried the weight of tested truth. He no longer needed to impress anyone.

> *Hall of Faith principle: Character over charisma. Scripture over style. Shepherding over self-promotion.*

The Young Woman Who Taught Faithfully

She prepared carefully, answered questions honestly, and served in places where her gift was sometimes overlooked. Heaven did not overlook her labor.

> *Hall of Faith principle: Character over charisma. Scripture over style. Shepherding over self-promotion.*

The Missionary Translator

Years were spent choosing words so that people could hear Scripture in the language of home. The pulpit began long before the sermon.

> *Hall of Faith principle: Character over charisma. Scripture over style. Shepherding over self-promotion.*

The Pastor Who Repented

He admitted failure publicly, accepted correction, stepped back when needed, and chose truth over image. Repentance became part of his witness.

Hall of Faith principle: Character over charisma. Scripture over style. Shepherding over self-promotion.

The Unknown Servant

No books, conferences, or viral clips carried the name. Yet families knew the pastor had prayed, studied, visited, and loved. Known in heaven was enough.

Hall of Faith principle: Character over charisma. Scripture over style. Shepherding over self-promotion.

PART XVIII

ONE HUNDRED FIFTY WORDS FOR THE PULPIT

1. A sermon without Scripture is a speech wearing church clothes.

2. You cannot improve God's Word by replacing it.

3. Entertainment may fill a room; only the gospel raises the dead.

4. The preacher's loudest microphone is a faithful life.

5. Clarity is compassion for the listener.

6. The text is not clay for the preacher's imagination.

7. A clever outline cannot rescue careless interpretation.

8. The pulpit is a stewardship, not a throne.

9. The goal is not to make the preacher memorable but to make Christ visible.

10. A verse out of context can become a witness forced to lie.

11. Faithfulness is success before applause arrives.

12. A quiet congregation may still contain a loud work of grace.

13. Preach to wounds without making wounds your entertainment.

14. Do not promise what God has not promised.

15. The Holy Spirit is not allergic to preparation.

16. Prayer does not replace study; prayer makes study worship.

17. Humor opens a window; it must not become the whole house.

18. A sermon should travel from the text to the heart and then into Monday.

19. The preacher who never listens eventually has nothing worth saying.

20. The church needs shepherds more than celebrities.

21. Do not confuse movement in the aisle with movement in the soul.

22. A long sermon is not automatically a deep sermon.

23. The best illustration is still a servant.

24. Repentance belongs on both sides of the pulpit.

25. When Christ is central, the preacher can afford to become smaller.

26. Remember: a sermon without Scripture is a speech wearing church clothes.

27. Remember: you cannot improve God's Word by replacing it.

28. Remember: entertainment may fill a room; only the gospel raises the dead.

29. Remember: the preacher's loudest microphone is a faithful life.

30. Remember: clarity is compassion for the listener.

31. Remember: the text is not clay for the preacher's imagination.

32. Remember: a clever outline cannot rescue careless interpretation.

33. Remember: the pulpit is a stewardship, not a throne.

34. Remember: the goal is not to make the preacher memorable but to make Christ visible.

35. Remember: a verse out of context can become a witness forced to lie.

36. Remember: faithfulness is success before applause arrives.

37. Remember: a quiet congregation may still contain a loud work of grace.

38. Remember: preach to wounds without making wounds your entertainment.

39. Remember: do not promise what God has not promised.

40. Remember: the Holy Spirit is not allergic to preparation.

41. Remember: prayer does not replace study; prayer makes study worship.

42. Remember: humor opens a window; it must not become the whole house.

43. Remember: a sermon should travel from the text to the heart and then into Monday.

44. Remember: the preacher who never listens eventually has nothing worth saying.

45. Remember: the church needs shepherds more than celebrities.

46. Remember: do not confuse movement in the aisle with movement in the soul.

47. Remember: a long sermon is not automatically a deep sermon.

48. Remember: the best illustration is still a servant.

49. Remember: repentance belongs on both sides of the pulpit.

50. Remember: when Christ is central, the preacher can afford to become smaller.

51. Pulpit wisdom: a sermon without Scripture is a speech wearing church clothes.

52. Pulpit wisdom: you cannot improve God's Word by replacing it.

53. Pulpit wisdom: entertainment may fill a room; only the gospel raises the dead.

54. Pulpit wisdom: the preacher's loudest microphone is a faithful life.

55. Pulpit wisdom: clarity is compassion for the listener.

56. Pulpit wisdom: the text is not clay for the preacher's imagination.

57. Pulpit wisdom: a clever outline cannot rescue careless interpretation.

58. Pulpit wisdom: the pulpit is a stewardship, not a throne.

59. Pulpit wisdom: the goal is not to make the preacher memorable but to make Christ visible.

60. Pulpit wisdom: a verse out of context can become a witness forced to lie.

61. Pulpit wisdom: faithfulness is success before applause arrives.

62. Pulpit wisdom: a quiet congregation may still contain a loud work of grace.

63. Pulpit wisdom: preach to wounds without making wounds your entertainment.

64. Pulpit wisdom: do not promise what God has not promised.

65. Pulpit wisdom: the Holy Spirit is not allergic to preparation.

66. Pulpit wisdom: prayer does not replace study; prayer makes study worship.

67. Pulpit wisdom: humor opens a window; it must not become the whole house.

68. Pulpit wisdom: a sermon should travel from the text to the heart and then into Monday.

69. Pulpit wisdom: the preacher who never listens eventually has nothing worth saying.

70. Pulpit wisdom: the church needs shepherds more than celebrities.

71. Pulpit wisdom: do not confuse movement in the aisle with movement in the soul.

72. Pulpit wisdom: a long sermon is not automatically a deep sermon.

73. Pulpit wisdom: the best illustration is still a servant.

74. Pulpit wisdom: repentance belongs on both sides of the pulpit.

75. Pulpit wisdom: when Christ is central, the preacher can afford to become smaller.

76. For the study: a sermon without Scripture is a speech wearing church clothes.

77. For the study: you cannot improve God's Word by replacing it.

78. For the study: entertainment may fill a room; only the gospel raises the dead.

79. For the study: the preacher's loudest microphone is a faithful life.

80. For the study: clarity is compassion for the listener.

81. For the study: the text is not clay for the preacher's imagination.

82. For the study: a clever outline cannot rescue careless interpretation.

83. For the study: the pulpit is a stewardship, not a throne.

84. For the study: the goal is not to make the preacher memorable but to make Christ visible.

85. For the study: a verse out of context can become a witness forced to lie.

86. For the study: faithfulness is success before applause arrives.

87. For the study: a quiet congregation may still contain a loud work of grace.

88. For the study: preach to wounds without making wounds your entertainment.

89. For the study: do not promise what God has not promised.

90. For the study: the Holy Spirit is not allergic to preparation.

91. For the study: prayer does not replace study; prayer makes study worship.

92. For the study: humor opens a window; it must not become the whole house.

93. For the study: a sermon should travel from the text to the heart and then into Monday.

94. For the study: the preacher who never listens eventually has nothing worth saying.

95. For the study: the church needs shepherds more than celebrities.

96. For the study: do not confuse movement in the aisle with movement in the soul.

97. For the study: a long sermon is not automatically a deep sermon.

98. For the study: the best illustration is still a servant.

99. For the study: repentance belongs on both sides of the pulpit.

100. For the study: when Christ is central, the preacher can afford to become smaller.

101. For Sunday: a sermon without Scripture is a speech wearing church clothes.

102. For Sunday: you cannot improve God's Word by replacing it.

103. For Sunday: entertainment may fill a room; only the gospel raises the dead.

104. For Sunday: the preacher's loudest microphone is a faithful life.

105. For Sunday: clarity is compassion for the listener.

106. For Sunday: the text is not clay for the preacher's imagination.

107. For Sunday: a clever outline cannot rescue careless interpretation.

108. For Sunday: the pulpit is a stewardship, not a throne.

109. For Sunday: the goal is not to make the preacher memorable but to make Christ visible.

110. For Sunday: a verse out of context can become a witness forced to lie.

111. For Sunday: faithfulness is success before applause arrives.

112. For Sunday: a quiet congregation may still contain a loud work of grace.

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120. For Sunday: the church needs shepherds more than celebrities.

121. For Sunday: do not confuse movement in the aisle with movement in the soul.

122. For Sunday: a long sermon is not automatically a deep sermon.

123. For Sunday: the best illustration is still a servant.

124. For Sunday: repentance belongs on both sides of the pulpit.

125. For Sunday: when Christ is central, the preacher can afford to become smaller.

126. For the long road: a sermon without Scripture is a speech wearing church clothes.

127. For the long road: you cannot improve God's Word by replacing it.

128. For the long road: entertainment may fill a room; only the gospel raises the dead.

129. For the long road: the preacher's loudest microphone is a faithful life.

130. For the long road: clarity is compassion for the listener.

131. For the long road: the text is not clay for the preacher's imagination.

132. For the long road: a clever outline cannot rescue careless interpretation.

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147. For the long road: a long sermon is not automatically a deep sermon.

