

Preaching at the Bridge

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At The Bridge, we are committed to preaching that faithfully engages the biblical text, proclaims the Gospel, and connects God's Word to the lives of God's people. Our aim is not just to inform but to transform, leading to response, surrender, obedience, and mission.

To that end, we utilize a combination of expositional, topical, and practice-based preaching. Each serves a distinct purpose in forming our people in the way of Jesus, and all three are used thoughtfully and intentionally throughout the year.

- Expositional preaching walks through a specific passage or book of the Bible, verse by verse, allowing the structure and themes of the text to shape the message. This approach fosters biblical literacy, contextual understanding, and theological depth. It helps form our people in the full counsel of Scripture and reminds us that all Scripture is God-breathed and profitable (2 Timothy 3:16–17).
- Topical preaching addresses particular themes, questions, or challenges by drawing from various parts of Scripture. When done well, it is no less biblical. It simply begins with a contemporary concern or discipleship need and brings God's Word to bear on it. This allows us to speak prophetically and pastorally into cultural moments, formation gaps, and areas where our people need clarity, guidance, or encouragement.
- Practice-based preaching introduces and immerses our community in a formative practice of the Christian life, such as sabbath, prayer, silence, hospitality, or fasting. These series often coincide with the start of a group's semester, helping us not only teach about spiritual practices but actually live them together. This approach reinforces that following Jesus is an embodied, habitual way of life shaped by rhythms that retrain our hearts and reorder our loves.

We see biblical precedent for this variety. Jesus addressed topics drawn from everyday life, anchored His teaching in Scripture, and invited people into practices that formed their hearts and habits. The Apostles likewise demonstrated diverse preaching methods, from exposition in synagogues to contextual engagement in public forums like Mars Hill (Acts 17). Paul's instruction to "preach the Word" (2 Timothy 4:2) does not prescribe a single method but points to the centrality of Scripture and the urgency of proclaiming it faithfully.

At The Bridge, the method of preaching follows God's leading. We continually ask: What is God saying to our church in this season? What do our people need to hear, practice, wrestle with, repent of, or step into? Whether we are walking through a Gospel, unpacking Romans, teaching on forgiveness, or inviting our people into sabbath, our aim is always to bring people face-to-face with Jesus and into deeper trust, obedience, and apprenticeship.

Regardless of method, faithful preaching requires deep study, humble submission to God's Word, and Spirit-led communal discernment. What matters most is not the category but the fruit: Is Jesus being exalted? Are people being saved? Are lives being changed? Is the Gospel clear? Are believers being rooted in Scripture, formed in Christlikeness, and sent into God's mission?

In short, we embrace expositional, topical, and practice-based preaching not as competing strategies but as complementary tools for making disciples who are with Jesus, becoming like Him, for the sake of the world.

What Is a Sermon at The Bridge

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1. Faithfully engages the biblical text.
2. Proclaims the Gospel.
3. Connects God's Word to the lives of God's people.
4. Engages the imagination.
5. Aims to transform, not just inform.
6. Leads to some kind of response.
7. Sends people out to live this truth where they live, work, and play.

The sermon is a sacred event in which the preacher proclaims the Good News of Jesus, inviting the listener to surrender, trust, and active participation in the mission of God in the world.

At the Bridge, we have three primary types of sermon series:

1. Exegetical: This is where we walk through a specific biblical text.
2. Topical: This is where we discover how God's Word equips us for modern issues, problems, and opportunities today.
3. Practice: At the start of each group's semester, we spend a few weeks introducing an ancient practice to focus on and live out as a community (i.e. sabbath, prayer, silence, fasting, etc.) See: bridge.tv/practices

Church Calendar

In addition to expositional, topical, and practice-based preaching, The Bridge intentionally follows the historic rhythms of the Church calendar. While we do not observe every feast or season, we embrace key moments that have shaped Christian worship for centuries. Seasons like Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter, and Pentecost serve as anchors in our preaching and worship life, helping form our people in the story of Jesus across the year. These seasons remind us that the Gospel is not an abstract set of ideas but a lived narrative we inhabit together. As a result, our teaching, worship, visuals, and congregational practices will often reflect these rhythms, inviting our community to slow down, pay attention, and be shaped by the life, death, resurrection, and reign of Jesus.

Big Idea

If you can't say the main point of your message in a single sentence, your community will never remember it. As Howard Hendricks used to say, "A mist in the pulpit is a fog in the pews."

I like to think in terms of head, heart, hands.

- What do you hope people will think? (head)
- What do you hope people will feel? (heart)
- What do you hope people will do? (hands)

Presence, Formation, Mission

Presence, Formation, Mission

Because our mission is to *be with Jesus, become like Him, for the sake of the world*, we plan our preaching calendar through the lens of Presence, Formation, and Mission. These three movements are not abstract ideas. They flow directly from the invitation of Jesus in Matthew 4:19:

“Follow me (Presence), and I will make you (Formation) fishers of men (Mission).”

Jesus’ first call was not primarily, “Learn from me,” or, “Serve me,” but “Follow me.” It is a call that demands repentance, surrender, reorientation, and abiding. To be with Jesus is not passive. It means leaving nets behind, turning from old patterns, submitting to His kingship, and ordering one’s entire life around His presence. Because of this, Presence in our preaching is never merely contemplative. It is evangelistic. It confronts competing allegiances. It names sin. It invites people into the costly but life-giving decision to entrust themselves fully to Jesus.

Presence also speaks to helping our community slow down, pay attention, and become aware of God’s nearness. Some series are intentionally crafted to cultivate intimacy with Jesus, recover rest, practice stillness, deepen prayer, or reorient hearts in a cultural moment defined by hurry and distraction. These messages remind us that discipleship begins not with doing but with abiding.

Formation then describes the Spirit’s ongoing work in shaping us into Christlikeness. Jesus does not call us to follow Him and then leave us unchanged. He promises, “I will make you.” Our preaching must therefore cultivate habits, virtues, practices, and biblical literacy that allow the Spirit to reshape our hearts, desires, and lives. These messages train people to live in the story of God, not simply hear it.

Mission flows naturally from Presence and Formation. The more we follow Jesus and allow Him to shape us, the more He sends us to neighborhoods, tables, workplaces, schools, jails, and the margins. Mission is not an activity for the spiritually elite; it is the overflow of a life surrendered to and formed by Jesus. Our preaching helps people see this biblical trajectory and equips them to embody it with courage, humility, and hope.

As we design each year’s preaching plan, we zoom out to ensure a healthy rhythm of all three movements. Some seasons emphasize repentance and returning to Jesus (Presence). Others focus on practices that deepen discipleship (Formation). Others call us outward with clarity, compassion, and conviction (Mission). And many series intentionally interweave all three movements, because in the life of a disciple, they always belong together.

