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FOUNDATION

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The call to preach is manifested in a burning desire to communicate God's truth. It resonates within as a passion that cannot be shaken nor removed. The Holy Spirit Himself sets people apart for the distinct role of preaching (Acts 13:2). The call to preaching is a personal invitation by God that you cannot run from. If God has called you to preach, He will chase you down until you accept His call.

One of the great identifiers of preachers who are "called," as opposed to those who do it to fulfill a job description, is found in the answer to a simple question: If you could do anything else, would you? When the answer to that question is "yes," then the answer of "calling" has also been revealed as "no." A preacher proclaims God's truth because He is compelled to (see Jer. 20:9; 1 Cor. 9:16). Now, whether he carries

out his calling well depends largely on his investment in his own spiritual life, spiritual disciplines, study, preparation, and congregational relationships. These are things that this book, and other similar books, seek to strengthen in men called to preach. But the calling itself comes from God Himself and must serve as the foundation upon which all these tools and materials are laid.

Thus, how can you as a pastor personally know that you are called to preach before you head any more deeply into the content in this book? It's simple. If you are called by God to preach, He will give you an insatiable passion to preach. In addition to other ministry burdens that pastors have, high on that list must be the burden to proclaim God's truth. Pastor, do you have an insatiable passion to preach? By "insatiable" I mean that this passion will keep you up at night just thinking of passages you want to preach and biblical principles you hope to convey. You would preach for free if you had to (and yes, I know, many of you do!). Paul said, "woe is me" if I do not preach the gospel (1 Cor. 9:16). Jeremiah wrote in Scripture that he tried not to do it, but it became like fire shut up in his bones (Jer. 20:9). To be called by God to do something always comes with a passion you cannot shake.

Don't tell me you are called to preach and yet don't have a passion to do it. Because either you haven't been called, or you are so carnal that God can't get through to you. Whom ever God calls, He emboldens. He creates the passion. This is

why people who are called to preach keep talking about how they tried to run from it, but they couldn't get away. God tracked them down. Identify your calling first; then look at how the Bible itself describes a preacher to see how you fit into this summation or can adapt in order to better mirror it. Preaching involves so much more than standing up to speak. It is more than a task to do; it is to be an ongoing mindset. If you aren't willing to make it that, you may want to consider another profession because God says He will hold teachers to a higher level of accountability (James 3:1).

KINGDOM PREACHING

The greatest summary in Scripture of what a preacher is comes from a preacher named Solomon:

In addition to being a wise man, the Preacher also taught the people knowledge; and he pondered, searched out and arranged many proverbs. The Preacher sought to find delightful words and to write words of truth correctly. The words of wise men are like goads, and masters of these collections are like well-driven nails; they are given by one Shepherd. (Eccl. 12:9–11)

This passage proclaims that a preacher must be given to personal reflection (“pondered”), study (“searched out”), and preparation (“arranged”) so that he can preach in such a way that imparts spiritual knowledge. Masters at preaching maximize their messaging in such a way that their words goad their listeners toward Christ, our Shepherd. Any other result indicates that the mode of communication was a speech, not a sermon. Christ is the cornerstone and must be the centerpiece of our congregations’ hearts and minds. While topics may differ and points of emphasis will vary, the overarching content of a sermon must always have the kingdom of God and the Lordship of our Shepherd and Savior, Jesus Christ, in view.

Luke affirmed this primary proclamation role of the preacher when describing the apostle Paul at the conclusion of the book of Acts, where he wrote, “And he stayed two full years in his own rented quarters and was welcoming all who came to him, preaching the kingdom of God and teaching concerning the Lord Jesus Christ with all openness, unhindered” (28:30–31). Over and over in Scripture, we read about the preaching of the kingdom of God and gospel of Christ. Here are just a few examples:

Jesus was going through all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness. (Matt. 9:35)

“This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come.” (Matt. 24:14)

Now after John had been taken into custody, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God. (Mark 1:14)

Soon afterwards, He began going around from one city and village to another, proclaiming and preaching the kingdom of God. (Luke 8:1)

And He sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to perform healing. (Luke 9:2)

“And heal those in it who are sick, and say to them, ‘The kingdom of God has come near to you.’” (Luke 10:9)