148. For the long road: the best illustration is still a servant.

149. For the long road: repentance belongs on both sides of the pulpit.

150. For the long road: when Christ is central, the preacher can afford to become smaller.

PART XIX

THE PREACHER'S DESK LIBRARY

Bible Study

- Use multiple reliable translations while keeping one primary preaching text.
- Build habits of whole-book reading before isolated verse study.
- Keep observation, interpretation, theology, and application distinguishable.

Theology

- Study doctrines in relation to the whole canon.
- Read historic creeds and confessions as guides, not replacements for Scripture.
- Learn to explain doctrine in language ordinary people can understand.

Church History

- Read voices from centuries and cultures beyond your own.
- Study both revivals and failures so that admiration does not become mythology.
- Notice how faithful preaching addressed changing contexts without changing the gospel.

Biblical Languages

- Learn enough grammar and vocabulary to use tools responsibly.
- Consult expert resources when a claim depends on technical detail.
- Never make the congregation feel that their translation is useless without you.

Pastoral Care

- Study grief, trauma, marriage, addiction, mental health, and crisis response.
- Know when preaching is not a substitute for referral or professional help.
- Let pastoral encounters deepen compassion without violating confidentiality.

Evangelism and Missions

- Learn to explain the gospel across levels of biblical literacy.
- Study cultures with humility and reject the assumption that your customs equal Christianity.
- Connect proclamation with justice, mercy, service, and witness.

Spiritual Formation

- Read for your own soul, not only for sermon material.
- Practice confession, Sabbath, silence, generosity, and accountable community.
- Let holiness become the hidden architecture beneath public ministry.

A Sustainable Reading Rhythm

29. Choose one substantial book each month rather than purchasing five you never finish.
30. Read Scripture daily without making every reading a sermon assignment.
31. Keep a one-page reading note: main claim, strongest insight, disagreement, ministry application.
32. Discuss books with trusted ministers who will challenge your conclusions.
33. Revisit foundational works every few years; maturity often reveals what speed missed.

PART XX

THE PULPIT ROUNDTABLE

The following conversations are imaginative teaching scenes, not historical quotations. Each voice represents themes associated with biblical and pastoral faithfulness across generations.

Eloquence and Power

Pauline Voice: Do not confuse polished speech with resurrection power. The message of the cross must remain central.

Seasoned Pastor: Skill is a gift, but skill must kneel before truth.

Young Minister: Then should I ignore communication?

Pauline Voice: No. Speak clearly. Just do not ask technique to do what only God can do.

Preaching in a Distracted Age

Young Minister: People live in short clips. Should sermons become short clips?

Rural Pastor: Know the people and remove unnecessary clutter, but do not starve them because attention has been poorly trained.

Historic Baptist Voice: Scripture is not dull. The preacher must show its living force rather than decorate it into relevance.

Fame and Faithfulness

Young Minister: How do I know whether ambition is holy?

Seasoned Pastor: Ask whether you would still obey if nobody outside your congregation ever knew your name.

Pauline Voice: Make it your ambition to please Christ. Platforms are temporary; stewardship is eternal.

The Wounded Preacher

Young Minister: How do I preach while hurting?

Rural Pastor: Tell the truth without making the congregation responsible for rescuing you.

Seasoned Pastor: Receive care, rest, counsel, and accountability. A shepherd is still a sheep under the Chief Shepherd.

The Final Measure

Young Minister: What makes a great sermon?

Historic Voice: The text is opened faithfully.

Rural Pastor: The people are loved honestly.

Pauline Voice: Christ is proclaimed.

Seasoned Pastor: And the preacher leaves the results to God.

THE FINAL PREACHER'S COVENANT

Standing under the authority of Jesus Christ and trusting the grace of God, I make this covenant not as a declaration of perfection but as a commitment to faithful dependence.

[ ] I will preach Christ rather than build myself.

[ ] I will honor the meaning, context, and purpose of the biblical text.

[ ] I will study diligently and refuse careless claims.

[ ] I will pray fervently and cultivate a private life with God.

[ ] I will shepherd people lovingly, including those who are difficult, wounded, skeptical, or overlooked.

[ ] I will pursue holiness, truthfulness, financial integrity, sexual integrity, and accountable relationships.

[ ] I will preach the whole counsel of God, not merely my favorite themes.

[ ] I will distinguish the promises of Scripture from my own preferences.

[ ] I will trust the Holy Spirit more than emotion, technology, personality, or manipulation.

[ ] I will welcome correction and repent when I am wrong.

[ ] I will protect confidential information and never weaponize the pulpit.

[ ] I will care for my family, body, and soul as part of my stewardship.

[ ] I will seek faithfulness above popularity and obedience above opportunity.

[ ] By God's grace, I will preach the Word in season and out of season.

Signature: _____

Date: _____ Church/Ministry: _____

CLOSING CHARGE

PREACH THE WORD

If this book causes one preacher to open the Bible more carefully, one church to hear Christ more clearly, one sinner to understand the gospel, one wounded believer to find durable hope, or one weary pastor to recover joy in the calling, every page has served its purpose.

Close the laptop when the work is done. Open the Scriptures before the noise begins. Stand in the pulpit without pretending that you are the Savior. Read the text. Explain the text. Exalt Christ. Love the people. Call for faithful response. Trust the Holy Spirit. Leave the results to God.

Preach the Word.

THE PREACHER'S COMPANION

A Weekly Field Guide for Faithful, Christ-Centered Ministry

> *The companion is not a substitute for the Bible. It is a set of handles that helps the preacher hold the Bible more carefully.*

This section is built for the preacher who must move from conviction to practice. It addresses emergencies, weak sermons, special services, long-range planning, and the human beings who sit in the pew while the preacher speaks. Use it before study, after preaching, during planning retreats, and whenever ministry becomes noisy enough to make the main thing hard to see.

PART XVI - THIRTY DAYS TO A HEALTHIER PULPIT

Day 1 - Open the Book First

Scripture: 2 Timothy 4:2

Before opening commentaries, social media, old outlines, or somebody else's sermon, open the text. The first voice in preparation should be God's voice.

Today's Practice: Read your passage aloud three times before consulting any secondary source.

> *Prayer: Lord, make me faithful in the study, humble in the pulpit, and loving among Your people. Amen.*

Day 2 - Let the Text Trouble You

Scripture: Hebrews 4:12

A sermon becomes dangerous in the best sense when the text has first searched the preacher. Do not rush to tell others what they must do before asking where the Word confronts you.

Today's Practice: Write one sentence describing what the passage corrects in you.

> *Prayer: Lord, make me faithful in the study, humble in the pulpit, and loving among Your people. Amen.*

Day 3 - Preach Christ Clearly

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 2:2

Mentioning Jesus is not the same as proclaiming Him. Explain who He is, what He has done, why His cross and resurrection matter, and what response He commands.

Today's Practice: State the gospel in four plain sentences.

> *Prayer: Lord, make me faithful in the study, humble in the pulpit, and loving among Your people. Amen.*

Day 4 - Love the People in the Room

Scripture: 1 Thessalonians 2:8

Congregations can hear whether a preacher loves them. Correction without affection feels like attack; affection without truth becomes neglect. Biblical preaching carries both.

Today's Practice: Pray by name for five people who may hear the sermon differently.

> *Prayer: Lord, make me faithful in the study, humble in the pulpit, and loving among Your people. Amen.*

Day 5 - Clarity Is Kindness

Scripture: Habakkuk 2:2

Confusion is not depth. The goal is not to make simple truth sound mysterious but to make profound truth understandable without making it shallow.

Today's Practice: Reduce your main idea to one clear sentence.

> *Prayer: Lord, make me faithful in the study, humble in the pulpit, and loving among Your people. Amen.*

Day 6 - Cut the Favorite Story

Scripture: John 3:30

The illustration you love may be the one the sermon does not need. If it competes with the text, cut it. The congregation came to see Christ, not your vacation slideshow.

Today's Practice: Delete one unnecessary illustration.

> *Prayer: Lord, make me faithful in the study, humble in the pulpit, and loving among Your people. Amen.*

Day 7 - Pray Beyond Performance

Scripture: Zechariah 4:6

Skill matters, but skill cannot raise the dead, convict the heart, or create faith. Prayer confesses that preaching requires power the preacher does not possess.

Today's Practice: Spend ten uninterrupted minutes praying for spiritual fruit.

> *Prayer: Lord, make me faithful in the study, humble in the pulpit, and loving among Your people. Amen.*

Day 8 - Respect the Context

Scripture: Nehemiah 8:8

A verse removed from context can be made to say almost anything. Faithful preaching asks what the author said, to whom, why, and how the passage fits the book.

Today's Practice: Read the chapter before and after your text.

