

HOW TO PREPARE SERMONS AND LESSONS

INTRODUCTION

A few days ago, a delivery truck brought a package to my door. I had ordered some cassette tapes and was very glad to get them. Although the important thing was to get the tapes, the truck was important because it brought the tapes to me.

The sermons and lessons we preach and teach are like delivery trucks. They deliver the goods. The Word is of course the most important thing, but there must be some way to deliver it to the people. Sermons and lessons must be given to people, but you deliver them.

In this article, you will learn how to build a sermon or a lesson plan. You will learn how to preach and teach that the people in your church or class receive the Word without noticing the one who does the preaching and teaching.

I have found that people learn best when they know what they are going to learn before they are taught it. So, at the beginning of each section, I have listed for you what you learn there.

SOME PRACTICAL HINTS

Here are four practical steps that will help you get the most out of this article.

1. Find a quiet place to read and go there to read this.
2. Follow the steps I recommend and **WORK ON A SERMON OR LESSON OF YOUR OWN** while you read.
3. Take a five to ten minute break every hour. You will understand more of what you're reading if you don't read too long at one time.
4. Make a plan to work on your sermons and lessons every week and do it.

WHY SHOULD YOU PLAN AHEAD?

WHAT YOU WILL LEARN IN THIS CHAPTER

1. You will learn what it means to be *“instant in season and out”* (1 Tim 4:2).
2. You will discover how to make sure your sermon and lesson ideas are good ones.
3. You will be able to list the four ingredients that go together to make an effective message.
4. You will know why the Word alone is ineffective in changing lives.

A young Bible college graduate was about to preach his first sermon before a congregation. It was his first church and he wanted to show the people that he knew the Word and was able to preach. He didn't want to read his message or use any notes. He wanted to speak entirely from his heart. So he had no notes, no outline, no helps of any kind.

He climbed into the pulpit to begin. However, he could not remember anything he wanted to say except for the verse that was his text. He hoped that quoting the verse would help him remember the rest of what he wanted to say, so he quoted the verse from Revelations “Behold, I am coming!”

He still couldn't remember anything more, so he decided to try saying the verse again.

“Behold, I am coming,” he shouted.

It was no use. He still couldn't remember anything more. He decided to try saying the text one more time, hoping and praying some other thoughts would return to his memory.

“Behold, I am coming,” he repeated desperately, leaning into the pulpit for effect.

Right at that moment, the pulpit gave way and he fell into the lap of a lady sitting in the front row. He was very embarrassed.

“I am so sorry,” he said, looking up at the woman.

“That’s ok, preacher,” she said. “I should have been ready – you warned me three times you were coming!”

SATURDAY NIGHT PANIC

You know what it’s like. You’ve been busy all week counseling, working, teaching, doing all those things a minister has to do. You meant to spend more time getting ready for Sunday, but so many needs came up and you just had to meet them. Now, it’s Saturday night and you still don’t have a sermon ready for tomorrow.

You open your Bible, flip through the pages, look hopefully towards Heaven and pray: “Oh God, oh God! Let me hear Your voice!” However, it is almost impossible to prepare a great sermon on Saturday night or to get a lesson ready at the last minute. We have all suffered listening to preachers who obviously put their message together at the last minute. We have made people suffer listening when we didn’t know exactly what we wanted to say, when our sermon wandered from thought to thought without any purpose.

There are many activities in a preacher’s ministry, but there is no one activity people see more than his preaching. People tend to judge you as a minister by your ability to preach and teach. They expect you to deliver great messages week after week. And rightly so. The Bible exhorts us to give attention to the preaching of the Word. (See 1 Timothy 4:13 and 2 Timothy 4:2.) It is the one thing we do that can so powerfully bring people to the Lord.

If you follow the method I propose, you will always have good things to preach about. You will always have a storehouse of material, thoughts, insights, challenges and illustrations to build into a sermon or lesson.

VEGETABLES OR WEEDS?

When I was a little boy, growing up on a farm town, my parents planted a garden behind our house. After carefully plowing the soil, putting fertilizer on it and making the rows, we planted seeds along the furrows. A few weeks later, my parents were out in the garden pulling weeds.

Even though I was only about six or seven years old, I went out to help them. When I asked what I could do, my mother told me to pull the weeds so the

vegetables could grow. As I remember it now, we were growing onions in the row I worked in.

After several minutes, my mother, who was working in front of me, turned around to see how I was doing. "Oh no," she said, "You're pulling up the onions, not the weeds!" I didn't know the difference between a weed and an onion plant.

Not every idea that we get is a good one. Not every thought we think is from the Lord. Some ideas and thoughts are good ones; they bear fruit in time. But some are weeds. We need to allow them to grow long enough to be able to see the difference and then be experienced enough to know which ones to pull and which ones to leave to grow longer.

If you wait until the last minute to put together a sermon or lesson, you will inevitably serve up both weeds and vegetables to your congregation. If you begin preparing your sermons and lessons weeks and months in advance you'll have the time and experience to know the difference. You'll offer up only healthy meals to the people.

GOING TO WORK

Begin now to build sermons or lessons. On a piece of paper, write out at least seven ideas or topics for sermons you would like to preach or lessons you would like to teach. If you are having a hard time getting started, use these questions to help you begin.

1. What do you feel strongly about right now? What gets you most excited? Angry? What moves you to action?
2. What do the people in your church or class want to know? What do they ask you about the most?
3. Can you preach a message or teach a class on one of those things they are asking for? Can you teach or preach more than one time on it?
4. List seven thoughts you have about one of those subjects.

HOW GREAT SERMONS ARE MADE

Outside, it was hot and very humid; inside, the air conditioners made it quite comfortable. Outside, the noise of the car horns and noisy mufflers made it very difficult to talk; inside, people were singing praises so you didn't want to talk.