This framework keeps our preaching focused, balanced, and missionally aligned. Most of all, it keeps Jesus’ invitation at the center:

Come to Me. Be shaped by Me. Be sent with Me.

That is the movement of the Gospel, and we want our preaching calendar to reflect it every single year.

Rhetoric and the Work of Preaching

Rhetoric and the Work of Preaching

While preaching at The Bridge is grounded in Scripture, shaped by communal discernment, and empowered by the Holy Spirit, we also recognize that faithful preaching requires attentiveness to how truth is communicated. For generations, Christian preachers have drawn from the insights of classical rhetoric as a way of stewarding their words with wisdom, clarity, and pastoral sensitivity. Good rhetoric serves the Gospel by helping the preacher speak truth in ways people can actually hear.

Aristotle identified three core dimensions of persuasion, all of which appear in biblical preaching: ethos, logos, and pathos

Ethos refers to the character of the preacher. As Philip Brooks famously said, "Preaching is the sharing of the Gospel through one's personality." Our lives must inhabit the story we preach. If we are not being formed into Christlikeness, our words will eventually lose weight.

Logos concerns the clarity and coherence of the message. Faithful preaching uses Scripture thoughtfully and logically, whether moving deductively from biblical truths to daily application or inductively from lived stories to theological insight. Reason alone cannot transform a heart, yet biblical logic helps people see the beauty, coherence, and trustworthiness of the Gospel.

Pathos reflects the emotional resonance of preaching. Jesus Himself engaged the emotions of His listeners with compassion, lament, righteous anger, and joy. Emotion is not a substitute for truth, yet it is often the doorway through which truth is received. Wise preachers steward emotion with humility, avoiding manipulation while helping people feel the gravity and goodness of the Gospel.

In all of this, rhetoric is never a performance tool. It is a pastoral tool, helping us communicate the Good News with integrity, clarity, and love. When used faithfully, it reinforces, not replaces, the conviction that preaching is a Spirit-led act of proclaiming Jesus for the transformation of God's people.

Teaching Team Process

Teaching Team Process

At The Bridge, preaching is not a solo endeavor but a communal one. Each sermon is shaped through the collaborative work of our Teaching Team, a group made up of diverse voices and perspectives. About two and a half weeks before a sermon is delivered, the preacher submits a first draft to the team for review.

The team then provides thoughtful feedback that spans a wide range of areas: theological clarity, biblical accuracy, cultural awareness, and pastoral sensitivity. We consider how transitions flow, how humor lands, how different demographics might hear a statement, and how well the sermon connects to our mission of helping people be with Jesus, become like Him, for the sake of the world.

This process not only sharpens the preacher's message but also reflects the communal nature of discernment and proclamation. By bringing multiple perspectives to the table, we seek to ensure that what is preached is faithful to God's Word, attentive to our cultural moment, and compelling for the people God has entrusted to our care.

Congregational Feedback

In addition to the work of our Teaching Team, every week we invite a rotating group of people from our church to offer feedback on the sermon. We do this through a simple form that asks for reflections on what was most compelling, what could be improved, and what advice might be helpful for the future.

This process ensures that a wide variety of voices, from different ages, backgrounds, and experiences, are continually shaping our preaching. The form includes both qualitative and quantitative questions, ranging from clarity of the Gospel and the use of Scripture to how humor, visuals, or transitions were received.

By gathering feedback from the congregation, we not only refine the craft of preaching but also practice mutual discipleship. Listening in this way helps us see how God's Word is landing in real time, what resonates, what confuses, and what challenges or encourages our people. It also underscores that preaching at The Bridge is not a one-directional monologue but part of an ongoing dialogue between leaders and the congregation as we learn together what it means to be with Jesus, become like Him, for the sake of the world.

Annual Teaching Offsite

Each year, our Teaching Team gathers for an extended offsite dedicated to prayerfully discerning, dreaming, and designing the next 18–24 months of sermons at The Bridge. This offsite is one of the most important communal rhythms in our preaching culture because it embodies our conviction that preaching is not merely content creation but Spirit-led, community-shaped discernment about what God is saying to our church in this season and the next.

This day gives us space to step out of the tyranny of the urgent and into a posture of attentiveness. We listen to Scripture. We listen to one another. We listen to the aches, questions, hopes, and longings of our people. We listen for the Spirit's guidance as we ask:

Where is God already moving? What does our church need in order to be with Jesus, become like Him, and live for the sake of the world?

The offsite is intentionally structured around both strategic planning and spiritual discernment:

1. Prayer and Communion with God

We begin by grounding ourselves in silence, Scripture, and open-handed prayer. Because every sermon “always begins with dedicated, focused, earnest time in prayer, silence, and Scripture,” our long-range planning begins the same way.

2. Reviewing the Spiritual Landscape of Our Church

We discuss what we’re hearing from our congregants, small groups, staff, and ministry leaders. What themes are emerging? Where are people struggling, growing, or seeking understanding? What cultural realities are shaping their discipleship right now?

3. Identifying Core Discipleship Needs

We map out the major discipleship gaps that need sustained attention, biblical literacy, cultural engagement, spiritual practices, relational wholeness, formation in the way of Jesus, mission, and the big theological anchors that shape a resilient faith.

4. Drafting Potential Series

Out of that shared discernment, we begin sketching possible exegetical series, topical series, and practice series, in alignment with our teaching philosophy: preaching that “faithfully engages the biblical text, proclaims the Gospel, connects God’s Word to the lives of God’s people, engages imagination, aims to transform, and sends people out to live the truth.”

5. Sequencing the Calendar

We arrange series into a coherent arc, attentive to the church calendar (Advent, Lent, Holy Week), formation rhythms, groups semesters, Baptism Sundays, and cultural moments, so that the year has both theological depth and pastoral intentionality.

6. Considering Diversity of Voice and Perspective

Because our preaching process is communal, we identify who will preach various series, ensuring a diversity of perspectives, styles, and experiences that sharpen the preaching and broaden the impact.

This annual rhythm anchors our preaching ministry in wisdom, unity, and foresight, helping us avoid reactive preaching and instead cultivate a long, faithful obedience in the same direction.

It ensures that our sermons across the year are not isolated talks, but a cohesive discipleship journey that forms our people over time in the way of Jesus. It gives us the margin to create thoughtful, biblically rich, creatively engaging, mission-driven preaching that serves the whole church.

Ultimately, the offsite allows us to hold the preaching ministry with open hands before God:

What does faithfulness look like in this next season? How can our preaching lead people more deeply into the presence of Jesus and more faithfully into His mission?

(We will, on occasion, survey the church, sometimes on high-visitor days like Easter, to get a sense of the needs, pain points, longings, and gaps our community is feeling to help inform our sermon planning)

Preaching Preparation

Preaching Preparation

Every sermon always begins with dedicated, focused, earnest time in prayer, silence, and Scripture. There's no power without God's Spirit and God's Word working in the life of the communicator.