The Law and the Prophets were proclaimed until John; since that time the gospel of the kingdom of God has been preached. (Luke 16:16)

But when they believed Philip preaching the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were being baptized, men and women alike. (Acts 8:12)

And he entered the synagogue and continued speaking out boldly for three months, reasoning and persuading them about the kingdom of God. (Acts 19:8)

When they had set a day for Paul, they came to him at his lodging in large numbers; and he was explaining to them by solemnly testifying about the kingdom of God and trying to persuade them concerning Jesus, from both the Law of Moses and from the Prophets, from morning until evening. (Acts 28:23)

Preaching must promote the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ through the proclamation and application of the Word of God. In this way, the Holy Spirit transforms lives as people learn to live all of life under God's rule. Preaching is a partnership with the Spirit of God to draw listeners heavenward so that their lives are aligned with Christ's overarching rule. This can be accomplished only when the truth of His Word remains supreme and unpolluted. The Bible is the Word of God made up of the words of God. Thus, one of your primary responsibilities as a preacher is to be certain not to sprinkle human invention into His Word. Rather, you are there first and foremost to explain what God has already said.

In fact, God condemns the prophets for giving their own viewpoint or for tweaking what He has said. In Jeremiah 23:25–28, for example, we read,

“I have heard what the prophets have said who prophesy falsely in My name, saying, ‘I had a dream, I

had a dream!’ How long? Is there anything in the hearts of the prophets who prophesy falsehood, even these prophets of the deception of their own heart, who intend to make My people forget My name by their dreams which they relate to one another, just as their fathers forgot My name because of Baal? The prophet who has a dream may relate his dream, but let him who has My word speak My word in truth. What does straw have in common with grain?” declares the LORD.

In today’s language, we might interpret that last verse to say, “What does that which you are preaching have to do with the price of tomatoes?” If your words and thoughts counter God’s Word and thoughts, then your words and thoughts are wrong and should not be shared from the pulpit. God makes that crystal clear, not only in Jeremiah, but elsewhere in Scripture as well. God will not bless, prosper, or anoint preaching that is not rooted in and resting on His truth. And, pastor, nothing could be worse than God being against your sermons.

EXPOSITORY PREACHING

A biblical expositor can be defined as *a spiritually prepared person declaring the interpretation and application of biblical*

truths acquired through the study of a passage in its context that the Holy Spirit then uses to confront the hearer and bring those who respond in conformity with God's Word. Let's break up this definition and look at its parts. I'll begin by going over a few standard terms and definitions.

Hermeneutics: the science (principles) and art (task) by which the meaning of the biblical text is determined.

Exegesis: the determination of the meaning of the biblical text in its historical and literary contexts.

Exposition: the communication of the meaning of the text along with its relevance to present-day hearers.

Homiletics: the science (principles) and art (task) by which the meaning and relevance of the biblical text are communicated in a preaching situation.

Pedagogy: the science (principles) and art (task) by which the meaning and relevance of the biblical text are communicated in a teaching situation.

A Spiritually Prepared Person

When Jesus was confronted by Satan in the wilderness, He went to the Word. He demonstrated for us what we are to do for others as preachers. He reached back into the Old Testament, into a similar context, in order to apply what was said there to what He was facing in the present.

The passage in Deuteronomy 8 that He pulled from had to do with the Israelites wandering in the wilderness. The same problem of hunger and weakness plagued them then that battled Jesus in His present state. When they were hungry, God provided manna so they could have all that they needed to survive. By applying this passage to His own circumstance, Jesus essentially let the devil know that He didn't need his help because the same God who met Israel in the wilderness and came up with a feeding program from above was the same God He was looking to in His own situation of hunger. Why? Because God is the same yesterday, today, and forever, and how He handled things in the past remains relevant to us today.

Pastor, this is what an expositor does. He takes Scripture and shows us its relevancy for today. And the reason we must refer back to Scripture like Jesus did, rather than rely on our own thoughts, is because God's thoughts are not our thoughts. His ways are not our ways. As high as the heavens are above the earth, that's the difference between what we think and what God thinks (Isa. 55:8-9).

As you refine your craft as an expository preacher, you will also gain confidence that you never had before. You will preach with a new level of authority. It will give you a unified presentation because all of the parts will now relate to your point, which will be rooted and embedded in Scripture. Biblical exposition will also help you identify pitfalls because as you seek to relate everything back to the basic, biblical point, you will see areas where you need to go deeper in your study because you don't fully understand it yet or can't fully make the connection.