After an hour of worship and prayer, the interpreter stood to introduce the speaker. Speaking in Indonesian, he told us about the life of this man from Holland who now lived in Hong Kong with an Indonesian wife and two adopted Japanese children. When the speaker began to share the Word, everybody listened. We forgot the humidity and the noise. We were listening to every word the speaker had to say. He was powerful.

He possessed something special as a minister that made him so powerful. Yes, he knew the Word. His skill as a preacher was finely sharpened. You could feel his love for the people. But I sat there in that Indonesian church, listening and trying to analyze what it was that made him different.

After nearly an hour of listening, I realized what it was. I had taught the principle in my own leadership seminars, and now I recognized it in him.

HE HAD THE ABILITY TO COMBINE THE WORD, EXPERIENCES FROM HIS OWN LIFE, AND THE SPIRIT TOGETHER TO CREATE A FORCEFUL, WELL-PRESENTED SERMON OR LESSON.

There are four parts to effective messages:

1. A knowledge of the subject you are preaching about.
2. The freshness of the Spirit in your life.
3. A vessel.
4. Experiences from life.

As we examine these one by one, you'll see how they fit together. The principle is illustrated in a drawing of a teapot.

The first part is the Word. An effective teacher must have some knowledge of the subject he is teaching. If he is to be really effective, he will spend more time studying and meditating than he will ministering.

That's why you must spend time in personal study, devotions and meditation. The effective church leader spends quality time studying the Bible. If he can get them, he reads books that give him insight into life as it was in Bible times. He also learns to apply the Bible's message to life in practical ways.

Some of us were taught that to be really "anointed," you shouldn't use any notes when you teach, you shouldn't write anything down while you study, nor should you use an outline to speak from. "Open your mouth and the Lord will fill it," they said. However, if there is no life inside of us, no life will come out of our mouths. In our diagram, we would compare the tea with the Word. Tea must be made from tea leaves. Good sermons must be made from the Word of God. But the Word alone is not nearly enough to make a sermon worth listening to. Information alone, no matter how good that information is, will not bring life to people. "The letter kills, but the Spirit give life" (2 Cor 3:6).

The second ingredient in our diagram is water. Tea leaves alone are not enough. The Pharisees of Jesus' day knew the Law, but their lives were dry and lifeless because they had no personal fellowship with the Author of the Word. They knew the Bible, but they did not have the second ingredient that is necessary in effective preaching. There was no freshness, so no one listened to what they had to say. Maybe you've heard someone minister who said the right things, but he was so dry you could hardly stay awake.

What is the second ingredient? It is the Spirit.

The Bible contains everything man needs to know to please God and live a happy life. The directions are old, but they can be applied to life today. The secret of freshness is simple: be fresh yourself. Paul the apostle says that we should "be filled with the Spirit" (Eph 5:18). That is not something that happens just a once in a lifetime. Instead, we should be before the Lord every day receiving from Him the freshness of Himself. The Spirit flows through our lives from God and out to others. One of the most effective tools of the enemy is to lock up the answers of the Bible in dry, religious terms. Preaching and teaching alone cannot change lives. The Pharisees of Jesus' day tried to change people by telling them the Word. It didn't work then and it won't work now. Good doctrine will not deliver people. It takes the Word and the power of God to change lives. If you don't have it in your life, you can't make it work for others by just talking about it.

The third part of effective teaching is a useful, willing vessel. The tea and the water are mixed together in a teapot. Once, a few years ago, I conducted a teacher training class for the teachers in our Christian school. As part of their training, I asked the teachers to answer these questions:

1. Write the title of every book you used in school.
2. Write the name of as many subjects you took that you can remember.
3. Describe special experiences that you remember.
4. Name every teacher you had and why you remember them.

Of the six people who took that training course, only one person could remember the name of a textbook. Two more people could remember a few subject titles. Most could remember several special experiences and activities. Everyone could remember at least six teachers. Why?

Because it is teachers who have the most impact on students, not the things they teach or the books they use. The teachers told stories about their lives; they used words and expressions that were colorful and power-packed. Their classes were not just dry lessons; they were powerful experiences between themselves and their students.

That little activity proved to me that it is people who affect people. We are touched by the lives of others as much as we are touched by the things they say. An effective teacher imparts himself to others. "The disciple, after he is fully taught, will be like his teacher" (Luke 6:40).

So, we have now examined three parts of good sermons and lessons:

- The Word
- The Spirit
- A vessel

In our diagram they would compare to the tea, the water, and the teapot. However, those ingredients are not yet tea. They need one more thing. Do you know what it is?

The fourth ingredient is heat or fire. The fires of life must be applied before tea leaves and water become something to drink. The one thing that made that preacher in Indonesia so dynamic was that he had lived through hard times so that the truth in the Book had become truth in his life. It is the heating that

completes the process. Fired on the burner of God's stove, baked in the oven of trial and experience, knowledge becomes wisdom.

You may remember the life of Joshua. For 40 years he served Moses and the people in the wilderness. It was those 40 years that prepared him to lead the people into the Promised Land.

You may know the Word fairly well. You may be alive with the Spirit. You may be a willing vessel. But you will never be completely effective unless and until those ingredients have brewed awhile. If you're feeling the heat now, relax. The Word and the Spirit are combining to make something very good.

A minister will not be effective simply because he learns a workable method of sermon and lesson preparation. Good tools help you minister better. There just isn't any substitute for an anointed, knowledgeable, Spirit-led preacher.

GOING TO WORK

You have already written out ideas you have for sermons or lessons. You have listed some of the things your people are asking questions about. Look at your list again. Which one(s) of the items on your list are you experiencing? How is God working truth into your life? Now write out some of the experiences you are having that illustrate and demonstrate God's Word in YOUR life. Try to use personal experiences.

