

Preaching the Gospel

A monthly magazine for preachers and those who want to preach.

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USE ILLUSTRATIONS!

The teachings of Jesus are full of parables, stories, object lessons, and comparisons. Even such straightforward statements as “You are the salt of the earth,” “You are the light of the world,” “I am the vine and you are the branches” are in themselves illustrations.

Take this simple conversation:

Now when Jesus saw a crowd around Him, He gave orders to depart to the other side. And a certain scribe came and said to Him, "Teacher, I will follow You wherever You go." And Jesus said to him, "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head." And another of the disciples said to Him, "Lord, permit me first to go and bury my father." But Jesus said to him, "Follow Me; and allow the dead to bury their own dead." (Matthew 8:18-22)

Jesus could have said, “If you follow me you will have to suffer, and you will not get much money.” Or He could have explained, “There are some things more important than other things. It is more important for you to follow Me than to bury your father. There are people who will not follow Me. Let them bury your father.” But what He said was much more effective—and unforgettable!

Illustrations are the windows of your sermon—they let in the light. Stories are unforgettable. If the story really makes the point of your sermon, the story will be remembered—and the point it makes.

No matter how well-reasoned your sermon, no matter how carefully you use scripture, no matter how sincerely you preach, without illustrations your sermon will be heavy and uninteresting.

Watch your audience. When are they alert and interested? It is when you are telling the story! When do you lose their attention? It is when you are explaining, and explaining, and proving—without illustrations!

Where do you get illustrations?

From everywhere! Jesus took his situations from farming, from house-keeping, from animals and trees. In His stories He used women, men, children, poor people, rich people, slaves and masters. He used true-to-life situations.

We can use the same stories as Jesus. His parables can form the basis of many sermons. We can find examples from Old Testament and New Testament characters and situations. We can illustrate by true-to-life modern situations, and even from current events.

In Luke 13 we read that Jesus used a current event to teach.

Now on the same occasion there were some present who reported to Him about the Galileans, whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. And He answered and said to them, "Do you suppose that these Galileans were greater sinners than all other Galileans, because they suffered this fate? I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. Or do you suppose that those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them, were worse culprits than all the men who live in Jerusalem? I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish."

The current notoriety of the so-called Gospel of Judas could provide the basis for a sermon on how we got the New Testament and how we know that we have it all. The terrible Aids pandemic is an illustration of the truth of Paul's statement in Romans 1:27—"and in the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire toward one another, men with men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error." And of Proverbs 7:26-27. "For many are the victims she has cast down, And numerous are all her slain. Her house is the way to Sheol, Descending to the chambers of death."

There are illustrations everywhere. So when you have outlined your sermon, go through it carefully and look for ways to illustrate. Plan your illustrations carefully. Make sure they make the points you want to make. (Don't tell a story just because you want to tell a story!) Your sermon will come alive. You will be amazed at how people listen. And you can be sure that you are getting your point across.

TO BE PUT ON THE E-MAIL LIST

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Share the magazine with others. We want it to be as useful as possible. PKW

BACK COPIES NOW ON WEB PAGE

My grandson, Joel, has put all the issues of *Preaching the Gospel Magazine* on my web page (www.knowyourbible.co.za). There is a neat *Search* feature which enables you to find anything you want easily. I hope this is a help to you all.

IF YOU ARE PLANNING TO PREACH

Bill Hall, Athens, Alabama, U.S.A.

If you are planning to preach, give careful attention to the following three basic elements of successful preaching.

1. Spirituality. The faithful preacher has a deep devotion to God and His word. He prays often. He lives with a constant awareness of God's nearness; he "walks with God." His character is beyond reproach. He hates sin and error, but loves truth and righteousness. "*His delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law he meditates day and night.*" If you want to preach, but lack these qualities, then wait. Develop these first. You can hardly motivate others to become what you have not become yourself.