STRUCTURE

WELCOME

Introductions, welcome, pastoral charge, open-handed prayer.

WOW

This is the intro/hook. How do we grab interest or create intrigue right off the bat?

WHY

This is the tension. What is the problem to be solved for the listener? Why should/would anyone care about what I'm going to share? What problem does this solve or point point does it address today?

WORD

This is the meat. What does God's Word actually say about this?

WON (GOSPEL)

This is the clear gospel proclamation and invitation, pointing clearly to Jesus as the means of healing, restoration, forgiveness, and new life.

WHAT NOW?

This is the application/response. What do we want people to actually do in light of this?

WE

This is Kingdom imagination. What would it look like if, by God's grace, we actually lived as if what we just learned was true? How do we more deeply surrender to God and his Kingdom?

BIG IDEA

If you can't say the main point of your message in a single sentence, your audience will never remember it. As Howard Hendricks used to say, "A mist in the pulpit is a fog in the pews."

People rarely remember everything you said. They usually remember:

- the tension,
- the bottom line,
- the story,
- and the picture you gave them.

So spend less time trying to say everything and more time helping them see one thing clearly.

TRUTH (Structure)

- T - Teach
- R - Reason (Convince)
- U - Unsettle (Move)

- T - Train (Apply)
- H - Hope

GRACE (Audience)

- G - Guilty (Sinner)
- R - Ruptured (Victim)
- A - Able (Gifted)
- C - Cherished (Beloved)
- E - Empowered

Explain it.

What do you need to explain because they don't understand?

Defend it.

What do you need to prove because they don't agree?

Stir it.

How do you inspire because they're not motivated?

Show it.

What do you need to make concrete because they're not living it?

—

Confront sin.

→ Sinner (doer of evil)

How will hearts resist, distort, justify, or weaponize this?

What idols compete here?

How does this break sin's power?

Comfort pain.

→ Victim (receiver of evil)

Where does this hurt?

What fear or trauma blocks this?

How does this alleviate suffering and dignify the wounded?

Mobilize gifts.

→ Gifted (doer of good)

What obedience is required?

How does this summon mission?

Where are people already positioned to act?

Reveal grace.

→ Beloved (receiver of good)

How does this show God's delight and commitment?

How does this reframe identity?

Where does this offer rest and shalom?

WRITING GUIDE

1. Start with a burden.

What keeps surfacing? A text, tension, question, problem, observation, story, or burden.

2. Find the tension.

What do people want to know?

What do they need to know?

The sermon lives in the overlap.

3. Let it simmer.

Clarity rarely arrives on command. Pray. Read. Think. Wait.

4. Craft the bottom line.

One sticky sentence.

If people remember one thing, what is it?

5. Build the message around four questions.

- What do they need to know?
- Why do they need to know it?
- What do they need to do?
- Why should they do it?

6. Move through the six movements.

WOW

Opening hook/idea

WHY

Create thirst. Raise tension. Show why anyone should care.

WORD

Teach the text. Explain. Illuminate. Connect Scripture to life.

WON

What Jesus declares, embodies, accomplished.

WHAT NOW

Get practical. What response does this require?

WE

Cast vision. Imagine a different future if this is true.

7. Test it.

Run it through trusted people.

Where are they confused? Bored? Inspired?

8. Understand it, don't memorize it.

Know the flow well enough that you can have a conversation, not recite a script.

THE P.R.E.A.C.H. TOOLKIT

- Picture - word pictures and metaphors

- Rhyme - memorable wording
- Echo - repetition
- Alliteration - repeated sounds
- Contrast - tension between ideas
- Hook - a sticky bottom line

COLOR CODING

Red = Appears on the screen

Blue = Carefully crafted, something I want to say verbatim.

Green = Personal story. I know I can walk away from my notes because it's already internalized.

Pink = Some sort of crowd participation.

Highlighted = Indicates a shift or movement in the overall arc of the message (think chapters)

I like to think in terms of head, heart, hands.

- What do you hope people will think? (head)
- What do you hope people will feel? (heart)
- What do you hope people will do? (hands)

Preaching Research

Preaching Research

Faithful preaching requires more than just exegesis. It requires imagination, curiosity, and careful attention to the world we live in. When preparing a sermon, here are the primary research streams I seek to prioritize and integrate:

Relevant Commentary

Always begin with Scripture and allow trusted commentaries to help unpack meaning. Look for insights into language, grammar, historical context, and theological depth. This grounds the sermon in the authority of God's Word rather than the creativity of the preacher.

Brain Science

Good preaching doesn't just convey information, it fosters transformation. Research in neuroscience shows us how people learn, remember, and change. Insights into attention spans, memory formation, and emotional engagement help shape sermons that actually stick.

Social Science

We preach to real people in real contexts. Drawing on sociology, psychology, and anthropology helps us better understand cultural trends, relational dynamics, and human behavior. This connects biblical truth to the actual lives and struggles of our congregation.

Quotes (Including Women, People of Color, People of Antiquity)

Diverse voices remind us that the Gospel is not bound to one culture, time, or perspective. Intentionally incorporating voices from women, people of color, and people throughout church history enriches the sermon and reflects the global, multiethnic Kingdom of God.

Art

Art has a way of saying what words alone cannot. Paintings, poetry, music, and film help awaken the imagination. Art reminds us that beauty is not peripheral to the Gospel but intrinsic to it, pointing us to the creativity of the Creator.

Cultural Analysis

Preaching requires reading both the Word of God and the world around us. Paying attention to cultural trends, news, media, and the stories shaping our communities allows us to speak prophetically and pastorally into the moment we are in.

History

Understanding historical events, movements, and figures brings depth to our sermons. Whether it's the history behind a biblical passage or a modern example from church history, historical awareness helps situate God's story in the larger story of the world.

Intro/Hook

The sermon must begin with intrigue. A good hook, whether a story, statistic, or image, grabs attention and prepares the heart to listen. Researching possible entry points is as important as studying the text itself.

Sticky Statements

Memorable phrases help truth travel. As Howard Hendricks used to say, "A mist in the pulpit is a fog in the pew." Craft short, portable statements that the congregation can carry into their week.

Metaphors/Analogies/Illustrations

Jesus often used parables and images drawn from everyday life. Metaphors, analogies, and illustrations create bridges from ancient truth to modern understanding. They also help engage thinkers, feelers, and doers alike.

Preaching Evaluation

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These are in addition to the required theological, hermeneutical, ecclesiological grounding that every sermon at The Bridge is required to have.

Evaluation 1: The Teacher's Triad

People tend to learn 1 of 3 ways: Thinking, Doing or Feeling (Called to Teach by Dr. William Yount). Did my sermon connect with:

- Thinkers?
- Doers?
- Feelers?

Evaluation 2: Answering Every Audience's Questions

Audiences subconsciously ask themselves 3 basic questions of any teacher:

1. Does the teacher know what he/she's talking about?
2. Does the teacher care what he/she's talking about?
3. Does the teacher care about me?