HOW TO PLAN AHEAD

WHAT YOU WILL LEARN IN THIS CHAPTER

1. You will see how to get great ideas and illustrations everywhere.
2. You will be able to know if what you are studying will help you minister to your people.
3. You will learn to use a system that will allow you to easily keep track of the great ideas you get.
4. You will make a sermon or lesson plan.
5. You will be able to name the three purposes of any sermon or lesson.

LEARNING TO HEAR THE LORD EVERYWHERE

The people lined the streets to shout praises to Jesus as He rode into Jerusalem on a donkey. Waving palm branches and crying “Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord,” they exalted Him. After a time of teaching by Jesus, God spoke from heaven.

The remarkable detail in this story isn't the fact that God spoke. The amazing point is that most people didn't recognize Him when He did speak. Some thought it was thunder; a few others thought it was an angel. They didn't recognize God's voice because it came from the sky and the only thing they had heard from the sky before was thunder. They, like us, are accustomed to hearing from God in only a few places. The problem is that we're not hearing Him when He does speak. If you are waiting for God to speak to you in some inner voice, or only through a Scripture that seems to jump from the page of your Bible, you will not hear God as often as He speaks.

On one occasion, God sent Jeremiah to the potter's house where He said He would announce His words to him. (Read Jeremiah 18:1- 6.) How? By letting Jeremiah observe a life experience that directly related to a spiritual principle. Some of the best ideas and illustrations for messages don't come from books, but from life as you watch it and live it. When you can find truth in life as we live it today, your people will be able to apply it to their own lives. Jesus used life as He lived it to explain truth.

For example, a few years ago I was preparing a sermon on leadership in the home. I wanted to show husbands that wives find it nearly impossible to follow a man who cannot make a decision. Some months before I preached this message, I was ministering in another city. While I was there, the host pastor took me to dinner at a hotel. After our meal, we walked through the lobby on our way outside on a platform in one corner of this very large room stood a newsstand. Since it was a major hotel, the operator of the newsstand had a dozen different newspapers from around the U.S. for sale. We stood for a few moments on the edge of the platform watching the movement of the crowd through the lobby. Just before we left, a couple walked past us toward the restaurant. As they got near the newsstand, the man stopped and said to the woman, “Wait a minute, I want to get a paper.”

She stood there while he walked over to the newsstand and picked up a newspaper. He looked it over and put it down, picking up another. He looked it over for a few seconds, then put it down and picked up yet another edition. He

did the same thing several times. Picking up, looking, replacing, the woman became more exasperated each time he did it. Finally she blurted out, “For goodness’ sakes, Harold, buy something!” She became frustrated when her husband could not make a decision.

There was an excellent illustration for a sermon I would preach sometime in the future. Some may have seen it and thought it was only something interesting to watch. It was God speaking in life. We may not hear Him because we aren’t accustomed to hearing His voice there. He’s speaking but we aren’t listening.

Here’s an exercise you may find useful. Leave your house and go out for a walk. Get away from your normal surroundings. While you’re out walking, find one object or observe one event in which you can find some spiritual truth or principle. Then develop a message from what you saw, or use what you saw as an illustration in it. When a friend of mine did this, he found a rusty nail. As he thought about it, he understood how something that was shiny and new could become rusty and worn. He then developed a message on how sin corrupts people.

Learn from other good communicators. Listen and read what other good speakers say. Nothing is original, so don’t feel guilty about borrowing their ideas. If and when you do borrow, the ethical thing to do is to tell your congregation who said it. If a man is a good communicator, study his method, listen to the words he uses, and remember his choice of illustrations. Maybe there’s a more forceful way to say what you need to say. Too many sermons and lessons are full of stammering and stuttering. If a man is a good communicator, learn from him.

LEARN FROM MY MISTAKE

It went like this: Church on Sunday, counseling and classes three nights a week, I taught in our Christian school, and worked on our new building on Saturday, church on Sunday, counseling and more ministering ...

I hope your schedule is less busy than mine was. Notice I said “was”. After several years of it, I made some radical changes. I was so busy with church activities I had no time to relax. I couldn’t hear God speak anywhere else, because I could never go anywhere else except at a run. The pressure of my schedule kept me from enjoying the other dimensions of my life. My wife,

children, myself as an individual, my friends were blurred together. I was so busy I couldn't enjoy them.

The first revelation we have of God is in the book of Genesis. There He reveals His creative nature. Good sermons and powerful lessons require creativity. Creativity means to make something new or to rearrange old things in a new way. Creativity begins to work in a relaxed environment. When you are not pressured, you can come up with some very creative ideas. How many times did Jesus teach His disciples and then take them off into the hills for a while? On more than one occasion, Jesus left a busy meeting and retreated to the hills. He needed to hear from His Father. So do we. Learn to relax.

When you begin to plan ahead, when you listen everywhere, when you learn to relax, it won't be long before you'll begin to gather a lot of ideas, thoughts, illustrations and principles. How will you keep track of them all? What will you do with them until you can put them into a sermon or lesson? You may be able to remember a few of them for a few days, but what will you do when you get so many, you can no longer remember them? How will you save them when you come across them so that you can find them later?

Here's a simple method to record and store all this material.

USE A SERMON AND LESSON PLAN

Since a good message takes several weeks or months to develop, you will need some way of keeping all those messages you are working on in some kind of order. I use a sermon/ lesson plan, but I didn't buy it anywhere. It's a form I developed myself. I like to preach series, taking several weeks on a topic before moving on to another. So I included a place to write in the series name. For instance, one summer I preached two months on "The Weapons of our Warfare." On this form, the series name "Weapons of our Warfare" would go there.