Expository preaching changes you, not just your hearers. Being bound to the order and content of the biblical text also means that expository preaching will change how you approach sermon preparation and preaching. Ezra 7:10 is one of the fundamental descriptions of who a preacher is. Memorize this verse. Let it be your definition as a preacher. It says, "For Ezra had set his heart to study the law of the LORD and to practice it, and to teach His statutes and ordinances in Israel." Ezra said he not only wanted to know the Word, but he also wanted to live the Word. He wanted to be a prepared person.

Some preachers hate going into the study and preparing for a sermon. They would rather be with people. They despise outlines, understanding figurative language, and the like. Yet perhaps this is because they have a warped perspective on study. Many preachers preach for the benefit of the people.

Yet if you follow Ezra's lead (which I hope you do), you will discover that preaching is first and foremost for yourself. Instead of studying and preaching for someone else, study and preach for yourself while letting others in on what you learn. This changes why you go into the study. You are now not just going into your study time because your church or class needs a sermon or lesson. You are also going in to ask God to teach *you*. This gives you a different mindset. Like Ezra, you will study in order to first put what you've learned into practice. Then you will teach what you've learned. You will find when you approach your preaching from this perspective that your sermons begin to feel more authentic and genuine than before. They will resonate with your audience at a deeper heart-level than before. You will desire to live and proclaim biblical truth in such a way that the spiritual principle and application takes root in the hearer *and* in yourself, enabling the Holy Spirit to produce ongoing growth.

Admonishing Timothy in his responsibilities as a preacher and teacher at the church in Ephesus, Paul wrote, "Until I come, give attention to the *public reading of Scripture*, to exhortation and teaching" (1 Tim. 4:13; emphasis added). In other words, Paul wanted Timothy to read it, live it, and teach it. That is biblical exposition in a nutshell. Paul also wanted Timothy's own spiritual development, based on his time in God's Word, to be visibly evident to his congregation (see 4:14–15).

In 1 Timothy 4:16, Paul follows up with these words to his mentee: “Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching; persevere in these things, for as you do this you will ensure salvation both for yourself and for those who hear you.” Timothy and the people he is teaching are already saved. But Paul is not talking about *justification* in this passage; he is talking about *sanctification*. He is talking about how doing those things in verse 13 would ensure the spiritual development of himself and those who hear him.

The point is that a preacher must first preach for himself if he wants to ensure the spiritual development of those to whom he preaches. If and when he doesn’t, he is sabotaging the spiritual growth of those he has been tasked with shepherding. Yet if and when he does, he will grow personally by leaps and bounds. His spiritual growth will be off the charts. As a result, those whom he disciples will also grow underneath his covering and care.

Declaring Biblical Truths

Next, biblical exposition is a proclamation of a biblical truth. To appreciate what I mean, you and I have to understand one fundamental truth: the Bible is literature. Scripture is Holy Spirit-inspired literature, but it is still literature. Words have meaning, but words only have meaning in a context. For example, if I said the word *bark*, some of you would think I meant what a dog does. Others might assume I was

talking about a tree. In order to form an idea, you have to put words together in such a way that they complete the idea or concept. What you want in biblical exposition is not merely the understanding of words, but also the understanding of words in relationship to other words. In this way, you can derive the idea or concept of Scripture.

Now, I hate to give you some discouraging news, but when people leave your church or Sunday school class, they are going to forget over ninety percent of everything you told them. You may come back to them in a few days and find they don't remember a single thing you said. Even if you taught in a tight, five-point outline, it is unlikely that they could rattle off even two of those carefully crafted points.

However, what they will remember is the overall idea. They are going to remember the concept. And they will also remember the application, if you made it clearly. This is why every time you preach a sermon or deliver a lesson, you must emphasize and re-emphasize the point. Have you ever talked to someone who rambles? If you're like me, you may want to interject a question: "What is your point?" You want them to identify a point because you need something in the communication process to attach to. Thus, there ought to be a succinct summary of your sermon or lesson so a hearer can remember the point, even when they forget everything else you said.

That said, I will generally have one major point per sermon and then come at that point in a variety of ways.