Did I answer all 3 questions in my sermon?

(Hints: the length of your sermon, your cadence, your vulnerability, etc. all help answer these questions)

Evaluation 3: Levity vs. Intensity

Were there constant flows from moments of levity to moments of intensity?

Good questions to ask re: Intensity

- What was the most intense moment of my sermon?
- When did I "have them?"
- When could you have heard a pin drop?

Good questions re: levity

- What was the most fun moment of my sermon?
- Did I ever make them laugh so much they clapped?

(Axiom: If they're laughing, they're learning.)

Evaluation 4: Was I myself?

Was it my voice or did I accidentally fall into the temptation of trying to emulate one of my heroes?

Another good question to ask is, "Who was I speaking to?" If I was speaking to my seminary professor, the biggest giver in the room, my biggest critic in the room, etc... I probably missed the actual audience.

Evaluation 5: Did the tail wag the dog?

Did I rely too much on any illustration or story?

Evaluation 6: Were my stories/illustrations memorable?

Will people remember the "why" of my illustrations or just the story itself? (Hint: Use the same verbiage when telling your story as when you apply your story.)

Evaluation 7: Personal Reflection

Was there anything I learned about myself in this sermon? (Hint: This usually only comes from watching or listening to yourself.)

Evaluation 8: Audience Reflection

Was there anything I learned about my audience?

- Did I learn anything about their sense of humor?
- Did I hit a limit on personal vulnerability that disallowed them from following the sermon?

Evaluation 9: Did I “miss” any subset of the audience?

- Did women connect with my sermon?
- Did people of color connect with my sermon?
- Did high school students connect with my sermon?
- Did single people connect with my sermon?
- Did older adults connect with my sermon?

Evaluation 10: Was the Gospel clearly and compellingly articulated?

- The most important aspect of any sermon is the clear presentation of the Gospel for people to respond to.

Questions in Different Decades of Your Life

Questions in Different Decades of Your Life (Gordan MacDonald)

One of the most important questions a preacher can ask is: *Who is sitting in the room?* People hear sermons through the lens of their stage of life. The questions keeping a twenty five year old awake at night are often very different from those weighing on someone in their sixties or seventies. Understanding the dominant questions of each decade helps a preacher connect timeless truth to present realities. It allows us to move beyond merely explaining a text and begin addressing the hopes, fears, regrets, ambitions, relationships, and longings people are actually carrying into the room. Effective preaching does not change the message, but it does help us understand the audience. When we know the questions people are asking, we can more clearly show how the Gospel speaks to them.

The Questions of your Twenties:

Life is marked by optimism, opportunities and potential. It is an exciting time of possibility and looking forward. Hope and energy are high.

- What kind of a man or woman am I becoming?
- How am I different from my mother or father?
- Where can I find a few friends who will welcome me as I am and who will offer the family-like connections that I need (or never had)?
- Can I love, and am I lovable?
- What will I do with my life?
- What is it that I really want in exchange for my life's labors?
- What parts of me in my life need correction?
- Around what person or conviction will I organize my life?

The Questions of your Thirties:

Spiritual life changes for people in their thirties. The spiritual questions no longer center on the ideals of youth but on the realities of life that is tough and unforgiving. 30-somethings are likely to see things in themselves they thought they might have overcome by now, simply by growing up.

- How do I prioritize the demands being made on my life?
- How far can I go in fulfilling my sense of purpose?
- Where are the people with whom I know I walk through life?
- What does my spiritual life look like? Do I even have time for one?
- Why am I not a better person?

The Questions in your Forties:

The complexities of life further accelerate and we begin to recognize that we can no longer shrug off our flaws and failures as youthfulness and inexperience. We are now grownups and expected to handle the bumps and bruises of life with unshakable courage. The expectation is that one should be solid. And yet, if one listens carefully, he might hear the word trapped used in the questions that now rise.

- Who was I as a child, and what powers back then influenced the kind of person I am today?
- Why do some people seem to be doing better than I?
- Why am I often disappointed in myself and others?
- Why are limitations beginning to outnumber options?
- Why do I seem to face so many uncertainties?

- What can I do to make a greater contribution to my generation? Or, what would it take to pick up a whole new calling in life and do this thing I've always wanted to do?

The Questions of your Fifties:

They prefer not to think about it, but the fact is they have moved across life's middle. Now one finds himself or herself wondering how many years one has left. It is a time of friends dying, marriages dissolving, and people moving to places of retirement. It can be sobering. It is a frightening moment when one discovers that younger people may know more than you.

- Why is time moving so fast?
- Why is my body becoming unreliable?
- How do I deal with my failures and my successes?
- How can my spouse and I reinvigorate our relationship now that the children are gone?
- Who are these young people who want to replace me?
- What do I do with my doubts and fears?
- Will I have enough money for the retirement years if there are health problems and economic downturns?

The Questions of your Sixties:

- When do I stop doing the things that have always defined me?
- Why do I feel ignored by a large part of the younger population?
- Why am I curious about who is listed in the obituary column of the papers, how they died, and what kinds of lives they live?
- Do I have enough time to do all the things I've dreamed about in the past?
- Who will be around me when I die?
- If I'm married, which one of us will go first, and what is it like to say goodbye to someone with whom you've shared so many years of life?
- Are the things I believe in capable of taking me to the end?
- Is there really life after death?
- What do I regret?
- What are the chief satisfactions of these many years of living?
- What have I done that will outlive me?

The Questions of your Seventies and Eighties:

The questions of these decades blend together and share similarities.

- Does anyone realize, or even care, who I once was?
- Is anyone aware that I once owned or managed a business, threw a mean curveball, taught school, possessed a beautiful solo voice, had an attractive face?
- Is my story important to anyone?
- How much of my life can I still control?
- Is there anything I can still contribute?
- Why this anger and irritability?
- Is God really there for me?
- Am I ready to face death?
- And when I die, how will it happen? Will I be missed, or will the news of my death bring relief?
- Heaven? What is it like?