Each sermon was given a title that would help people remember what it was about. So I included a place for the title on my form. The most important part of sermon and lesson preparation is to state its purpose. As you begin preparing a sermon or lesson, define the reason behind it. Why are you going to preach it? What do you want to happen as the result of your having taught it? What do you want it to accomplish for those who hear it?

There are three broad purposes for a sermon or lesson:

1. to inform,
2. to persuade,
3. to motivate.

Every message will fall somewhere in these three categories. Some sermons or lessons may include more than one, but each will include at least one. Your statement of purpose should read something like this: “I want to motivate each person in my congregation to witness to at least two people this next week.”

Preaching a sermon or teaching a lesson without a stated purpose is like firing a gun without a target. It makes a lot of noise and gets attention, but it captures no game. The sermons of the Bible show purpose. So do its books and letters. Read John 20:30-31, 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, and 1 Thessalonians 4:1.

If the most important part of sermon and lesson preparation is a stated purpose, the most important parts of preaching and teaching are the introduction and conclusion. Use an introduction that gets the people’s attention, sets the mood for the message, and makes them want to hear more. Create a conclusion that sums up your purpose, provides an action step, and brings your thoughts to a crisp end. List several ways to introduce and conclude your message on the sermon plan.

On the rest of the page, write down any major thoughts you MIGHT include in your sermon or lesson. Don’t worry about any particular order now, just write down anything that comes up. You’ll choose the ones you’ll use in your message later. Keep your stated purpose in mind. The sermon/lesson plan form is not your completed message. It is only a device to help you assemble all the parts into the finished product.

GO TO WORK

Make a sermon plan right now. Take a piece of paper and make a sermon plan like the one in the illustration. Then, take the ideas you gathered earlier and begin to plan a sermon or lesson. Be sure to:

1. Define the purpose of the message. I want to preach this message because...

2. List ideas, Scriptures and illustrations that apply to the message.
3. Plan a conclusion. How do you want the sermon to end? The conclusion should be an action step. Get your listeners to do something. Don't let them just listen to you. Blessed are they that hear the Word of God and do it.

HAVE TIME AND A PLACE TO STUDY

WHAT YOU WILL LEARN IN THIS CHAPTER

1. You will see why it is necessary to discipline yourself to study in order to be an effective preacher.
2. You will be able to describe a good place to study.
3. You will learn different ways to study the Bible.
4. "*Jotham was mighty because he ordered his ways before the Lord*" (2 Chron 27:6). Don't fool yourself; the people you speak to can tell when you've taken time to prepare and when you haven't. There are many pressing needs, but study is always important. Schedule a certain time every week to work on sermons and lessons. Notice I said "sermons and lessons," not just that week's message. You will work on the sermons and lessons you will deliver that week. You will also work on messages you'll deliver in the future, adding notes, Scriptures, illustrations, and polishing the form.

Let your family and your congregation know when and where you'll be studying. Encourage them to leave you alone during this time. You may have to do some adjusting until you find the best time for you, but don't be afraid to set a time and enforce it. There is a tendency to look at preparation time as not being "real ministry". But it is very important.

If it's important to set aside time, it's also important to set aside a place. This place may be a study in your house or church. It may be a corner of a room, but it should be secluded and quiet. It should be a place that can be isolated from the activity of others. It should be comfortable.

Prepare your spirit to receive from the Holy Spirit. Spend some time praying and worshipping. It is the Spirit that will help you include exactly what needs to be in your message. The Bible is God's revelation to us. It is not just a book of

history. It is the account of God's dealings with man and how He has revealed Himself to us. It is not the account of man's search for God. God was never lost. Man is lost, and the Bible tells us how God found him.

The test of an experience is its biblical foundation. Many times we try to prove the Bible by our experiences. Instead, we must prove all our experiences by the Bible. I have read about people who claimed they had died and gone to a place full of light and nice music. Some of these people said they were not Christians. In spite of their experience, the Bible does not say that the unsaved go to a nice place after they die. We should use illustrations from experience to illustrate our sermons and lessons, but be certain that those experiences are proven by the Scriptures.

STUDY THE BIBLE IN THESE WAYS:

Read it all the way through. Get a look at the whole Bible. See how one book relates to another.

Read each book. See the setting of the book, when it was written, and what was happening in history at the time it was written. Why was the book written? This is especially true when you are studying the letters of the New Testament.

Let the Bible inspire you while you read it. Be challenged and lifted by its message. Read it and apply it to yourself, not just for your congregation. It is quite possible that a minister can study the Bible for others, but never let the Book touch him where he lives. He must be concerned that his message touches his congregation. He must always let it touch himself.

Study different subjects. For example, praise is a very exciting subject to study through all the Bible.

STUDY WORDS

Study the Bible *carefully*. Pay attention to detail, names, meanings and locations. Learn to read with emphasis like someone speaks.

Study it *prayerfully*. Ask God to speak to you.

Study it *regularly*. Be systematic.

PREPARING YOUR SERMON OR LESSON

WHAT YOU WILL LEARN IN THIS CHAPTER

1. You will learn how to keep the attention of anyone who listens to you preach.
2. You will be able to list the three parts of every sermon / lesson.
3. You will be able to tell the difference between a lesson and a sermon.
4. You will learn to make a simple outline.

KEEPING THEIR ATTENTION

Two men were ice fishing. They stood over an hour on the ice and caught nothing. However, they noticed that a man just a few feet away caught one fish after another. The two men decided to ask him his secret. They walked up to him and asked, "We couldn't help but notice that you are catching quite a few fish. Could you tell us your secret? We aren't catching anything."

"Mmmmph," the successful fisherman replied.