> *Prayer: Lord, make me faithful in the study, humble in the pulpit, and loving among Your people. Amen.*

Day 9 - Apply to Monday

Scripture: James 1:22

Application answers what belief, attitude, habit, relationship, or action must change. A sermon that never reaches life may be admired and ignored.

Today's Practice: Write one specific application for believer and unbeliever.

> *Prayer: Lord, make me faithful in the study, humble in the pulpit, and loving among Your people. Amen.*

Day 10 - Do Not Manufacture Tears

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 4:2

Emotion is not the enemy; manipulation is. Let truth awaken emotion rather than using music, volume, delay, or guilt to force a response.

Today's Practice: Remove any sentence that pressures people beyond what the text warrants.

> *Prayer: Lord, make me faithful in the study, humble in the pulpit, and loving among Your people. Amen.*

Day 11 - Preach to the Wounded

Scripture: Isaiah 42:3

Someone listening is carrying grief, fear, shame, addiction, betrayal, or exhaustion. Do not soften truth, but speak it like a shepherd treating souls rather than winning arguments.

Today's Practice: Add one sentence of gospel hope for the bruised.

> *Prayer: Lord, make me faithful in the study, humble in the pulpit, and loving among Your people. Amen.*

Day 12 - Keep the Main Thing Main

Scripture: Luke 24:27

A sermon can be accurate in every detail and still lose the central message. Major on what the text majors on.

Today's Practice: Circle the sentence that contains the passage's central burden.

> *Prayer: Lord, make me faithful in the study, humble in the pulpit, and loving among Your people. Amen.*

Day 13 - Stop Before the Sermon Dies

Scripture: Ecclesiastes 5:2

Length is not depth. Some sermons are twenty minutes of truth and thirty minutes of refusing to land the plane. End when the text has been explained, applied, and pressed home.

Today's Practice: Mark the exact sentence where your sermon should end.

> *Prayer: Lord, make me faithful in the study, humble in the pulpit, and loving among Your people. Amen.*

Day 14 - Preach What Broke You First

Scripture: Psalm 51:17

People can detect borrowed fire. Let grace humble you before you announce it to others. Testimony is strongest when it magnifies God rather than the preacher.

Today's Practice: Write a private prayer of repentance before revising the sermon.

> *Prayer: Lord, make me faithful in the study, humble in the pulpit, and loving among Your people. Amen.*

Day 15 - Use Your Own Voice

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 15:10

Learn from faithful preachers without becoming an imitation. God called you to be a faithful steward, not a tribute act.

Today's Practice: Rewrite one paragraph so it sounds natural when spoken by you.

> *Prayer: Lord, make me faithful in the study, humble in the pulpit, and loving among Your people. Amen.*

Day 16 - Explain Before You Shout

Scripture: Acts 17:2-3

Volume can underline truth, but it cannot replace explanation. If the congregation does not understand the point quietly, saying it louder will not repair it.

Today's Practice: Explain your most important claim without slogans.

> *Prayer: Lord, make me faithful in the study, humble in the pulpit, and loving among Your people. Amen.*

Day 17 - Do Not Weaponize the Pulpit

Scripture: 1 Peter 5:2-3

Never use a sermon to settle a private disagreement, embarrass a member, punish critics, or reveal confidential pain. The pulpit belongs to Christ.

Today's Practice: Ask whether any line is secretly aimed at one person.

> *Prayer: Lord, make me faithful in the study, humble in the pulpit, and loving among Your people. Amen.*

Day 18 - Honor the Ordinary Sunday

Scripture: 2 Timothy 4:2

Not every sermon will feel historic. Faithfulness often looks like opening the Book again for familiar people in a familiar room. Heaven measures obedience differently from social media.

Today's Practice: Prepare this Sunday as carefully as a conference invitation.

> *Prayer: Lord, make me faithful in the study, humble in the pulpit, and loving among Your people. Amen.*

Day 19 - Make Room for Silence

Scripture: Psalm 46:10

The preacher does not have to fill every second. A well-placed pause allows truth to settle and gives the congregation time to think.

Today's Practice: Mark two places where silence will strengthen the point.

> *Prayer: Lord, make me faithful in the study, humble in the pulpit, and loving among Your people. Amen.*

Day 20 - Invite Without Begging

Scripture: Matthew 11:28

The gospel invitation carries Christ's authority. Explain the response, urge it sincerely, and trust God. Do not negotiate, flatter, or hold the room hostage.

Today's Practice: Write a two-minute invitation grounded in the text.

> *Prayer: Lord, make me faithful in the study, humble in the pulpit, and loving among Your people. Amen.*

Day 21 - Check the Facts

Scripture: Proverbs 18:13

A dramatic story does not become true because it preaches well. Verify quotations, history, statistics, names, and claims. Credibility lost in a small detail can weaken a great truth.

Today's Practice: Fact-check every claim not stated in the passage.

> *Prayer: Lord, make me faithful in the study, humble in the pulpit, and loving among Your people. Amen.*

Day 22 - Remember the Children

Scripture: Deuteronomy 6:6-7

Do not make the sermon childish, but make at least some of it accessible. A clear picture, defined word, and simple sentence can help younger listeners enter the text.

Today's Practice: Add one explanation a teenager can follow.

> *Prayer: Lord, make me faithful in the study, humble in the pulpit, and loving among Your people. Amen.*

Day 23 - Feed Mature Saints Too

Scripture: Hebrews 5:14

Accessibility is not an excuse for thinness. Give the congregation something substantial to think about, treasure, and practice.

Today's Practice: Add one theological connection that deepens understanding.

> *Prayer: Lord, make me faithful in the study, humble in the pulpit, and loving among Your people. Amen.*

Day 24 - Preach the Hard Text

Scripture: Acts 20:27

A balanced diet includes passages the preacher would not naturally choose. Consecutive exposition forces us to face warnings, judgment, holiness, suffering, and difficult doctrine.

Today's Practice: Schedule one avoided passage for future study.

> *Prayer: Lord, make me faithful in the study, humble in the pulpit, and loving among Your people. Amen.*

Day 25 - Guard Your Family

Scripture: 1 Timothy 3:4-5

The sermon is not faithful if preparation regularly devours the people entrusted to your care at home. Ministry discipline includes boundaries.

Today's Practice: Set a firm stopping time for preparation today.

> *Prayer: Lord, make me faithful in the study, humble in the pulpit, and loving among Your people. Amen.*

Day 26 - Receive Correction

Scripture: Proverbs 9:9

A preacher who cannot be questioned is already in danger. Wise feedback can expose confusion, excess, blind spots, and habits the preacher cannot hear.

Today's Practice: Ask one trusted listener what was unclear last Sunday.

> *Prayer: Lord, make me faithful in the study, humble in the pulpit, and loving among Your people. Amen.*

Day 27 - Leave Results to God

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 3:6-7

You are responsible for faithfulness, not for producing visible outcomes on command. Some seed grows slowly and some fruit appears after the preacher is gone.

Today's Practice: Name one outcome you need to release to God.

> *Prayer: Lord, make me faithful in the study, humble in the pulpit, and loving among Your people. Amen.*

Day 28 - Rest Before You Stand

Scripture: Mark 6:31

Exhaustion can make the preacher impatient, careless, dramatic, or numb. Rest is not laziness when it protects stewardship.

Today's Practice: Prepare early enough to sleep before preaching.

> *Prayer: Lord, make me faithful in the study, humble in the pulpit, and loving among Your people. Amen.*

Day 29 - Preach With Joy

Scripture: Philippians 1:18

The pulpit is not merely a burden. It is a privilege to announce the unsearchable riches of Christ. Let holy joy appear in your face and voice.

Today's Practice: Write three reasons you are grateful to preach.

> *Prayer: Lord, make me faithful in the study, humble in the pulpit, and loving among Your people. Amen.*

Day 30 - Finish Faithful

Scripture: 2 Timothy 4:7

The goal is not one great sermon but a life of faithful proclamation. Character, doctrine, love, endurance, and humility must survive the applause.

Today's Practice: Write the sentence you hope can be said about your ministry at the end.

> *Prayer: Lord, make me faithful in the study, humble in the pulpit, and loving among Your people. Amen.*

PART XVII - FIFTY-TWO PULPIT EMERGENCIES

1. Your Notes Disappear

Pause. Read the text. State the main idea. Walk through the passage in its natural order. A missing manuscript is not a missing Bible.

Remember: Stay calm, protect people, honor the text, and refuse to make yourself the center.

2. The Microphone Dies

Do not fight the equipment publicly. Move closer, project calmly, and continue. The gospel survived before batteries.

Remember: Stay calm, protect people, honor the text, and refuse to make yourself the center.

3. The Projector Fails

Explain what was on the screen. Ask people to open their Bibles. Technology is a servant, not a co-preacher.

Remember: Stay calm, protect people, honor the text, and refuse to make yourself the center.

4. You Lose Your Place

Stop, breathe, reread the last verse, and restate the main point. Panic confuses more than the pause.