13 Essential Elements of a Sermon

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1. INTRO

In the first 3 minutes (90 seconds) what the talk is about & why it matters

2. TEXT

The Scripture that the talk has been submitted to and is based upon

3. INSIGHT OF TEXT

The nugget of wisdom found in personal study that inspires study

4. FRAMEWORK

The systematic way of structuring the text and talk for clarity and consistency

5. CHORUS

A repeatable and memorable rhythmic phrase that sings the sermon

6. CULTURAL QUOTE

How the current cultural moment is related to the talk in support or opposition

7. CHURCH HISTORY QUOTE

A reference that offers historical credibility or cultural realignment

8. STORY or ILLUSTRATION to LAUGH

Story that reveals our shared humanity and to not take yourself too seriously

9. STORY or ILLUSTRATION to CRY

Story that reveals our shared pain, disappointment, and loss

10. NONBELIEVER

Acknowledge those with questions, doubts, or opposition to Christian faith

11. QUESTION

Questions to ask during and after the talk for learning to sink deeper

12. PRACTICE

Learning through some action in the next 24 hours or next 7 days

13. BLESSING

Prayer for the people as they go into the week and the world

Originally from Jon Tyson's "9 Core Elements of The Talk", April 2017

Preaching/Teaching/Writing Resources

Preaching/Teaching/Writing Resources

BOOKS

- Communicating For A Change, Andy Stanley and Lane Jones.
- The Jazz of Preaching, Kirk Byron Jones.
- The Witness of Preaching, Thomas G. Long
- Preaching By Ear, Dave McClellan
- Achtemeier, Elizabeth. Creative Preaching
- Achtemeier, Elizabeth. Preaching from the Old Testament
- Bal, Mieke. Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative
- Black, C. Clifton. The Rhetorical of the Gospel
- Buttrick, David. Homiletic: Moves and Structures
- Brueggemann, Walter. Texts Under Negotiation, The Bible and Postmodern Imagination
- Brueggemann, Walter. Reverberations of Faith: A Theological Handbook of Old Testament Themes
- Dyrness, William. How Does America Hear The Gospel?
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Preaching for Mission

Preaching for Mission

At The Bridge, we believe preaching should do more than transfer information. It should form disciples, shape imagination, and mobilize people into God's mission.

Every sermon should help people see that following Jesus is not merely about attending church services or accumulating biblical knowledge. It is about becoming the kind of people who embody the way of Jesus in everyday life and participate in what God is doing in the world.

As you prepare and preach, keep the following principles in mind:

Preach to equip, not impress.

According to Ephesians 4, pastors and teachers are given to equip God's people for the work of ministry. The goal is not admiration for the communicator but activation of the congregation. Success is measured less by how well people remember the preacher and more by how faithfully they follow Jesus throughout the week.

Help people see themselves as sent.

Every follower of Jesus is a missionary in the context where God has placed them. Whether they are teachers, students, retirees, business owners, healthcare workers, parents, or neighbors, God intends to work through ordinary people in ordinary places for extraordinary Kingdom purposes.

Connect the text to God's mission.

Every passage fits within the larger story of God's redemptive work in the world. As you teach the text faithfully, help people see how it reveals God's heart for reconciliation, restoration, justice, mercy, discipleship, evangelism, and renewal.

Move beyond information to formation.

Ask not only, "What should people know?" but also, "Who should they become?" and "What should they do?" Faithful preaching calls for response. It invites people toward obedience, witness, generosity, hospitality, peacemaking, service, and disciple-making.

Preach with conviction and hope.

The power of preaching is not found in cleverness, charisma, or persuasion. The Spirit of God works through the Word of God. Trust Scripture. Preach with confidence, humility, passion, and expectancy.

Celebrate sending, not merely gathering.

A healthy church is not defined only by how many people attend but by how many people are living as ambassadors of Jesus throughout the week. We gather to worship, learn, encourage, and be formed. We scatter to love, serve, witness, and participate in God's mission.

Keep the mission and vision in view.

The mission of The Bridge is to be with Jesus and become like Him for the sake of the world. The vision of The Bridge is to bring the Gospel to every table. Wherever possible, help people imagine what it looks like to live out these realities in practical, everyday ways.

As you prepare your message, consider these questions:

- How does this text help people become more like Jesus?
- What aspect of God's mission does this text reveal?
- How does this passage move people from consumerism to participation?
- What specific response is this text inviting?

- How might this sermon help bring the Gospel to more tables in our community?

The goal is not simply that people leave informed. The goal is that people leave formed, equipped, and sent.

Cultural Engagement & Teaching Venues

Cultural Engagement & Teaching Venues

At The Bridge, we believe that Jesus is Lord over every square inch of life. There is no part of the human experience that falls outside the scope of His reign. Questions surrounding sexuality, identity, politics, technology, justice, race, economics, family, suffering, and culture are not merely cultural questions; they are discipleship questions. They shape how people understand themselves, relate to others, and ultimately respond to God.

Because of this, we seek to avoid two equal and opposite errors.

On one side is the temptation to avoid difficult issues altogether. This approach often arises from a desire to preserve unity, avoid controversy, or maintain broad appeal. While those motivations may be understandable, silence comes at a cost. The questions shaping people's lives do not disappear simply because the church chooses not to address them. Human beings are always being formed by something. If the church does not help people think Christianly about the world around them, other voices will gladly step in and do so instead.

On the other side is the temptation to make cultural commentary the center of ministry. Churches can become reactive, consumed by the latest controversy, and driven more by the news cycle than by the Gospel. In these environments, Jesus gradually becomes secondary to politics, ideology, or culture wars. The result is often anxiety, division, and spiritual exhaustion rather than mature discipleship.

We reject both approaches.

Our goal is neither to ignore culture nor to obsess over it. Our goal is to form people who can faithfully follow Jesus within it.

As followers of Jesus, we are called to be both rooted and responsive. We must be rooted in Scripture, historic Christian orthodoxy, and the way of Jesus while remaining responsive to the real questions, challenges, opportunities, and pressures facing people in the present moment. Faithfulness requires both stability and attentiveness.

This commitment requires wisdom regarding not only what we teach but also where and how we teach it.

One of our guiding values is this:

“We don't shout from platforms what should be shared around tables.”

This does not mean difficult conversations are avoided. Rather, it reflects our conviction that different environments are designed to accomplish different purposes. Not every conversation belongs in every venue.

The question is not simply, *“Should we talk about this?”*

A better question is, *“What venue will best help our people become more like Jesus?”*

Theological Foundation

The ministry of Jesus demonstrates remarkable flexibility in both message and method.

At times, Jesus preached publicly to large crowds. The Sermon on the Mount is a powerful example of public proclamation, where He announced the realities of God's Kingdom and called people to a new way of life.

At other times, He taught privately to His disciples, explaining truths they were not yet prepared to understand in larger settings. He often reserved deeper explanations for those who were walking closely with Him and learning to live as His followers.

There were also moments when Jesus engaged individuals in deeply personal conversations. Nicodemus came to Him with questions in the night. The Samaritan woman encountered Him at a well. Zacchaeus welcomed Him into his home. Martha and Mary experienced His care and instruction in the context of friendship and relationship. In each case, Jesus communicated truth in a way that fit the person and the setting.

The Apostle Paul followed a similar pattern. He preached publicly in synagogues and marketplaces, reasoned in lecture halls, taught within house churches, and answered questions through letters. While the Gospel never changed, Paul adapted his approach to the audience and environment before him.

Throughout the New Testament, a consistent principle emerges: the message remains unchanged, but the method adapts to the audience and context.

Likewise, our responsibility is not merely to communicate truth but to communicate truth wisely.

