

Making *DOERS* Out of *HEARERS*

Preparing Sermons That Put Principles Into *Practice*

"But be doers of the word, and not hearers only..." James 1:22

by Frank R. Parrish

Sleeping Faces

There are many books on the many ways of preparing sermons, and section D-13 of *The Shepherd's Staff* gives a complete and detailed study of sermon preparation.

Let me simply show you the *lessons* I have learned, not from books or Bible School, but from twenty years of preparing and preaching sermons. I have watched the faces (sometimes *sleeping* faces!) of the people I preached to, and listened to their comments and complaints about my sermons.

I learned that they did not want long, complicated and often confusing sermons. But they did want **clear** and **easy-to-understand** sermons that answered **their** questions, met **their** spiritual needs, and applied to **their** daily lives.

Preacher = *Student*

We cannot communicate to others what we ourselves do not understand; we cannot clearly **teach** what we have not thoroughly **studied**.

Therefore, Scripture exhorts us to be *master craftsmen* as **students** of the Word in order to be *master craftsmen* as **preachers** of the Word (2 Tim 2:15).

The best example we can find of such a master craftsman is the Master Himself -- the Lord Jesus. Here then are **practiced principles** we can learn by studying just some of **what** Jesus said and **how** He said it.

1. Jesus spoke only *what God gave Him to speak*.

"For I have not spoken on My own authority; but the Father who sent Me gave me a command...what I should speak...therefore whatever I speak, just as the Father has told me, so I speak" (John 2:49-50; see also John 7:17-18; 8:26, 28, 38; 17:10; 14:10; 17:8).

Our sermons should say *what God wants us to say to His people*. God knows better than we do what is in each of our listeners' hearts. He knows exactly what will minister to, admonish, correct, encourage and bless those we serve.

God **does** have a word for His people; so before you stand before **them** to preach, kneel humbly before **Him** to receive that word.

Spend much of your preparation time in prayer. Ask God to illuminate the Scriptures to you by the power of His Spirit. Ask Him which Bible passages apply to the people

you will speak to.

Ask God to place within **your** heart the desires of **His** heart for the people. All that God does is because of His great heart of love for mankind.

2. Jesus confronted pain and sin in people's lives with grace, love and acceptance -- *without compromising the truth.*

In the story of the woman caught in adultery (John 8:1-12), Jesus reveals more of God's heart than the Law ever could by itself.

He did not condemn her, yet he **clearly told her** to "*go, and...sin no more*" (v. 11). And while He rejected the sexual sin in **her** heart -- He revealed the arrogance and self-righteous religious legalism in her **accusers'** hearts.

He did all this in an **uncondemning** way, in words that were easily understood.

3. Jesus *told stories (parables) to teach important truths about man, sin, salvation and God.*

Our Lord used the simple parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 11:32) to reveal many important truths about repentance, forgiveness, and the deadly deception of self-righteousness.

He also revealed a vivid picture of the loving, longsuffering Father-heart of God through the response of the young man's father.

This is an important lesson to us about teaching the truths of Scripture. Simple stories are often the most effective.

4. Jesus told stories people could *relate to in their daily lives.*

Jesus' listeners were housewives, farmers, merchants, fishermen and shepherds. So He taught them deep truths about the Kingdom of God by telling simple stories about people who did those very same things. (See Matthew 13 and Luke 15:4-7).

5. Jesus' preaching supplied spiritual tools that *work.*

A tool is meant to be *used*. But if it is so complicated that no one knows **how to use it**, or **what it is meant to be used for** -- it will **not** be properly used.

A biblical principle is a *spiritual tool*. It too is meant to be **used -- applied** -- in real life. But if a sermon is so complicated that no one knows **how to apply the truth to their life**, it will **not** be used. It will **not** be applied. It will **not** be put into practice.

Jesus, *the* Master Craftsman, knew that spiritual truths must **work**. His sermons are easily-understood "instruction manuals" that show us how to use the truths in daily life.

6. Jesus kept His preaching *simple.*

Jesus did **not** use complicated theological terms when He preached. He used simple, everyday words that **all could understand**.

This made the *principles* Jesus taught easy to understand and therefore easy to *remember*.

Biblical truths that are easy to *understand* and *remember* are then easy to *apply* to daily life. They become like tools to repair the spiritual brokenness in people's lives, and to help them live as effective Believers in Jesus Christ.

7. Jesus kept His preaching *focused*.

Each parable Jesus told is a **clear illustration** -- a perfectly focused "photograph" -- of **ONE spiritual principle**.

Each sermon **you** preach should keep ONE spiritual principle (such as "evangelism") in *clear focus*.

A good guideline for effective sermons is to teach those you serve:

a. **ONE FACT they should KNOW** about the subject (such as, "Jesus commands us to go and preach the gospel");

b. **ONE WAY they should FEEL** about the subject (such as, "broken-hearted compassion for those lost and unsaved"); and

c. *most importantly* -- **ONE THING they can DO** about the subject (such as, "tell someone about Jesus Christ", or "help us in a city-wide outreach", etc.).

The goal of all sermons presented to those you serve should be to **instruct** their minds to know and understand God; **inspire** their hearts to live godly and effective lives for Christ's sake; and to **stir them up to be zealous for good works** -- so that they will not be **hearers** of the Word only...but **DOERS!**