Remember: Stay calm, protect people, honor the text, and refuse to make yourself the center.

5. A Baby Cries

Keep perspective. Babies are not an attack on the anointing. Smile, continue, and let parents know they are welcome.

Remember: Stay calm, protect people, honor the text, and refuse to make yourself the center.

6. Someone Faints

Stop preaching. Make space. Call for medical help. Pastoral care outranks finishing point three.

Remember: Stay calm, protect people, honor the text, and refuse to make yourself the center.

7. A Phone Rings Repeatedly

Do not humiliate the owner. A brief smile and gracious pause usually solve what sarcasm will worsen.

Remember: Stay calm, protect people, honor the text, and refuse to make yourself the center.

8. You Finish Early

End. Do not invent twenty minutes of spiritual leftovers because the bulletin promised a longer sermon.

Remember: Stay calm, protect people, honor the text, and refuse to make yourself the center.

9. You Are Running Long

Cut secondary material. Move to the central application and conclusion. The congregation does not need every page you wrote.

Remember: Stay calm, protect people, honor the text, and refuse to make yourself the center.

10. The Livestream Stops

Preach to the room God actually gave you. The internet audience can receive the recording later.

Remember: Stay calm, protect people, honor the text, and refuse to make yourself the center.

11. A Guest Interrupts Loudly

Respond with dignity, assess safety, and allow leaders to help. Do not turn a distressed person into sermon entertainment.

Remember: Stay calm, protect people, honor the text, and refuse to make yourself the center.

12. You Mispronounce a Name

Correct yourself simply and continue. Humility repairs what pretending cannot.

Remember: Stay calm, protect people, honor the text, and refuse to make yourself the center.

13. You Quote the Wrong Verse

Acknowledge it, give the correct reference if known, and move on. Accuracy matters more than saving face.

Remember: Stay calm, protect people, honor the text, and refuse to make yourself the center.

14. Your Illustration Is Not Landing

Release it. Explain the truth plainly. Do not keep resuscitating a story the congregation has already buried.

Remember: Stay calm, protect people, honor the text, and refuse to make yourself the center.

15. The Congregation Is Quiet

Quiet is not failure. People may be thinking, grieving, learning, or resisting. Do not manufacture noise to reassure yourself.

Remember: Stay calm, protect people, honor the text, and refuse to make yourself the center.

16. The Congregation Is Very Loud

Welcome response without letting response control the sermon. Finish explaining the text.

Remember: Stay calm, protect people, honor the text, and refuse to make yourself the center.

17. An Elderly Listener Cannot Hear

Slow down, face forward, and use the microphone well. Clarity is pastoral care.

Remember: Stay calm, protect people, honor the text, and refuse to make yourself the center.

18. Children Are Restless

Shorten complex sentences, use a clear image, and continue kindly. Their presence is evidence of a living church.

Remember: Stay calm, protect people, honor the text, and refuse to make yourself the center.

19. The Building Is Too Hot

Acknowledge it briefly, simplify the sermon, and avoid proving endurance by extending discomfort.

Remember: Stay calm, protect people, honor the text, and refuse to make yourself the center.

20. The Building Is Too Cold

Keep people engaged and move with purpose. Nobody receives an extra crown for spiritual frostbite.

Remember: Stay calm, protect people, honor the text, and refuse to make yourself the center.

21. A Storm Begins

Give safety instructions if needed. Do not spiritualize every thunderclap as confirmation of your point.

Remember: Stay calm, protect people, honor the text, and refuse to make yourself the center.

22. The Power Goes Out

Use available light, gather people close, read the text, and preach simply. The first-century church managed.

Remember: Stay calm, protect people, honor the text, and refuse to make yourself the center.

23. You Become Emotional

Pause and breathe. Emotion can serve truth; it should not prevent the congregation from hearing it.

Remember: Stay calm, protect people, honor the text, and refuse to make yourself the center.

24. You Forget a Key Point

If it is essential, state it plainly. If it is not essential, let it go. The Holy Spirit is not trapped in your outline.

Remember: Stay calm, protect people, honor the text, and refuse to make yourself the center.

25. A Joke Falls Flat

Do not explain why it was funny. That funeral has already happened.

Remember: Stay calm, protect people, honor the text, and refuse to make yourself the center.

26. You Accidentally Offend Someone

Clarify immediately when possible and apologize after service. Truth does not require carelessness.

Remember: Stay calm, protect people, honor the text, and refuse to make yourself the center.

27. A Sensitive Detail Slips Out

Stop, correct the disclosure, and protect the person. Follow up privately and accept responsibility.

Remember: Stay calm, protect people, honor the text, and refuse to make yourself the center.

28. The Text Is Read Incorrectly

Reread it correctly without drama. The goal is truth, not the appearance of perfection.

Remember: Stay calm, protect people, honor the text, and refuse to make yourself the center.

29. You Are Preaching Through Grief

Do not fake strength. Be honest without making the congregation carry your entire sorrow.

Remember: Stay calm, protect people, honor the text, and refuse to make yourself the center.

30. You Are Physically Ill

Shorten the message or ask another leader to preach. Faithfulness includes knowing when your body needs care.

Remember: Stay calm, protect people, honor the text, and refuse to make yourself the center.

31. You Receive Bad News Before Service

Tell a trusted leader, pray, and decide whether another preacher should step in. You are a shepherd, not a machine.

Remember: Stay calm, protect people, honor the text, and refuse to make yourself the center.

32. A Visitor Challenges You Publicly

Do not conduct a debate from the pulpit. Offer to speak afterward unless immediate safety or grave error requires response.

Remember: Stay calm, protect people, honor the text, and refuse to make yourself the center.

33. A Member Walks Out

Do not chase them verbally. Continue preaching and follow up later with pastoral concern.

Remember: Stay calm, protect people, honor the text, and refuse to make yourself the center.

34. Someone Shouts a Correction

Verify the issue. If they are right, thank them. If not, proceed calmly and address it later.

Remember: Stay calm, protect people, honor the text, and refuse to make yourself the center.

35. Your Voice Begins to Fail

Slow down, drink water, shorten the message, and avoid forcing volume. The sermon is not improved by vocal injury.

Remember: Stay calm, protect people, honor the text, and refuse to make yourself the center.

36. Communion Elements Are Missing

Explain the delay, use the time for Scripture and prayer, and proceed only when the church can administer the ordinance properly.

Remember: Stay calm, protect people, honor the text, and refuse to make yourself the center.

37. A Baptism Candidate Is Afraid

Slow the service down. Reassure the person. The schedule serves the disciple, not the reverse.

Remember: Stay calm, protect people, honor the text, and refuse to make yourself the center.

38. A Funeral Family Is Divided

Preach Christ, honor the deceased truthfully, and refuse to use the sermon to settle family conflict.

Remember: Stay calm, protect people, honor the text, and refuse to make yourself the center.

39. The Wedding Starts Very Late

Remain gracious. Shorten nonessential remarks and preserve the dignity of the couple and covenant.

Remember: Stay calm, protect people, honor the text, and refuse to make yourself the center.

40. A Child Asks a Question Aloud

When appropriate, answer briefly and warmly. You may have just witnessed active listening.

Remember: Stay calm, protect people, honor the text, and refuse to make yourself the center.

41. The Interpreter Falls Behind

Use shorter sentences, pause often, and give the interpreter the manuscript when possible.

Remember: Stay calm, protect people, honor the text, and refuse to make yourself the center.

42. You Are Preaching Outdoors

Prepare for noise, weather, and shorter attention. Use a clear structure and strong biblical repetition.

Remember: Stay calm, protect people, honor the text, and refuse to make yourself the center.

43. The Clock Is Wrong

Do not blame the clock. Know your sermon well enough to adjust based on the actual service flow.

Remember: Stay calm, protect people, honor the text, and refuse to make yourself the center.

44. The Offering Runs Long

Do not punish the congregation by keeping every planned minute. Adapt without resentment.

Remember: Stay calm, protect people, honor the text, and refuse to make yourself the center.

45. The Music Runs Long

Coordinate later; shepherd now. Cut material rather than turning the sermon into revenge with paragraphs.

Remember: Stay calm, protect people, honor the text, and refuse to make yourself the center.

46. A Testimony Takes Over

Thank the person, summarize the grace of God, and gently restore order.

Remember: Stay calm, protect people, honor the text, and refuse to make yourself the center.

47. An Announcement Changes the Mood

Name the transition, pray if appropriate, and lead people back into the text.

Remember: Stay calm, protect people, honor the text, and refuse to make yourself the center.

48. The Room Is Mostly Empty

Preach the Word with the same care. Souls do not become less valuable because chairs are visible.

Remember: Stay calm, protect people, honor the text, and refuse to make yourself the center.

49. The Room Is Overflowing

Do not become a different preacher. Clarity, humility, and Christ still matter more than impressing the crowd.

Remember: Stay calm, protect people, honor the text, and refuse to make yourself the center.