Biblical formation involves more than proclamation alone. It requires conversation, reflection, questions, relationships, practice, and ongoing discipleship. Some truths are best proclaimed to a gathered congregation. Others are best explored through discussion and dialogue. Still others are best embodied and worked out in the context of relationships around a table.

Faithful ministry requires all of these approaches.

A Theology of Formation

At The Bridge, we view preaching as an act of formation rather than merely an act of information.

The goal of teaching is not simply to transfer knowledge but to help people become the kind of people who naturally live in the way of Jesus. While knowledge matters, Christian maturity involves far more than acquiring correct information. It involves the transformation of the whole person.

For that reason, our primary question is not, *"What opinion should people hold?"*

Our primary question is, *"What kind of person is Jesus inviting them to become?"*

Many cultural conversations focus primarily on positions and conclusions. While the Gospel certainly speaks to beliefs and convictions, it also reaches deeper than that. Jesus seeks to transform desires, loves, habits, imagination, character, identity, and allegiance. He is not merely shaping what people think; He is shaping who they are.

As a result, our engagement with cultural issues is aimed at cultivating wisdom, humility, discernment, courage, conviction, compassion, and Christlikeness.

Our objective is not simply that people become better at winning arguments.

Our objective is that they increasingly resemble Jesus.

Choosing the Appropriate Venue

Different environments accomplish different purposes. Because of this, we intentionally utilize multiple teaching venues throughout the life of our church. Each venue serves a distinct role in the process of discipleship and formation.

Sunday Sermons

The Sunday sermon is primarily designed for proclamation.

It is the gathered church's weekly opportunity to hear God's Word, encounter the Gospel, worship King Jesus, and be formed together as a community. The sermon serves as a central moment in the life of the church, where Scripture is opened and God's people are called to deeper faithfulness.

For this reason, Sunday preaching should generally focus on the biblical text, the Gospel, spiritual formation, mission, and the larger story of God.

When cultural issues are addressed from the stage, they should emerge naturally from the biblical text, connect directly to discipleship, or represent a significant formation challenge affecting our congregation. Cultural engagement should flow from Scripture rather than from a desire to comment on every issue dominating public conversation.

The Sunday sermon is not intended to function as a weekly cultural commentary, nor is it designed to provide exhaustive treatment of every controversial topic. Sermons prioritize proclamation over debate. Their purpose is not to answer every possible question but to faithfully announce the Good News of Jesus and call people toward trust, repentance, obedience, and mission.

Whenever possible, we seek to move beyond the surface issue and address the deeper discipleship realities underneath it. Political debates often reveal questions of allegiance. Conversations about sexuality frequently touch on identity. Consumerism exposes issues of worship. Technology raises questions about attention and formation. Anxiety often reveals deeper struggles related to trust.

Rather than merely reacting to symptoms, preaching seeks to address the roots.

Groups, Classes, and Table Conversations

Many issues require more dialogue than proclamation.

Questions involving sexuality, gender, politics, race, abortion, technology, mental health, science, suffering, and ethics often contain layers of complexity that cannot be adequately addressed in a thirty-minute sermon. These topics frequently involve personal experiences, emotional realities, and practical implications that require space for thoughtful engagement.

For that reason, groups, classes, and table conversations play an essential role in discipleship.

These environments allow people to ask questions, process ideas, voice concerns, share experiences, learn from one another, and practice disagreement with grace. They create opportunities for mutual learning and relational growth that are difficult to achieve in a large gathering.

Tables have always been central to the ministry of Jesus. Some of His most significant moments of transformation occurred not only through public teaching but through meals, conversations, questions, and relationships. Around tables, people were known, challenged, encouraged, and invited into deeper discipleship.

Because of this, many of our most important conversations should occur in circles rather than rows.

Hot Topics Gatherings

From time to time, the church may create intentional spaces dedicated to contemporary theological and cultural questions.

These gatherings provide opportunities for deeper engagement than a Sunday sermon typically allows. They create room for curiosity, nuance, thoughtful exploration, and meaningful dialogue. This philosophy is reflected in our Hot Topics conversations, which seek to examine what Scripture teaches, how the historic church has wrestled with an issue, and how Christians can engage faithfully in the present moment.

The purpose of these gatherings is not to manufacture controversy or generate unnecessary debate.

The purpose is discipleship.

We want these conversations to be marked by biblical conviction, intellectual honesty, historic rootedness, humility, curiosity, charity, and courage. Difficult questions should neither be feared nor dismissed. Instead, they should be approached thoughtfully and faithfully.

We are not afraid of difficult questions.

We simply believe difficult questions deserve thoughtful environments.

Podcasts, Interviews, and Long-Form Discussions

Some conversations are important but do not fit naturally within the framework of a sermon, class, or small group.

In these situations, podcasts, interviews, roundtable discussions, and other long-form formats can serve as valuable discipleship tools. These environments provide additional space for exploration and allow leaders to engage topics with a level of depth and nuance that is often difficult to achieve elsewhere.

Through these formats, leaders can explore complexity, model healthy dialogue, address common questions, provide additional resources, demonstrate charitable disagreement, and offer perspectives that sermons often cannot accommodate.

These conversations should never compete with preaching. Instead, they exist to support and extend discipleship beyond the Sunday gathering. They provide another setting in which people can wrestle with important questions in the presence of trusted leaders and thoughtful guidance.

Frequency and Context Matter

Not every ministry context requires the same level of engagement with every issue.

The needs of students differ from the needs of retirees. Parents face questions that single adults may not encounter. Young adults navigate challenges that often differ from those experienced by older generations. Effective discipleship requires attentiveness to the realities people are actually facing.

For example, student ministry may require more frequent conversations about sexuality, identity, relationships, technology, and mental health because those issues are especially formative during adolescence and young adulthood. Parenting ministries may need focused discussions about digital formation, discipleship in the home, and the cultural pressures facing children and teenagers.

Our goal is not to give equal attention to every issue.

Our goal is to faithfully equip people for the realities they are actually encountering in their daily lives.

A Guiding Principle

As a general rule, the more complex, emotional, personal, or controversial an issue becomes, the more relational the environment should become.

Large gatherings are excellent for proclamation. Classrooms are excellent for explanation. Circles are excellent for formation. Tables are excellent for discernment.

The church needs all of these environments.

Ultimately, our calling is not to produce people who know how to react to every cultural headline. Our calling is to form people who know how to follow Jesus.

We want to cultivate disciples who are biblically grounded, Spirit-led, intellectually thoughtful, emotionally healthy, relationally mature, and missionally engaged. We want to raise up disciples who can enter difficult conversations without fear, hold deep convictions without hostility, and embody both grace and truth in their relationships with others.

We want to form people who can bring the Gospel to every table they encounter.

That is the goal. Not relevance or retreat, but faithful presence in the way of Jesus.