"Pardon us," the two said. "We couldn't understand you. What did you say?"

"Mmmmph," he said again. "We're really sorry," they said.

"We really didn't understand that. What was that you said?"

At that point, the man spit something out of his mouth and stated, "You've gotta keep the worms warm."

Keeping the attention and respect of any one group of people week after week is not easy. You can't afford to be careless in either what you preach or how you preach it. You've "gotta keep the worms warm."

In your sermon / lesson plan, you worked on the introduction, body and conclusion of your message. Now you will assemble them together into its finished form. I recommend you keep your sermon and lesson outlines. They

are works of craftsmanship you have invested a great deal of time and effort into. It's my belief that a message doesn't get really good until it's been delivered two or three times.

Often you will remember some points you made in a sermon you preached sometime in the past, so you'll need some easy way to store them.

I use an outline to preach from, but I don't get too concerned with following an exact outline form. You may choose to list the points down the page numerically. Or you may want to use letters. Find a form you can work with that serves the purpose.

In the introduction of your message, bait the hook. Spend a few minutes grabbing the attention of the congregation. God once used a burning bush to get Moses' attention. In the introduction; tell the people what you're going to tell them in the sermon.

In the body of the message, tell them. Build your message point by point toward your stated purpose. Set forth your major points. Let one point lead to the next or let each point support one major emphasis. Illustrations are windows into the truth. They let in light. While you have been planning the message, you've had the time to gather several good stories and illustrations. Use them.

Limit yourself. Be careful not to wander away from your topic. It's easy to be drawn away into talking about something other than that which relates to your purpose. Limit yourself to a certain time, a certain subject, and your stated purpose.

In the conclusion, tell the people what you have told them. Sum up your points. Bring your thoughts to a logical conclusion. I've sat through a number of messages that had conclusions which had nothing to do with the message. Often we attempt an altar call based on the second coming of Christ when we never mentioned His coming in our message. Be consistent. Use an action step to prompt the people to do more than just listen. You may have the people come forward, lead them in some commitment to the Lord, or have them do something right then. A powerful action step makes the difference between a sermon and a lesson.

CONCLUSION

So there you have it: a simple, easy-to-use method of sermon and lesson preparation. Long-range planning, disciplined Spirit-led study, and careful work add up to effective preaching and teaching. You'll approach Sunday morning with more confidence. You'll find that you'll be able to apply theological truths in practical ways. Your people will be able to make Christianity work better for them.

You have learned easy-to-use methods to organize your thoughts, build sermons and lessons, and store completed outlines. Now you must put it into practice. If you have been working on a sermon or lesson along with this article, you are off to a great beginning.

SAMPLE SERMONS YOU CAN PREACH

We have included two sermon outlines by Gerald Rowlands. They are good examples of the kind of sermons that you should preach, because they are:

1. carefully **organized**
2. solidly **Bible-based**
3. clearly **expressed**

Please study these sermons carefully, paying close attention to:

- The **Biblical truths** they are teaching
 1. regarding prophecy
 2. regarding the discerning of spirits
- How the sermons are **organized**
 1. use of outline format
 2. use of definitions
 3. use of Scripture references
- How the sermons **express** the biblical truths they are teaching
 1. various points and principles emphasized
 2. clarity of words and sentences

Please feel free to use these messages in your personal development and training as well as in your public ministry as the Holy Spirit leads you.

“And moreover, because the preacher was wise, he still taught the people knowledge; yes he pondered and sought out and set in order many proverbs. The preacher sought to find acceptable words; and what was written was upright – words of truth. The words of the wise are like goads, and the words of the masters of assemblies are like well-driven rails, given by one Shepherd” Ecclesiastes 12:9- 11.

“TO ANOTHER, PROPHECY”: 1 CORINTHIANS 12:10

1.WHAT IS PROPHECY?

A. A Brief Definition

The meaning of the Greek word *propheteia*, translated in the New Testament as ‘prophecy,’ is a divinely inspired utterance. Prophecy is as supernatural as the gift of tongues, only it is supernatural utterance in a **known** tongue. It is a manifestation of the Spirit of God, not of the human mind.

In its simplest form (that is without some other gift working together with it), all who have received the baptism of the Holy Spirit may exercise this gift: *“For ye may all prophesy, one by one”* (1 Cor 14:31).

The importance of this gift is emphasized by the prominence which it is given in those chapters which deal with spiritual gifts. For example, it is mentioned twenty-two times in Chapters 11 through 14 of 1 Corinthians.

B. The Gift Is Distinct From The Office

The Scriptures reveal obvious difference between the **office of prophet** and the **gift of prophecy**. The New Testament order of things is different from the Old Testament. The prophet of the Old Testament differs from that of the New Testament as the priest of the Old differs from that of the New. In the Old Testament, only certain men were chosen by God to be priests, but in the New Testament we are all kings and priests unto our God. Likewise, in the Old only a few were chosen and appointed to prophesy, but in the New, Paul says, *“Ye may **all** prophesy”* (1 Cor 14:31).

There is, however, a New Testament office of prophet which is distinct from the gift of prophecy. Although both are called **gifts**, one is a gift from Christ to the Church (Ephesians 4:8-12), while the other is a gift from the Holy Spirit to an individual member of the Church (1 Cor 12:10). In Ephesians 4, Christ gave **some** (to be understood) prophets, but in 1 Corinthians 14:31, **all** may prophesy.

We can see this distinction in Acts 21:8-22. Philip had 4 daughters 'which did prophesy' (the gift), but Agabus was **a prophet** (the office). Using the gift of prophecy **does not make one a prophet**, but the one holding the office of a prophet does use the gift.