50. You Sense the Sermon Is Failing

Return to the text, simplify, and finish faithfully. A weak delivery does not make Scripture weak.

Remember: Stay calm, protect people, honor the text, and refuse to make yourself the center.

51. You Realize Your Main Claim Is Wrong

Correct it before the congregation. A humble correction protects people and honors truth.

Remember: Stay calm, protect people, honor the text, and refuse to make yourself the center.

52. Nothing Goes Wrong

Give thanks, resist pride, and remember that smooth logistics are not the same as spiritual fruit.

Remember: Stay calm, protect people, honor the text, and refuse to make yourself the center.

PART XVIII - QUESTIONS A PREACHER SHOULD NEVER STOP ASKING

[ ] Did I identify what the passage actually says?

[ ] Did I explain why it says it?

[ ] Did I respect the literary and historical context?

[ ] Did I distinguish command, promise, description, and principle?

[ ] Did I preach Christ rather than merely mention Him?

[ ] Did I make the gospel understandable to an unbeliever?

[ ] Did I give mature believers something substantial to grow on?

[ ] Did I explain theological terms in ordinary language?

[ ] Did I apply the truth specifically without manipulating people?

[ ] Did I address mind, heart, habits, relationships, and hope?

[ ] Did I use illustrations that illuminate rather than dominate?

[ ] Did I verify quotations, stories, and statistics?

[ ] Did I speak about absent people with fairness?

[ ] Did I protect confidential information?

[ ] Did I weaponize the pulpit against a critic?

[ ] Did I confuse volume with authority?

[ ] Did I confuse emotion with the Holy Spirit?

[ ] Did I pray for the congregation by name?

[ ] Did I prepare early enough to revise?

[ ] Did I remove what was interesting but unnecessary?

[ ] Did I state one memorable main idea?

[ ] Did each major point arise from the text?

[ ] Did the conclusion land the sermon or restart it?

[ ] Did I offer hope grounded in God rather than optimism?

[ ] Did I call sin what Scripture calls sin?

[ ] Did I proclaim grace as costly, holy, and sufficient?

[ ] Did my tone reflect the tone of the passage?

[ ] Did I account for grieving, skeptical, young, and new listeners?

[ ] Did I honor the time entrusted to me?

[ ] Did I leave room for silence and thought?

[ ] Did my life this week contradict my message?

[ ] Have I repented where the text confronted me?

[ ] Am I preaching this because it is needed or because it will perform well?

[ ] Would I preach the same message if no clip could be posted?

[ ] Can the congregation retell the central truth on Monday?

[ ] What action should obedience produce?

[ ] What false belief should the passage correct?

[ ] What comfort should the passage provide?

[ ] What mystery should I admit rather than pretend to solve?

[ ] What danger should I warn about?

[ ] What glory of God should people see?

[ ] What work of Christ should they treasure?

[ ] What dependence on the Spirit should they practice?

[ ] Have I listened to wise feedback from previous sermons?

[ ] Am I trying to sound like someone else?

[ ] Have I confused novelty with freshness?

[ ] Is the sermon simple enough to follow and deep enough to revisit?

[ ] Have I prepared for interruptions without becoming rigid?

[ ] Can I deliver the sermon without the screen?

[ ] Can I summarize it without notes?

[ ] Am I willing to cut it shorter?

[ ] Have I planned a clear transition to prayer or invitation?

[ ] Will I follow up pastorally after preaching?

[ ] Am I prepared to receive criticism without collapsing or retaliating?

[ ] Have I left the outcome to God?

PART XIX - THE PULPIT HOSPITAL

Weak Opening

Diagnosis: The sermon begins with five minutes of greetings, apologies, weather, and unrelated remarks.

Treatment: Begin with the tension, question, image, or problem already present in the text. Then orient listeners quickly.

Discharge Question: What specific revision will keep this weakness from returning?

Main-Idea Failure

Diagnosis: The sermon contains many true statements but no governing claim.

Treatment: Write one complete sentence that names the subject and what the passage says about it.

Discharge Question: What specific revision will keep this weakness from returning?

Commentary Overload

Diagnosis: The preacher reports what six scholars said but never explains the verse in his own clear voice.

Treatment: Use research to understand the text; present only what helps the congregation understand it.

Discharge Question: What specific revision will keep this weakness from returning?

Illustration Obesity

Diagnosis: Stories occupy more space than Scripture and are remembered more clearly.

Treatment: Cut illustrations by half. Keep only those that clarify the central truth.

Discharge Question: What specific revision will keep this weakness from returning?

Application Anemia

Diagnosis: The sermon ends with information but no response.

Treatment: Answer: What should we believe, stop, start, confess, endure, repair, or hope in?

Discharge Question: What specific revision will keep this weakness from returning?

Gospel Absence

Diagnosis: The sermon offers principles without Christ's person and work.

Treatment: Show how the text relates to human need, God's grace, Christ's work, and faithful response.

Discharge Question: What specific revision will keep this weakness from returning?

Context Amnesia

Diagnosis: A favorite phrase is removed from its argument and made to support a foreign idea.

Treatment: Read the surrounding chapter, trace the book's purpose, and explain the original setting.

Discharge Question: What specific revision will keep this weakness from returning?

Volume Dependence

Diagnosis: Intensity rises whenever clarity falls.

Treatment: Lower the volume. Define the claim. Give evidence from the text. Then use vocal force as emphasis, not camouflage.

Discharge Question: What specific revision will keep this weakness from returning?

Conclusion Relapse

Diagnosis: After reaching the ending, the preacher starts another sermon.

Treatment: Write the final paragraph in advance and stop after the final appeal.

Discharge Question: What specific revision will keep this weakness from returning?

Invitation Manipulation

Diagnosis: The response time depends on guilt, repetition, music, or public pressure.

Treatment: Explain the biblical response, urge it sincerely, allow appropriate time, and trust God.

Discharge Question: What specific revision will keep this weakness from returning?

Theological Fog

Diagnosis: Terms such as justification, sanctification, covenant, glory, or sovereignty are used but not explained.

Treatment: Define the term in one sentence, illustrate it, and show why it matters.

Discharge Question: What specific revision will keep this weakness from returning?

Biography Takeover

Diagnosis: The preacher's life story becomes the real subject.

Treatment: Use personal material sparingly and move attention quickly from self to Scripture and Christ.

Discharge Question: What specific revision will keep this weakness from returning?

Rabbit-Trail Disorder

Diagnosis: Every association becomes a detour.

Treatment: Place extra insights in a future-sermon file. Protect the main road.

Discharge Question: What specific revision will keep this weakness from returning?

No-Pew Awareness

Diagnosis: The sermon assumes every listener is healthy, married, mature, educated, and already convinced.

Treatment: Imagine several real listeners and revise language, explanation, and application accordingly.

Discharge Question: What specific revision will keep this weakness from returning?

Borrowed-Fire Syndrome

Diagnosis: The outline, phrases, and passion belong to another preacher.

Treatment: Study independently, cite what you use, and speak in the voice God formed through your life and calling.

Discharge Question: What specific revision will keep this weakness from returning?

PART XX - THE PREACHER'S SMILE

The Accidental Forty-Five-Point Sermon

The preacher announced three points. Each point had five subpoints. Each subpoint had three observations. By the time he reached the conclusion, the congregation had formed a search committee to locate point one. The lesson is not that outlines are wrong. The lesson is that an outline should help people follow the truth, not qualify them for a mathematics degree.

> *Pulpit lesson: Humor should help us tell the truth about ourselves without making light of the holy calling.*

The Wireless Microphone

The pastor walked the entire sanctuary while the livestream camera remained fixed on an empty pulpit. Online viewers heard a strong sermon delivered by what appeared to be invisible faith. Technology lesson: decide whether the preacher follows the camera or the camera follows the preacher before worship begins.

> *Pulpit lesson: Humor should help us tell the truth about ourselves without making light of the holy calling.*

I Am Almost Finished

The phrase was spoken at 11:43. It was repeated at 11:57, 12:14, and 12:31. By the fourth announcement, it no longer functioned as information. It had become a church tradition.

> *Pulpit lesson: Humor should help us tell the truth about ourselves without making light of the holy calling.*

The Greek Word Marathon

The preacher explained seven Greek words, four verb tenses, two manuscript variants, and one ancient idiom. A member

whispered, “I still do not know what I am supposed to do.” Scholarship is a gift when it opens the text. It becomes luggage when the preacher unloads the whole library into the aisle.

> *Pulpit lesson: Humor should help us tell the truth about ourselves without making light of the holy calling.*

The Spiritual Weather Report

Every problem in the sound system was blamed on spiritual warfare. The cable was loose. Sometimes rebuke the devil. Sometimes plug in the microphone.

> *Pulpit lesson: Humor should help us tell the truth about ourselves without making light of the holy calling.*

The Title Was Better Than the Sermon

The message was called “When Your Destiny Dances With Your Assignment.” Forty minutes later, destiny had not danced, assignment had not arrived, and the text had left the building.