2. Preparation. Learn to **read**. Reading comprehension is an essential tool to understanding the scriptures and related books. Learn to **think**. Many of the things you will read in commentaries and even in brotherhood periodicals will be false. Woe is that man who in his preaching and Bible class teaching merely parrots what he has read. Learn to **differentiate**: between truth and error, between fact and supposition, between what is clearly taught and what is in the "gray" area, between what is congregationally applicable and what is individually applicable, between the time to "rock the boat" and the time not to "rock the boat." "*Be wise as serpents and harmless as doves*" (Matthew 10:16). Learn **courage**. You will be faced with pressures and intimidation from every side. To some, you will preach too hard; to some, too soft. Some will pressure you to compromise; others will try to force you into some "hard-line" position which you really can't find in the scriptures. Please God. Get along with the brethren as far as possible, but not at the risk of losing your soul. If problems do develop, take a long, hard look at "self." We fear that many a man has created a "doctrinal" crisis in an effort to cover up his own bad disposition and dictatorial attitude.

3. Presentation. You are no longer a schoolboy playing a part on a stage. Neither are you a comedian being paid to entertain an audience. You are a dying man preaching to dying men and women the only message on earth that can save their souls. Speak to **them**. Help them to see their sins, and point them to the Savior. Speak with the warmth, and love, and sincerity that will let them know that you care for them and their eternal destiny. What you speak may be more important, but how you speak is important, too.

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This file is formatted for printing on both sides of the paper, with room to punch holes on the left for inserting in a notebook.

L.A. Mott, Jr. (*Notebook on Jeremiah*, p. 67) writes: "Someone has said that there are three kinds of preachers. The first has to say something—he is a paid talker who has to fill a certain amount of time each week. The second has something to say, and that is a whole lot better. But the best is the third—the man who has something to say **and has to say it**. That is the kind of preacher Jeremiah was." And that's the kind of preacher you must be.

--from *Two Men*, pp. 141-143

VISUAL AIDS

At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, "Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" And He called a child to Himself and set him before them, and said, "Truly I say to you, unless you are converted and become like children, you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever then humbles himself as this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whoever receives one such child in My name receives Me; but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it is better for him that a heavy millstone be hung around his neck, and that he be drowned in the depth of the sea."—Matthew 18:1-6

What an unforgettable visual aid! Or how about this one?

And Jesus came out from the temple and was going away when His disciples came up to point out the temple buildings to Him. And He answered and said to them, "Do you not see all these things? Truly I say to you, not one stone here shall be left upon another, which will not be torn down."—Matthew 24:1-2.

And if you want more examples of how visual aids were used by God's preachers, read the book of Ezekiel. He was even commanded to act out a battle.

"Now you son of man, get yourself a brick, place it before you and inscribe a city on it, Jerusalem. Then lay siege against it, build a siege wall, raise up a ramp, pitch camps and place battering rams against it all around. Then get yourself an iron plate and set it up as an iron wall between you and the city, and set your face toward it so that it is under siege, and besiege it. This is a sign to the house of Israel."—Ezekiel 4:1-3.

In my 55 years of preaching I have used the blackboard extensively and this is still one of the best preaching aids. I have heard it said, and I think I have repeated it as my own thought, "You can't be a gospel preacher without a blackboard." Charts and diagrams can be drawn before or during the sermon. Words or sentences can be written as you preach. Colored chalk can be used for greater effect, and wetting the chalk before writing puts a strong white line on the board. Of course, the white board can be used in the same way.

When I was preaching a meeting where Wendell Watts was the local evangelist, he showed me how to make cloth charts, and I have a stack of them in my closet which I have used to good effect.

In teaching home classes, I have used cloth charts and film strips.

And now I am using PowerPoint, which I like very much. It is worth the time to learn how to use PowerPoint. You will find it much easier than you think. A word of caution—don't get carried away with the fancy effects you can create. You want to call attention to the points of your sermon, not the things dancing or spinning on the screen.

Use visual aids whenever they will help get across the point of your sermon. Learn to use them well. Don't let them overpower your sermon. Make sure they remain "aids".