Four Tests Of A Genuine Prophet (The Office)

1. *Christ has **set** them in the Church (the Body).* (The New Testament does not allow for independent prophets who are not acceptable to other Spirit-filled believers. The prophet is a part of and accountable to the church.)
2. *Other recognized prophets will endorse him.*
3. *His predictions will come to pass.*
4. *His ministry will be associated with founding churches, equipping saints for ministry, etc.*

2. WHAT PROPHECY IS NOT: SOME MISUNDERSTANDINGS ABOUT PROPHECY

A. Prophecy Is Not To Be Confused With Preaching

Many today insist that **prophecy** in the Bible refers to preaching. This robs the gift of its supernatural character. Preaching and teaching is most usually the result of prayerful meditation in the Word of God coupled with diligent preparation. In contrast, prophecy is often spontaneous and has not been prepared beforehand by the person giving the message.

Prophetic utterance is under the **immediate and direct** inspiration of the Holy Spirit. In anointed preaching, the natural mind is assisted and inspired by the Spirit. In true prophesy the mind of the Spirit is speaking through human speech organs. However, in the course of anointed preaching the gift of prophecy also may operate during the message.

B. Prophecy Is Not To Be Confused With Predicting The Future

To prophesy is not to foretell but to speak for another (in comfort). If some hidden truth is revealed, this is the **word of knowledge** operating within the prophecy. A **word of wisdom** also may be contained within a prophecy, giving a form of prediction regarding some event in the future.

C. Prophecy Is Not For Personal Guidance

1 Corinthians 14:3 says, “... *he that prophesieth speaketh unto men to edification and exhortation and comfort.*” There is no reason to believe that prophecy characteristically foretells the future or attempts to direct the personal future of anyone, based upon this scripture. It is therefore not wise to seek out anyone to give you personal guidance through the gifts of the Spirit. Ask God and He will give you wisdom (James 1:5) then use your own sanctified judgment and knowledge of the Word.

Even the New Testament prophet made no effort to make people obey or follow his leadings. He left the conclusions and initiative to the judgment of those who heard his utterance. On one occasion a prophet did predict a drought, but he did not offer any advice or guidance about what should be done. On another occasion a prophet foretold the arrest of Paul in Jerusalem and while Paul apparently did not doubt the truth of the prediction, he went to Jerusalem anyway, even against the expressed desires of other disciples. Personal guidance should be viewed as a confirmation of what God has already shown you, and if there is not God given witness in your own spirit, then any proffered personal guidance should be rejected.

3. WHAT THE SCRIPTURES TEACH ABOUT THE GIFT OF PROPHECY

A. For Speaking Supernaturally To Men (1 Cor 14:3)

Conveying the mind of the Spirit directly to the Church, resulting in edification, exhortation and comfort.

B. Prophecy Is Superior To Tongues And Interpretation Because It Is Instantly Intelligible

In a public assembly, the gift of tongues requires an interpreter, but prophecy does not. With prophecy there is also no danger of a message in tongues occurring without an accompanying interpretation, which is unscriptural.

C. Prophecy Convinces Unbelievers (the unlearned or uninitiated) (1 Cor 14:24, 25).

The 'unlearned' are those who are ignorant of the truth and the teaching and worship of the Church.

Through the operation of prophecy they will ...

1. *Be convinced of all.*
2. *Be judged of all.*
3. *Have the secrets of their hearts made manifest.*
4. *Fall down before God and surrender in humility.*
5. *Come to worship God.*
6. *Acknowledge that God is among you of a truth.*

D. Prophecy Provides Threefold Ministry To The Church (1 Cor 14:3)

1. *Oikidome* – “Edification” is a combination of two Greek words: *Oikos* (house), and *dome* (a form of the Greek word for ‘to build’). Therefore, the first of the threefold ministry of this gift is “to help build the Lord’s house” (the Church). The use of this word indicates prophecy aids spiritual growth. The function of this, as with all spiritual gifts, is distinct but complementary to the written Word.
2. *Parakleesis*, translated “exhortation”, means a ‘calling near’. Its use here has the sense of a persuasive discourse, a stirring address, instructive, admonitory, consolatory, or powerful discourse. The exhortation stimulates believers to achieve the height of the theme of the prophecy. It is also significant that the word “Comforter,” referring to the Holy Spirit, is *parakleetos*, based on exactly the same verb as *parakleesis*.
3. *Paramuthia*, translated “comfort”, means to speak kindly or soothingly to someone. Prophecy should have the element in it which speaks in order to soothe and pacify, by speaking persuasively and tenderly.
4. Prophecy is usually all three of these functions expressed in one message. The Church today is desperately in need of God given, properly controlled prophecy. Together with the anointed preaching of the Word, it will probably do more than anything else to bring revival blessing and power to the Church.

E. Prophecy Functions So That Believers May Learn (1 Cor 14:31)

This does not refer to doctrine which is ministered from the Word through a teacher rather than a prophet. It functions rather that the believers may learn spiritual truths and things for their edification, comfort and exhortation. Such truth must be tested by the written Word before being digested.

F. We Are To Desire This Gift And Covet It (1 Cor.14:1,39).

G. The Person Operating The Gift Is Responsible For Its Use Or Misuse (1 Cor 14:32)

Prophecy is not an uncontrolled utterance. Rather it properly functions under the prophet's authority. The prophet, not God, is responsible for any disorderly misuse of the gift. All prophecy is suspect unless it has been tested and approved by acknowledged prophets, otherwise it would not have to be submitted to the test. Some persons prophesy in the first person ("I, the Lord, speak unto you ...") unconsciously trying to shift the responsibility of the utterance 100% to God. It is wise to avoid this practice, since prophetic utterance, like the other gifts, is a cooperative effort between God and the prophet, but under the prophet's control.