> *Pulpit lesson: Humor should help us tell the truth about ourselves without making light of the holy calling.*

The Testimony That Ate the Text

The preacher planned to tell a two-minute story. The story developed characters, flashbacks, a road trip, weather conditions, and a sequel. By the time Scripture returned, it needed a visitor badge.

> *Pulpit lesson: Humor should help us tell the truth about ourselves without making light of the holy calling.*

The Closing That Would Not Close

The organ played. The preacher closed the Bible. The congregation stood. Then he remembered “one more thing.” Twenty minutes later, the organist had entered a season of sanctification.

Pulpit lesson: Humor should help us tell the truth about ourselves without making light of the holy calling.

The Map Section

The preacher moved through so many passages that listeners eventually reached the maps in the back of the Bible. Even Paul's missionary journeys seemed less complicated.

Pulpit lesson: Humor should help us tell the truth about ourselves without making light of the holy calling.

The Misbehaving Slide

The screen displayed “Lust” during a point about “Trust.” The preacher corrected it, the congregation recovered, and the media team learned that one letter can create an emergency revival.

Pulpit lesson: Humor should help us tell the truth about ourselves without making light of the holy calling.

The Amen Competition

One side of the church said amen. The preacher challenged the other side. Soon the sermon became a noise contest and the verse waited patiently for its turn.

Pulpit lesson: Humor should help us tell the truth about ourselves without making light of the holy calling.

The Unplanned Fast

The preacher promised a short sermon before lunch. Three hours later, the congregation had entered a corporate fast without consent.

Pulpit lesson: Humor should help us tell the truth about ourselves without making light of the holy calling.

PART XXI - PREACHING THROUGH THE ENTIRE BIBLE

The following field guide is intentionally concise. It is not a substitute for careful study. It helps the preacher locate each book's central burden, its connection to Christ, and a responsible starting point for a sermon series.

Genesis

Central Burden: Beginnings, covenant, fall, promise, and God's sovereign faithfulness.

Christ-Centered Focus: Christ is the promised seed, true image, greater Joseph, and source of blessing.

Preaching Direction: Preach creation, Abraham, Jacob, and Joseph without turning narratives into mere moral tales.

Exodus

Central Burden: Redemption, covenant, presence, and worship.

Christ-Centered Focus: Christ is the Passover Lamb, greater Moses, and dwelling presence of God.

Preaching Direction: Series: From Bondage to Worship.

Leviticus

Central Burden: Holiness, sacrifice, priesthood, and access to God.

Christ-Centered Focus: Christ fulfills sacrifice and priesthood and makes His people holy.

Preaching Direction: Explain the system before applying individual laws.

Numbers

Central Burden: Unbelief, wilderness testing, judgment, and preserving grace.

Christ-Centered Focus: Christ is the lifted serpent and faithful guide through the wilderness.

Preaching Direction: Series: Grace in the Wilderness.

Deuteronomy

Central Burden: Covenant renewal, love, obedience, memory, and choice.

Christ-Centered Focus: Christ obeys fully and mediates the better covenant.

Preaching Direction: Preach Moses' final sermons as pastoral covenant appeals.

Joshua

Central Burden: God gives rest and fulfills His promises amid holy judgment.

Christ-Centered Focus: Jesus is the greater Joshua who brings final rest.

Preaching Direction: Avoid treating conquest as permission for personal ambition.

Judges

Central Burden: Repeated rebellion, failed deliverers, and the need for a righteous king.

Christ-Centered Focus: Christ is the true Deliverer and righteous King.

Preaching Direction: Use the cycle to expose sin's downward spiral.

Ruth

Central Burden: Providence, loyal love, redemption, and inclusion.

Christ-Centered Focus: Christ is the ultimate Kinsman-Redeemer.

Preaching Direction: Series: Grace in Ordinary Faithfulness.

1 Samuel

Central Burden: Leadership, kingship, obedience, and God's choice.

Christ-Centered Focus: Christ is the anointed King after God's heart.

Preaching Direction: Contrast Saul's appearance with David's calling carefully.

2 Samuel

Central Burden: Davidic kingdom, covenant, sin, discipline, and mercy.

Christ-Centered Focus: Christ is David's promised everlasting Son.

Preaching Direction: Do not hide David's failures or miss covenant hope.

1 Kings

Central Burden: Temple, divided loyalty, prophetic confrontation, and kingdom decline.

Christ-Centered Focus: Christ is greater than Solomon and the true temple.

Preaching Direction: Series: A Divided Heart, A Divided Kingdom.

2 Kings

Central Burden: Persistent rebellion, prophetic witness, exile, and God's faithfulness.

Christ-Centered Focus: Christ bears exile and restores the kingdom.

Preaching Direction: Preach decline as covenant history, not disconnected disasters.

1 Chronicles

Central Burden: Davidic worship, priestly order, and covenant continuity.

Christ-Centered Focus: Christ is the promised Davidic ruler and true worship center.

Preaching Direction: Show why genealogy and worship matter to restored identity.

2 Chronicles

Central Burden: Temple, reform, apostasy, judgment, and hope of return.

Christ-Centered Focus: Christ is the final temple and faithful King.

Preaching Direction: Series: Revival, Relapse, and Returning Grace.

Ezra

Central Burden: Return, temple rebuilding, Scripture, and covenant renewal.

Christ-Centered Focus: Christ rebuilds God's people as a living temple.

Preaching Direction: Balance zeal for holiness with the book's difficult social context.

Nehemiah

Central Burden: Rebuilding, leadership, opposition, confession, and reform.

Christ-Centered Focus: Christ builds and guards His church.

Preaching Direction: Do not reduce the book to leadership slogans.

Esther

Central Burden: Hidden providence, courage, reversal, and preservation.

Christ-Centered Focus: Christ secures the ultimate reversal and deliverance of His people.

Preaching Direction: Honor God's hidden hand without inventing details.

Job

Central Burden: Suffering, wisdom, human limits, and God's majesty.

Christ-Centered Focus: Christ is the innocent sufferer and living Redeemer.

Preaching Direction: Do not preach the friends' speeches as if God endorsed every claim.

Psalms

Central Burden: Prayer, praise, lament, kingship, wisdom, and worship.

Christ-Centered Focus: Christ is the blessed Man, anointed King, suffering righteous One, and Shepherd.

Preaching Direction: Let the genre and emotional movement shape the sermon.

Proverbs

Central Burden: Skillful godly living under the fear of the Lord.

Christ-Centered Focus: Christ is the wisdom of God.

Preaching Direction: Preach principles as wisdom, not mechanical promises.

Ecclesiastes

Central Burden: Life under the sun, human limits, meaning, and fear of God.

Christ-Centered Focus: Christ brings resurrection meaning beyond vanity.

Preaching Direction: Allow the tension to work before rushing to resolution.

Song of Solomon

Central Burden: Covenant love, desire, delight, and marital faithfulness.

Christ-Centered Focus: Preach first as wisdom for human love; connect to covenant themes without erasing the poem.

Preaching Direction: Use mature, dignified language.

Isaiah

Central Burden: Holy God, judgment, comfort, servant, kingdom, and new creation.

Christ-Centered Focus: Christ is Immanuel, the Servant, and reigning King.

Preaching Direction: Series: Holy, Wounded, Reigning.

Jeremiah

Central Burden: Covenant breaking, prophetic grief, judgment, and new covenant hope.

Christ-Centered Focus: Christ mediates the promised new covenant.

Preaching Direction: Let lament and warning retain their weight.

Lamentations

Central Burden: Communal grief, judgment, honest lament, and stubborn hope.

Christ-Centered Focus: Christ enters judgment and grief and secures mercy.

Preaching Direction: Teach the church how to lament biblically.

Ezekiel

Central Burden: God's glory, judgment, responsibility, restoration, and new heart.

Christ-Centered Focus: Christ is the true Shepherd and giver of the Spirit.

Preaching Direction: Explain symbolic actions before application.

Daniel

Central Burden: Faithfulness in exile, sovereign kingdoms, visions, and final victory.

Christ-Centered Focus: Christ is the Son of Man whose kingdom cannot be destroyed.

Preaching Direction: Avoid date-setting and speculative charts.

Hosea

Central Burden: Covenant infidelity and relentless divine love.

Christ-Centered Focus: Christ is the faithful Bridegroom who redeems His people.

Preaching Direction: Handle marital imagery with pastoral sensitivity.

Joel

Central Burden: Day of the Lord, repentance, restoration, and Spirit outpouring.

Christ-Centered Focus: Christ pours out the Spirit and brings final salvation.

Preaching Direction: Connect Pentecost without exhausting Joel's future hope.

Amos

Central Burden: Justice, worship hypocrisy, judgment, and restored Davidic hope.

Christ-Centered Focus: Christ restores David's fallen tent and forms a just people.

Preaching Direction: Apply justice first to God's covenant people.