The Platform-Classroom-Table-Podcast Framework

One of the most important questions we ask when engaging a cultural, theological, or ethical issue is not merely, "Should we talk about this?" but rather, "Where should we talk about this?" Different environments are designed to accomplish different purposes, and wisdom requires matching the conversation to the venue best suited for it.

Platform → Proclaim

The Sunday platform is primarily designed for proclamation. Its purpose is to announce the Good News of Jesus, teach Scripture, call people to discipleship, and help form the gathered church. The platform is at its best when it provides clarity, conviction, vision, encouragement, challenge, and Gospel-centered formation.

Because the platform is largely a one-way communication environment, it is generally not the ideal setting for highly nuanced, exploratory, or deeply interactive conversations. When cultural issues are

addressed from the stage, they should emerge naturally from the biblical text, connect directly to discipleship, or represent a significant formation issue affecting the life of the church. In this setting, the guiding question is: “What does God’s Word proclaim?”

Classroom → Explain

The classroom is designed for explanation. Some topics require more time, historical context, theological depth, and opportunities for questions than a sermon can realistically provide. Classes, workshops, and Hot Topics gatherings allow leaders to carefully unpack complex issues while creating space for learning, clarification, and thoughtful engagement.

In this environment, people can gain a deeper understanding of what Scripture teaches, how Christians have historically approached a particular issue, where faithful believers may disagree, and how followers of Jesus can engage wisely in the present moment. The classroom is therefore guided by the question: “What does God’s Word teach?”

Table → Discuss

The table is designed for conversation. Many issues involve personal experiences, fears, wounds, questions, relationships, and real-life complexities that cannot be adequately addressed through proclamation alone. Around a table, people are known by one another, and there is room for genuine interaction. Questions can be asked, stories can be shared, misunderstandings can be clarified, and people can practice the difficult but essential work of listening, empathy, discernment, and grace.

The ministry of Jesus consistently moved people from crowds to conversations. Many of the most transformative moments in the Gospels occurred around meals, in homes, and within relationships. The table reflects that relational dynamic by creating space for people to wrestle together with what faithful discipleship looks like in everyday life. The guiding question in this setting is: “How do we faithfully live this together?”

Podcast → Explore

The podcast is designed for exploration. Some conversations are important enough to address but are too nuanced, lengthy, or specialized for either a sermon or a classroom setting. Podcasts, interviews, and roundtable discussions create space for leaders to think out loud, explore complexity, answer common questions, share resources, and model thoughtful engagement with difficult topics.

These conversations can provide additional depth without requiring every issue to become a sermon series or a church-wide initiative. They allow listeners to engage at their own pace while benefiting from a more expansive discussion than other environments may permit. The podcast is guided by the question: “What additional wisdom might help us navigate this faithfully?”

A Simple Rule of Thumb

As complexity increases, relational proximity should increase as well. The more emotionally charged, personal, controversial, or nuanced a conversation becomes, the more relational the environment should be. While simple truths can often be proclaimed from a platform, complex truths usually require explanation. Personal truths often call for discussion, and nuanced truths frequently benefit from exploration.

Rows are excellent for proclamation because they allow a community to hear a shared message together. Classrooms are excellent for explanation because they provide space for learning and clarification. Tables

are excellent for discernment because they foster conversation and mutual understanding. Podcasts are excellent for exploration because they allow ideas to be examined in greater depth and detail.

Ultimately, the goal is not merely to communicate information about cultural issues. The goal is to form people who can think, live, love, and lead in the way of Jesus. When deciding where a conversation belongs, the most important question is: "Which environment will best help people become more like Jesus?" The answer to that question should determine the venue.

Lecture: "Preaching as Formation"

Lecture Title: “Preaching as Formation: A Theology of Proclamation in the Way of Jesus”

Guest Lecturer: Ian Simkins

Course: Homiletics: North Central University

INTRODUCTION

Good morning, friends. It’s a real joy to be with you today. First, a word of thanks to Joshua, your professor and my friend, for the invitation. I love him and have been a big fan for a long time. I’m so grateful for the great work he’s done and will continue to do. What a sacred privilege to talk about one of my great passions: the craft and calling of preaching.

STORY: First Sermon I Ever Preached

Before we go any further, I want to start with this premise:

Preaching is not merely the transmission of biblical information but the cultivation of Christlike formation for the sake of the world.

We’re not just exegetes. We’re shepherds. We’re not just proclaimers. We’re spiritual guides. Every sermon is an opportunity to help people *be with Jesus, become like Him, and live for the sake of the world.*

That means preaching is not just about clarity or cleverness, it’s about presence, power, and participation in what God is doing among His people. This quote has been rattling me lately:

“A passion to preach without a burden to study is just a desire to perform.” - HB Charles Jr

I. THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS OF PREACHING

Let’s begin with the why. What is preaching, theologically?

Each week, when we open the Scriptures and proclaim the Word of God, we are not merely performing a task, we are participating in a holy, Spirit-empowered event. Preaching is not just explanation. It is revelation. Not just information. But transformation.

Here are four foundational convictions I have about the nature of preaching:

A. Preaching is Incarnational

Preaching is the embodied witness of the Living Word.

John 1:14 tells us, “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.” The Incarnation is not just a doctrine, it’s a model for preaching. When we preach, we don’t merely offer abstract truths. We embody them. We become participants in the ongoing mystery of God making Himself known through human language, story, tone, and life.

Preaching that is incarnational is rooted in the reality that God still speaks through ordinary vessels. It brings eternity into time, heaven into earth, transcendence into the tangible. The preacher is not simply a lecturer or performer, but a witness to the Word made flesh, made audible.

As Frederick Buechner wrote:

“The Gospel is not only true but also beautiful. Preaching is the art of letting people see that.”

Preaching is incarnational when the Word becomes real, not just in the sermon, but in the preacher. When the messenger and the message are united in character, humility, and holiness.

STORY: Mentor calling me out on parroting the styles of other preachers

B. Preaching is Pneumatological

Preaching is empowered and animated by the Holy Spirit.

We do not preach alone. We don't awaken hearts or convict souls by our eloquence or insight. It is the Spirit who empowers the Word, who illuminates Scripture, and who softens the hearts of listeners.

Paul reminds us in 1 Thessalonians 1:5,

“Our gospel came to you not simply with words but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and deep conviction.”

This is why prayer is not preparation for the sermon, it is the sermon's power source. The preacher prays over the Word, for the people, and for the Spirit's movement, trusting that what happens in the hearts of the listeners is beyond our control, but not beyond God's care.

As Martyn Lloyd-Jones wrote:

“What is preaching? Logic on fire!”

Preaching without the Spirit is noise. Preaching with the Spirit is fire, wind, light, and life. It is the movement of God's presence through the frailty of human speech.