H. Prophecy Is To Be Controlled (1 Cor 14:29, 31, 32)

The restrictions set forth in these verses seem to imply that the prophets must speak one at a time, and not more than three utterances should take place in any one meeting. The ideal seems to be two – or at the most three. "*All may prophesy* [implied: [‘over a period of time’]]" doesn't conflict with the above restrictions. Prophecy is not an uncontrolled utterance, but must function within biblical boundaries.

I. Prophecy May Be Received At One's Baptism in the Spirit (Acts 19:6), But Does Not Take the Place of Tongues As An Initial Evidence

It may also be received later in one's experience after having been filled with the Spirit.

J. Prophecy Must Be Exercised by Faith (Rom 12:6).

This is not prophesying by faith, it is operating the gift of prophecy by faith. It Satan can destroy your faith, then he will destroy your use of the gift. It takes more faith to prophesy than to speak in tongues because prophecy is instantly

intelligible and understandable by the congregation, whereas tongues are not intelligible until interpreted.

K. Prophecy Must Be Judged (1 Cor 14:29)

Sometimes the discerning of spirits comes into operation in connection with this. There are three possible sources of inspiration for a prophecy:

1. *The Holy Spirit.*
2. *Evil, lying spirits.*

Isaiah 8: 19 and 20 speaks of people who have familiar spirits which speak through them. In Acts 16:17 we read of an evil spirit speaking through a girl. What she said would probably have been accepted as true prophecy by some had Paul not discerned the evil spirit at its root.

3. *The Human Spirit.*

A person may prophesy out of his own heart, or allow his own ideas and personal thoughts or opinions to influence his utterance. In Jeremiah 23:16 we read of prophets who “*prophesy out of their own hearts.*” They “*speaking a vision of their own hearts and not of the mouth of the Lord.*” See also Ezekiel 13:2 and 3. The spiritual manifestations of the discerning of spirits will enable us to judge the source of an utterance.

4. *There are several things which will always be true of a true prophetic utterance.*
 1. It will edify, exhort and comfort the Church.
 2. It will not contradict the written Word of God.
 3. It will exalt the Lord Jesus Christ, by name.
 4. It will speak to the Church.
 5. It will not break the spirit of the meeting in which it occurs, although it may well change the course of that meeting.
 6. It will be acceptable to the majority of spirit-filled believers present.
 7. There is also the test alluded to in Matthew 7:16. (“*Ye shall know them by their fruits*”). It is safe to reject any so-called prophecy coming from one whose life is a reproach to the cause of Christ.

L. Prophecy Is Not To Be Despised (1 Thess 5:20)

The problems which may arise from time to time with any supernatural manifestations in the Church are no reason to quench the Spirit or despise His manifestations. Nor is the fact that gifts are being operated by persons in whom believers do not have wholehearted confidence grounds for rejecting all prophecy.

1. *It is unscriptural to deny the reality of these gifts.*
2. *It is disobedient not to allow them to operate.*
3. *It is cowardly not to regulate them because of fear.*

According to Joel 2:28, prophecy would have a vital and prominent part in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the Last Days.

“TO ANOTHER, THE DISCERNING OF SPIRITS”: 1 CORINTHIANS 12:10

Discerning of spirits is a more important subject than we generally realize. If this spiritual gift were used more frequently with its counterpart – casting out demons – many of the problems we face today would be greatly minimized.

Discerning of spirits is the third of the revelation gifts: the word of wisdom and the word of knowledge are the other two. It is a divine ability imparted by the Holy Spirit so we can penetrate the spiritual realm and distinguish between the spirit of Satan (evil spirits), the Spirit of God, and the human spirit. By it we can discern the origin of certain actions, teachings, circumstances, etc., that have been inspired by spiritual beings.

This gift is more limited than the other two revelation gifts. The revelation given in this instance is limited to the origin of the behavior in question. Nonetheless, the discerning of spirits is just as supernatural in its operation as are any of the other eight gifts. It supplies the Church with information available no other way.

1. DEMON ACTIVITY AND THE CHURCH

A. The Nature of Demons

To deny the existence of demons is to refute the Bible. Throughout its contents, demons are named, described and taught about in both the Old and New Testaments. There are many and varied views with regard to their origin. The New Testament doesn't teach about their origin; it only presents examples of how to deal with them.

1. *Demons are spirit beings without bodies of their own.*
2. *Demons are limitless in their capacity to indwell other objects.*

In the Scriptures, demons are said to dwell in the heavenly realms, the air, on the earth, in the sea, in humans, in animals and in inanimate idols. (Job 1:7; Matt 8:32; 12:43; Mark 5:13; Luke 11:24; Eph 2:2;6:12; Jude 6; Rev 16:14)

3. *Demons are inherently evil.*

It is important we know this because it isn't always obvious that demonic spirits are incapable of anything good or constructive. Anything they inhabit or influence is spiritually defiled.

4. *They can produce serious physical and mental derangement (Matt 9:32; 15:22; 17:15; Mark 5:1-13; Luke 13:16)*
5. *Demons often influence our thoughts and speech though wholly unsuspected and undetected by us (1 Timothy 4:1, 2).*

B. Demon Activity Among Christians And In The Assembly

In certain of the grosser manifestations of demonization, little discernment is required to identify the hellish source of the activity involved. However, in the context of the Church it is quite a different thing. Here, demonic activity is veiled and subtle, insinuating evil into the life of the Church by counterfeiting God's activity. Entering the gathering place through either an unfortunate, unsuspecting victim or a compliant agent of evil, demons seek entrance into many Christian gatherings with the aim to disrupt, hinder, confuse or render a meeting powerless.