Obadiah

Central Burden: Pride, violence, judgment, and the Lord's kingdom.

Christ-Centered Focus: Christ humbles the proud and establishes God's kingdom.

Preaching Direction: A short book can support a focused one-sermon exposition.

Jonah

Central Burden: Mission, repentance, prejudice, mercy, and God's compassion.

Christ-Centered Focus: Christ is greater than Jonah and brings salvation to the nations.

Preaching Direction: Do not make the fish the main character.

Micah

Central Burden: Judgment, justice, shepherd hope, and promised ruler.

Christ-Centered Focus: Christ is the Bethlehem ruler and Shepherd-King.

Preaching Direction: Hold Micah 6:8 inside the covenant message.

Nahum

Central Burden: God's justice against violent empire and refuge for His people.

Christ-Centered Focus: Christ judges evil and shelters those who trust Him.

Preaching Direction: Preach judgment without delighting in human suffering.

Habakkuk

Central Burden: Faith amid confusion, complaint, divine justice, and worship.

Christ-Centered Focus: The righteous live by faith fulfilled in the gospel of Christ.

Preaching Direction: Let the sermon move from question to watchfulness to worship.

Zephaniah

Central Burden: Day of the Lord, judgment, remnant, and rejoicing restoration.

Christ-Centered Focus: Christ gathers the humble remnant and rejoices over His people.

Preaching Direction: Balance terror and tender restoration.

Haggai

Central Burden: Misplaced priorities, temple rebuilding, and promised glory.

Christ-Centered Focus: Christ is the greater glory of God's dwelling.

Preaching Direction: Avoid using the book merely for building campaigns.

Zechariah

Central Burden: Return, cleansing, priest-king hope, and coming kingdom.

Christ-Centered Focus: Christ is the Branch, pierced King, and humble rider.

Preaching Direction: Explain visions patiently and resist speculation.

Malachi

Central Burden: Covenant weariness, corrupt worship, justice, and coming messenger.

Christ-Centered Focus: Christ is the Lord who comes to His temple and the Sun of righteousness.

Preaching Direction: Series: When Worship Grows Weary.

Matthew

Central Burden: Jesus as Messiah-King who fulfills Scripture and forms kingdom disciples.

Christ-Centered Focus: Christ is the center, teacher, sacrifice, and risen Lord.

Preaching Direction: Series through the five teaching blocks.

Mark

Central Burden: Jesus the authoritative, suffering Son of God who calls costly discipleship.

Christ-Centered Focus: Christ gives His life as a ransom and rises.

Preaching Direction: Keep the narrative urgency.

Luke

Central Burden: Jesus the Spirit-anointed Savior for outsiders, sinners, and the nations.

Christ-Centered Focus: Christ seeks and saves the lost.

Preaching Direction: Highlight reversal, prayer, joy, and the marginalized.

John

Central Burden: Signs, belief, new life, and Jesus' divine identity.

Christ-Centered Focus: Christ is the eternal Word and giver of life.

Preaching Direction: Do not separate signs from their stated purpose.

Acts

Central Burden: The risen Christ advances His gospel by the Spirit through the church.

Christ-Centered Focus: Christ reigns and sends witnesses to the nations.

Preaching Direction: Preach descriptive events with attention to apostolic purpose.

Romans

Central Burden: God's righteousness in the gospel, justification, union with Christ, Israel, and transformed life.

Christ-Centered Focus: Christ is the crucified and risen center of salvation.

Preaching Direction: Plan multiple series rather than rushing.

1 Corinthians

Central Burden: The gospel corrects a divided, compromised, gifted church.

Christ-Centered Focus: Christ crucified reshapes wisdom, holiness, worship, and resurrection hope.

Preaching Direction: Let the cross govern every issue.

2 Corinthians

Central Burden: Apostolic ministry through weakness, comfort, integrity, and generosity.

Christ-Centered Focus: Christ's power is displayed through weakness.

Preaching Direction: Series: Treasure in Jars of Clay.

Galatians

Central Burden: Justification by faith, freedom, Spirit, and the danger of another gospel.

Christ-Centered Focus: Christ redeems from the curse and forms a new creation.

Preaching Direction: Distinguish gospel freedom from self-indulgence.

Ephesians

Central Burden: Union with Christ, one new humanity, church identity, holy living, and spiritual warfare.

Christ-Centered Focus: All things are united under Christ.

Preaching Direction: Build application from identity, not moralism.

Philippians

Central Burden: Gospel partnership, humility, joy, contentment, and perseverance.

Christ-Centered Focus: Christ empties Himself, is exalted, and strengthens His people.

Preaching Direction: Do not reduce joy to positive thinking.

Colossians

Central Burden: Christ's supremacy and sufficiency over every rival.

Christ-Centered Focus: Christ is creator, reconciler, head, and fullness of God.

Preaching Direction: Expose modern substitutes for Christ's sufficiency.

1 Thessalonians

Central Burden: Conversion, holy living, pastoral affection, resurrection, and Christ's return.

Christ-Centered Focus: Christ rescues, sanctifies, raises, and returns.

Preaching Direction: Use eschatology to produce hope and holiness.

2 Thessalonians

Central Burden: Perseverance, judgment, deception, work, and the day of the Lord.

Christ-Centered Focus: Christ will be revealed in glory and defeat lawlessness.

Preaching Direction: Avoid sensational timetables.

1 Timothy

Central Burden: Sound doctrine, church order, godliness, leadership, and faithful ministry.

Christ-Centered Focus: Christ is the one Mediator and hope of the church.

Preaching Direction: Apply qualifications before discussing platforms.

2 Timothy

Central Burden: Guarding the gospel, enduring suffering, Scripture, and finishing well.

Christ-Centered Focus: Christ abolishes death and preserves His servants.

Preaching Direction: A natural book for ordination and ministry training.

Titus

Central Burden: Sound doctrine producing good works and healthy churches.

Christ-Centered Focus: The grace of Christ trains God's people for holiness.

Preaching Direction: Show the inseparability of doctrine and conduct.

Philemon

Central Burden: Gospel reconciliation, brotherhood, appeal, and costly love.

Christ-Centered Focus: Christ receives debtors and creates a new family.

Preaching Direction: Address slavery historically and ethically with care.

Hebrews

Central Burden: Christ's supremacy, priesthood, sacrifice, covenant, endurance, and access.

Christ-Centered Focus: Christ is the final Word, great High Priest, and once-for-all sacrifice.

Preaching Direction: Trace repeated warnings and encouragements together.

James

Central Burden: Wholehearted faith expressed in trials, speech, justice, wisdom, and works.

Christ-Centered Focus: Christ is the Lord of glory whose wisdom shapes life.

Preaching Direction: Do not oppose James to Paul.

1 Peter

Central Burden: Hope and holiness for suffering exiles.

Christ-Centered Focus: Christ suffers, triumphs, shepherds, and will be revealed.

Preaching Direction: Preach suffering without promising easy escape.

2 Peter

Central Burden: Growth, apostolic truth, false teachers, judgment, and new creation.

Christ-Centered Focus: Christ will return and fulfill His promises.

Preaching Direction: Connect doctrine of return to holy living.

1 John

Central Burden: Assurance, truth, love, obedience, and testing claims.

Christ-Centered Focus: Christ is the incarnate life and atoning advocate.

Preaching Direction: Respect the letter's repeated tests and pastoral purpose.

2 John

Central Burden: Truth, love, obedience, and boundaries against deceivers.

Christ-Centered Focus: Christ is the truth confessed as come in the flesh.

Preaching Direction: Show that love does not require doctrinal naivety.

3 John

Central Burden: Hospitality, faithful partnership, pride, and church leadership.

Christ-Centered Focus: Serving Christ includes receiving and supporting faithful workers.

Preaching Direction: Contrast Gaius and Diotrephes without personality gossip.

Jude

Central Burden: Contending for the faith amid corrupt teachers.

Christ-Centered Focus: Christ keeps His people and will present them blameless.

Preaching Direction: Balance urgent warning with the closing doxology.

Revelation

Central Burden: The unveiled victory of the Lamb, faithful witness, judgment, worship, and new creation.

Christ-Centered Focus: Christ is the slain and reigning Lamb who makes all things new.

Preaching Direction: Preach for endurance and worship, not speculation.

PART XXII - PREACHING IN SPECIAL MOMENTS

Christmas

Preach incarnation, fulfillment, humility, kingship, and salvation. Do not allow nostalgia to replace wonder. Choose one text and explain why the coming of the Son changes everything.

Planning Questions: What does this occasion tempt us to emphasize instead of Christ? What does the chosen text actually promise? What pastoral needs are present in the room?

Resurrection Sunday

Proclaim the historical, bodily resurrection and its meaning: Jesus is Lord, sin is defeated, death is conquered, and believers have living hope. Do not assume visitors understand the gospel.