C. Preaching is Ecclesial

When we preach, we are not speaking into a void. We are speaking to a people. A covenant people. A people formed by the Gospel and sent by grace. The primary audience of the sermon is not the curious onlooker or the cultural critic, it is the Church, the beloved bride of Christ.

Paul writes in Ephesians 4:11–13 that Christ gave some

“to be apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up...”

That phrase, *built up*, is crucial. Preaching builds. It strengthens. It forms. It doesn't simply give answers. It gives identity.

The pulpit is not a podium of authority. It is a table of nourishment. It feeds the Church with truth, grace, hope, and conviction.

Preaching is also ecclesial in its attentiveness to context. Every sermon should reflect a deep listening to the unique wounds, questions, and longings of that particular congregation. The preacher is not just a theologian; they are a *pastor-theologian*, one who listens to both Scripture and the people, and speaks into the intersection of the two.

Preaching in this way reminds the Church who she is and what she is for: a community of grace, holiness, and love.

D. Preaching is Missional

But preaching is not only for the gathered, it is for the scattered. It is not only for the Church, but for the world the Church is sent into.

Jesus' first public sermon, in Luke 4, is a declaration of liberation: good news to the poor, freedom for the captives, sight for the blind. Preaching, when it is faithful to the Gospel, is not merely for internal edification, it is for external mission.

Preaching does not terminate on the sermon. It sends the Church into the streets.

A missional sermon calls the people of God to embody the Gospel where they live, work, eat, and play. It forms disciples who live on mission, not just members who attend events.

It's important to note: mission doesn't begin *after* the benediction, it begins *through* the preaching. When we preach justice, reconciliation, hospitality, and the Kingdom of God, we equip the saints to live into their calling as salt and light.

As Lesslie Newbigin put it:

"The Church is the hermeneutic of the Gospel."

This means the world sees and interprets the Gospel through the lives of God's people. And it is the preacher's role to help the Church embody that Gospel with clarity, courage, and compassion.

II. THE FORM OF PREACHING: SHAPING THE MESSAGE

Now let's talk about how I shape a message. For every sermon, I use six movements:

WELCOME, WOW, WHY, WORD, WHAT NOW?, WE

Each section builds upon the previous to form a journey of encounter and transformation.

1. WELCOME – Set the tone with posture and presence

Before a word of exposition is offered, I begin every sermon with a welcome and a moment of open-handed prayer. This is not just a practical gesture, it's a theological posture.

The way we begin matters. It signals who we are, who this time is for, and how we are entering it.

In our church context, I always welcome multiple communities (our campuses, online, and our jail congregation). I want every listener to feel seen and included. This reminds us that the Gospel is for all people, in all places, not just those sitting in a pew.

Then, I lead our church in a moment of silence with open hands.

Open hands say: "I'm here. I'm listening. I'm ready to receive." It's a way of physically embodying the reality that we come not in control, but in surrender. This is a sacred reset. Before we teach the text, we till the soil. Before we proclaim, we posture ourselves to receive.

As Barbara Brown Taylor writes:

"The practice of preaching begins not with speaking, but with listening."

2. WOW – Start with surprise, story, tension, or insight.

This is your hook. It answers, “Why should I listen?” and invites curiosity. A compelling story, cultural insight, or research stat that builds tension works well here.

Good sermons begin by helping people *feel the weight* of the text’s relevance before *explaining* it.

3. WHY – Identify the tension, problem, or gap the text addresses.

This is where I often weave in cultural critique, longing, or existential ache. It’s where I stir up the soil.

If the Gospel is good news, the WHY names the bad news we live with.

4. WORD – The bulk of the sermon. Dive into the text.

This is where we bring rigorous exegesis, historical context, etymology, and commentary to bear.

I usually go verse-by-verse or in short sections, using both academic and pastoral commentary. But always ask: *What is God saying to His people, here and now, through this text?*

Also, I ask myself:

- What is the structure of the text? (Chiasm? Parallelism? Narrative arc?)
- What is the emotional tone? (Lament? Invitation? Warning?)
- How does this reveal the character of God?
- How does this anticipate or reflect Jesus?

The WORD section is not about information but formation. That’s why I include:

- Theological richness
- Cultural insight
- Diverse voices (women, people of color, historical figures, poets, skeptics)
- Stories, metaphors, and sticky statements (I use the acronym P.R.E.A.C.H. to build them)

5. WHAT NOW? – Application, invitation, and practice.

This section bridges theology and discipleship. How do we respond? What do we practice? I often offer one actionable next step, but also leave space for mystery, awe, and conviction.

We don’t just preach for *decisions* but for *discipleship*.

6. WE – Vision and community.

Here, I name what it means to live this out *together*. I connect the message to our mission: to bring the Gospel to every table.

Preaching doesn’t end with “you go do it”, but with “let’s do this together.”

III. THE GOSPEL PUNCH: ALWAYS CHRIST-CENTERED

Every sermon, regardless of the text, culminates in Jesus.

We proclaim:

- His incarnation (God with us)
- His life and ministry (God for us)
- His crucifixion (God suffers with and for us)
- His resurrection (God victorious over death)
- His ascension and reign (God reigning in love)

As Tim Keller says:

“Jesus is the true and better Adam, who passed the test in the garden... Jesus is the true and better Moses... the true and better David...”

A sermon without the Gospel is a motivational speech. A sermon with the Gospel is a Spirit-enabled call into a new way of life.

IV. THE PERSON OF THE PREACHER

The credibility of the message is tethered to the integrity of the messenger.

Preaching is not a performance, it is the overflow of your formation.

As Fred Craddock once said:

“To be a preacher is to be vulnerable before God and neighbor.”

So, I’d ask:

- Do I preach as someone who’s been with Jesus?
- Do I live the practices I call others to?
- Do I love the people I’m speaking to?

Don’t just prepare your sermon. Prepare yourself.

You don’t need to be perfect. But you do need to be present, prayerful, and surrendered.

STORY: Charles Stanley Preaching Conference

V. COMMUNION: PREACHING TO THE TABLE

At our church, every sermon ends with communion. It’s not an afterthought, it’s the culmination.

The sermon leads to the table. Not to our cleverness, but to Christ’s body.

The broken Word proclaimed leads to the broken body shared.

In communion, the Word becomes flesh again.

In communion, the preacher steps aside, and Jesus takes center stage.

CONCLUSION: A HOLY TASK

Preaching is a sacred act. It is not a TED Talk, a theological lecture, or a therapy session, though it can contain elements of all three.

Preaching is one of God’s chosen means of awakening hearts, renewing minds, forming disciples, and transforming communities.

So, preach faithfully.
Preach Christ.
Preach with tears.
Preach with joy.
Preach to the skeptic and the saint.
Preach to the weary and the wondering.
Preach like it matters, because it does.

Let me leave you with this:

“Preach the Gospel. Die. Be forgotten.” – Count Zinzendorf

But also,
“Preach the Gospel. Be faithful. And let the Spirit set the world on fire.”