C. The Problems With Demons Among Christians And In The Church

Demons are intelligent, personal spirit-beings. They think, know, and remember. We err if we think of them as "things." Although Jesus Christ has given us the power and authority to trample demons without feet, they aren't

to be trifled with or made fun of. They are responsible for countless incidents of harm in the Church.

The most serious difficulty with demonic activity is that it is impossible to see it by natural means. Since demons are unclean, evil **spirits**, only one **sensitive to the spiritual realm and knowledgeable of spiritual things** can deal effectively with them. **This is why God has equipped the Church with the Holy Spirit's gift of discerning of spirits.**

2. THE GIFT OF DISCERNING OF SPIRITS

A. The Function Of The Gift

The gift of discerning of spirits gives one a supernatural understanding of the nature and activity of spirits. It enables him to distinguish between the divine, satanic and human origin of spiritual activity and reveals the nature of the spirits themselves.

It is easy to confuse the works of the spirit of Satan with those of the Spirit of God: Satan always tries to counterfeit the works of the Holy Spirit. Satan is known as the deceiver, the father of lies, and the serpent. All these titles signify the subtle, crafty deceptiveness which he uses to bring about evil whenever he can. Many times his counterfeit is so plausible that one will be entirely deceived unless someone is present who functions with the supernatural gift of discerning of spirits. If demon activity were always so obviously reeking with evil and wicked intent as we tend to imagine, there would be no use for this gift of the Spirit.

In the account of the girl with the spirit of divination in Acts 16, Paul challenged the spirit which might easily have deceived other servants of God. The girl gave a perfectly true statement when she said, "*These men are servants of the most high God who show to you the way of salvation,*" **but the spirit speaking was an evil spirit.**

Why would an evil spirit advertise the apostles in that fashion? Because it was of no credit or help to the gospel or its ministers to have such a person following them and no doubt causing many to think she was one of them.

B. Incidents Of The Gift In The New Testament

1. *Acts 8:23* – The incident of Peter and the other apostles dealing with Simon the Sorcerer. Peter’s ability to look at the source of Simon’s desire to have their power as evil was an example of discerning of spirits.
2. *Acts 13:8- 12* – Paul discerns and defeats Elymas’ attempt to dissuade the governor from interest in the gospel.
3. *Acts 16:16-20* – Paul and the girl with the spirit of divination.
4. *1 Timothy 4:1, 2* – To expose plausible error in the Church.

C. The Operations And Need For The Gift Today

The gift of discerning of spirits is experiencing its own revival in much of the world today. It can be seen in action in the ministry of many men of God in the present renewal. It is absolutely essential that this gift operate if the Church is going to accomplish her full mission and destroy the works of the devil. There are as many demons in the world today as there were when Jesus walked the earth and in the days of the early Church. Their purpose is as avowedly evil. This supernatural gift is especially necessary for missionaries and workers in heathen lands where Spiritism, Satanism and occultism abound.

D. How The Gift Of Discerning Of Spirits Operates

The first and most obvious function of this gift is to reveal the presence of evil spirits in the life of people or churches. However, it also functions to evaluate the source of a prophetic message, a particular teaching, or some supernatural manifestation. The person functioning with this gift will be able to tell whether the source of the message or act is demonic, divine or merely human. If the source is discerned to be demonic, the person functioning in this gift will also usually be able to reveal.

1. The nature of the demon.

This is what his work is, whether lying, causing infirmity (such as cancer, blindness, dumbness, etc.), unclean behavior and the like.

2. The name of the demon.

This is usually revealed with the nature of the demon, although it isn’t at all uncommon to reveal a demon’s proper name.

3. The number of demons.

As in the case of “Legion”, or Mary, out of whom Jesus cast seven devils, it is not at all uncommon for a person to be demonized by more than one spirit at

a time. This is part of the information revealed by the gift of the discerning of spirits.

4. The strength of particular demons.

Often during an encounter with an evil spirit, the one who functions with the discerning of spirits will know by revelation which of several demons is strongest and has greatest authority.

5. About getting information.

Often, demons will give much information verbally themselves to one they know has supernaturally discerned their presence and who has power to cast them out. However, since demons can be counted on to lie, it is a good idea to treat the information they give with suspicion and count on information supernaturally given by the Holy Spirit.

E. Discerning Of Spirits Doesn't Always Involve Faith To Expel Demons

Although the gift of discerning of spirits is essential for effective deliverance, it is not sufficient by itself. It must work in concert with the gifts of faith and effective miracles. It is those who function with those gifts that usually have the greatest success in casting out demons.

F. Other Means Of Discerning Of Spirits (Trying The Spirits)

Although without the gift of discerning of spirits being in operation it is nearly impossible to assess the presence of demon spirits in their most subtle workings, there are other ways the Scriptures give us to judge whether the source of teaching or behavior may be demonic.

1. Judging "by their fruits" (Matt 7:15-18).

"By their fruits... a good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit." Any form of behavior which is manifestly evil is suspect and possibly rooted in demon activity.

2. Conformity to the Word of God.

It is a basic rule of the Christian life that the Word of God, the Bible, is the only norm of faith and practice. If that conformity is conspicuously absent, the possibility of demonization exists.

3. Blasphemy.

1 Corinthians 12:3 says, *“Wherefore I give you to understand that no man speaking by the Spirit of God calleth Jesus accursed and that no man can say that Jesus is the Lord but by the Holy Ghost.”* To say Jesus is Lord doesn’t mean simply to pronounce the words, but to give heartfelt submission, obedience and allegiance to Jesus’ sovereignty.

4. Heretical Christology.

“Every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God” (1 John 4:3; 2 John 7). One of the chief attacks upon the Church by spiritual wickedness is upon our understanding of Who Jesus is. Most cults which claim Christian origins deviated from truth in their belief about Jesus.