Planning Questions: What does this occasion tempt us to emphasize instead of Christ? What does the chosen text actually promise? What pastoral needs are present in the room?

Pentecost

Explain the Spirit's coming in the story of redemption, the exalted Christ's gift, the church's witness, and the formation of a new covenant people.

Planning Questions: What does this occasion tempt us to emphasize instead of Christ? What does the chosen text actually promise? What pastoral needs are present in the room?

Baptism

Center union with Christ, public confession, discipleship, and the church's responsibility. Avoid turning the ordinance into a sentimental photo opportunity.

Planning Questions: What does this occasion tempt us to emphasize instead of Christ? What does the chosen text actually promise? What pastoral needs are present in the room?

Communion

Proclaim Christ's body and blood, covenant, remembrance, self-examination, unity, and future hope. Keep the meditation focused and reverent.

Planning Questions: What does this occasion tempt us to emphasize instead of Christ? What does the chosen text actually promise? What pastoral needs are present in the room?

Funeral

Tell the truth about death, honor the person without inventing their spiritual condition, comfort the grieving, proclaim resurrection, and point clearly to Christ.

Planning Questions: What does this occasion tempt us to emphasize instead of Christ? What does the chosen text actually promise? What pastoral needs are present in the room?

Wedding

Preach covenant, sacrificial love, faithfulness, forgiveness, and the witness of marriage. Speak to the couple rather than performing for the room.

Planning Questions: What does this occasion tempt us to emphasize instead of Christ? What does the chosen text actually promise? What pastoral needs are present in the room?

Baby Dedication

Emphasize parental stewardship, congregational support, prayer, Scripture, and the child's need for personal faith. Do not imply that the ceremony saves.

Planning Questions: What does this occasion tempt us to emphasize instead of Christ? What does the chosen text actually promise? What pastoral needs are present in the room?

Church Anniversary

Give thanks for grace, honor faithful servants, tell the truth about the past, and call the church toward future obedience. History is a platform, not a hammock.

Planning Questions: What does this occasion tempt us to emphasize instead of Christ? What does the chosen text actually promise? What pastoral needs are present in the room?

Revival Service

Preach repentance, renewal, gospel hope, holiness, prayer, and dependence on God. Revival is not created by extending services until people surrender from fatigue.

Planning Questions: What does this occasion tempt us to emphasize instead of Christ? What does the chosen text actually promise? What pastoral needs are present in the room?

Ordination

Stress character, doctrine, calling, service, suffering, accountability, and faithfulness. Gifts without integrity are not readiness.

Planning Questions: What does this occasion tempt us to emphasize instead of Christ? What does the chosen text actually promise? What pastoral needs are present in the room?

Pastoral Installation

Clarify the work of shepherding, the congregation's responsibilities, mutual love, prayer, and submission to Christ the Chief Shepherd.

Planning Questions: What does this occasion tempt us to emphasize instead of Christ? What does the chosen text actually promise? What pastoral needs are present in the room?

Homecoming

Celebrate belonging and memory while proclaiming the greater home God prepares in Christ. Welcome former members without making current ministry feel invisible.

Planning Questions: What does this occasion tempt us to emphasize instead of Christ? What does the chosen text actually promise? What pastoral needs are present in the room?

Youth Sunday

Respect young people with real Scripture, clear explanation, and honest application. Do not confuse youthfulness with shallowness.

Planning Questions: What does this occasion tempt us to emphasize instead of Christ? What does the chosen text actually promise? What pastoral needs are present in the room?

Men's Day

Call men to Christlike holiness, humility, courage, responsibility, tenderness, and service rather than cultural stereotypes.

Planning Questions: What does this occasion tempt us to emphasize instead of Christ? What does the chosen text actually promise? What pastoral needs are present in the room?

Women's Day

Honor women as image-bearers, disciples, servants, leaders within the church's convictions, and essential witnesses to God's work. Avoid flattery in place of exposition.

Planning Questions: What does this occasion tempt us to emphasize instead of Christ? What does the chosen text actually promise? What pastoral needs are present in the room?

Civic Crisis

Address fear, justice, neighbor love, truth, grief, and Christian witness without turning the pulpit into a party platform.

Planning Questions: What does this occasion tempt us to emphasize instead of Christ? What does the chosen text actually promise? What pastoral needs are present in the room?

Community Tragedy

Name the pain, lament honestly, resist easy explanations, affirm God's presence, mobilize care, and proclaim resurrection hope.

Planning Questions: What does this occasion tempt us to emphasize instead of Christ? What does the chosen text actually promise? What pastoral needs are present in the room?

New Year

Call for remembrance, repentance, wisdom, stewardship, and hope. Avoid baptizing personal resolutions as divine promises.

Planning Questions: What does this occasion tempt us to emphasize instead of Christ? What does the chosen text actually promise? What pastoral needs are present in the room?

Watch Night

Place testimony and anticipation within God's faithfulness, human frailty, and the need to number our days wisely.

Planning Questions: What does this occasion tempt us to emphasize instead of Christ? What does the chosen text actually promise? What pastoral needs are present in the room?

FROM THE PEW

> *Pastor, I do not need you to impress me. I need you to help me hear God.*

I may be sitting quietly, but my life is not quiet. My marriage is hurting. My child has wandered. My mother died. My job is uncertain. I am ashamed of something I have not told anyone. I am afraid my faith is failing. I may look composed because I learned how to dress pain for church.

Please do not spend the whole sermon proving that you are clever. I already believe you are gifted. Please show me the text. Explain the words I do not understand. Tell me what was happening when they were written. Help me see Jesus. Tell me the truth about sin without acting as though you have never needed mercy. Tell me the truth about grace without pretending obedience does not matter.

Please remember that I may be new to the Bible. When you say, “You know the story,” I may not know it. When you announce a book and chapter quickly, I may still be looking for the table of contents. Do not shame me for learning slowly. Teach me.

Please remember the children, the grieving, the skeptical spouse, the elderly saint, the recovering addict, the person with limited education, and the member who has heard thousands of sermons. We do not all need the same example, but we all need the same Christ.

Please do not punish us because someone criticized you. Do not reveal what was said in confidence. Do not use the pulpit to win an argument we did not know existed. Shepherd us.

When the truth is hard, do not apologize for God. But speak with tears in your voice rather than triumph over our weakness. Correct us as someone who expects grace to change us.

When you invite us to respond, be clear. Some of us do not know what “come to Jesus” means. Explain repentance. Explain faith.

Explain why the cross matters. Explain what happens next. Give us room to think, and trust the Spirit to work.

We may not remember every point. We may not praise every sermon. We may never know how many hours you studied. But when you open the Book faithfully, week after week, it forms us. It gives language to our grief, courage for obedience, categories for wisdom, and hope in death.

Pastor, preach the Word. We are hungrier than we look.

THE PREACHER'S WEEKLY COMPANION PAGE

Passage:

_____

_____

Main idea in one sentence:

_____

_____

What does this text reveal about God?

_____

_____

How does this text expose human need?

_____

_____

How does this text connect to Christ and the gospel?

_____

_____

What must be explained?

_____

_____

What must be corrected?

_____

_____

What must be comforted?

_____

_____

What must be obeyed?

_____

_____

What illustration truly helps?

_____

_____

What should be removed?

_____

_____

How will the sermon begin?

_____

_____

How will the sermon end?

_____

_____

How will I invite response without manipulation?

_____

_____

Who needs pastoral follow-up after this sermon?

_____

_____

THIRTY-DAY PULPIT HEALTH CHECK

[ ] I opened the text before secondary sources.

[ ] I prayed for the people, not merely the sermon.

[ ] I stated a clear main idea.

[ ] I respected context.

[ ] I preached Christ clearly.

[ ] I explained theological terms.

[ ] I applied truth specifically.

[ ] I protected confidential information.

[ ] I avoided manipulation.

[ ] I verified stories and claims.

[ ] I honored the congregation's time.

[ ] I received feedback humbly.

[ ] I cared for my family and body.

[ ] I followed up pastorally.

[ ] I left results to God.

Most needed improvement this month:

_____

_____

One practice I will begin:

_____

_____

One practice I will stop:

_____

_____

One person who will hold me accountable:

_____

_____

FINAL WORD - THE WORD STILL STANDS

Someday another preacher will stand where you once stood. Another generation will sing. Another congregation will open its Bibles. Your voice will be silent, your favorite technology obsolete, your illustrations dated, and your name unknown to most of the people receiving fruit from seeds you planted.

But if you faithfully preached Christ from the Scriptures, the ministry of the Word will continue beyond your final sermon. A child you taught may become a faithful parent. A wounded believer may endure because a promise was explained accurately. A sinner may turn to Christ because the gospel was made plain. A young minister may open the Book because you showed that the text was enough.

Trends will fade. Platforms will change. Buildings will age. Methods will be revised. Personalities will rise and disappear. But the Word of our God shall stand forever.

> *Close the manuscript. Open the Bible. Walk to the pulpit. Preach the Word.*