

## Things to Know about Preaching to Our Needs

Recently we took time to consider the purpose for preaching and focused on the fact that America needs preaching and that God has called everyone of us to preach. Our preaching is in one form or another, but we are *always* preaching. One of our young people expressed, out of the blue, his concern about being shy. I understand that. However, sometimes you just have to speak up for the Lord and know that the Holy Spirit will do whatever He wants with that. Most of our anxiety with getting started, but once we do, the Holy Spirit gives us strength. Our concern is about our messaging. Whether we are listening to a commercial, a politician, a preacher, or someone just sharing a story with us, in order to connect with them we have to identify *why* they are addressing the point they are trying to make. *Our* messaging will address the needs that people have. As we understand what our true needs are, we can better understand the message of a sermon.

### 1. Our general need.

We know that the ultimate end of all preaching is for the reclamation of souls. Everything aims towards getting people to realize that they *are* going to die and that they have to be ready to meet God. Towards that end, all preaching is either to deliver the Gospel or to prepare people to *receive* the Gospel. That was the mission of John the Baptist.

Matt 3:1-3 In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judaea,  
2And saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.  
3For this is he that was spoken of by the prophet Esaias, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.

Related to preparing *unbelievers* to *receive* the Gospel is the general need to

prepare *believers* to *deliver* the Gospel. In that light, it has been said that there are *two* basic messages in the Bible: salvation and sanctification in order to serve God.

A list of the 33 best self-help books included titles like: *The Four Agreements*, *Thinking Fast and Slow*, *Best Self*, *The 48 Laws Of Power*, *The Courage to be Disliked*, *Daring Greatly*, *Big Magic*, and *Who Moved My Cheese*. Notably absent from the list was the Bible. Specifically, the King James Authorized Version is the best-seller of *all* time, the most quoted book in the English language and is the most ignored book in any list of self-help books. In contrast, as Paul was meeting with the Ephesian elders for the last time, he made sure to point out that he had been careful to preach everything he could from the Bible.

Acts 20:24-27 But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God.

25And now, behold, I know that ye all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, shall see my face no more.

26Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I *am* pure from the blood of all *men*.

27For I have not shunned to declare unto you **all the counsel of God**.

The general purpose of preaching is to share everything you need to know about turning to God, establishing a relationship with Him, and serving Him with your life.

## 2. Perceived needs.

Back in the 1960s, the *Church Growth Movement* began and grew in popularity especially into the 1980s and

beyond.<sup>1</sup> It is defined as a movement within evangelical Christianity which aims to grow churches based on research, sociology, analysis, etc.

A popular survey for establishing a church included questions such as:

- What do you think is the greatest need in this area?
- Why do you think most people don't attend church?
- If you were to look for a church to attend, what kind of things would you look for?
- What advice can you give to a new church that really wants to be helpful to people in the community?

These questions are designed to not challenge people but to help design what kinds of ministries would appeal to the unchurched and what a church could *do for them*.<sup>2</sup>

One of the major churches involved in the Church Growth Movement did a study and found that they had to address the problem that "heavy involvement into programs and activities did not necessarily translate into discipleship." Chuck Colson offered this self reflection for the Church Growth Movement, "[We need] to take a long, hard look at what we are doing and ask whether it is really changing lives. We all need to improve. Christians today are just like the culture. We need to be transformed and then turn around and transform the world around us...Think what could happen if, instead of tickling ears, all the churches gave the people real meat. Then there might be hope for America after all, as serious disciples are equipped to defend their faith and take their places in our

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<sup>1</sup>[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Church\\_Growth](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Church_Growth)

<sup>2</sup>[https://s3.amazonaws.com/media.cloversites.com/ec/ecf1856b-181f-4d79-974a-a2f8410473f8/documents/SURVEY\\_Community\\_Survey\\_Questions\\_2.pdf](https://s3.amazonaws.com/media.cloversites.com/ec/ecf1856b-181f-4d79-974a-a2f8410473f8/documents/SURVEY_Community_Survey_Questions_2.pdf)

communities."<sup>3</sup>

Early as I started to enter ministry, a liberal friend challenged my evangelistic zeal asking how I would talk to someone who was facing a crisis pregnancy. It was suggested that sharing the Gospel would be insensitive to what someone would be facing at a time like that. Others have suggested that you can't share the Gospel with a hungry person and that we should make sure to address poverty and that *then* people will be able and willing to listen to the Gospel.

While all of these things are important concerns, these are not the *true* needs that people have. These are all *symptoms* of mankind who has gone astray.

Rom 3:10-18 As it is written,  
There is none righteous, no, not one:

11 There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God.

12 They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one.

13 Their throat *is* an open sepulchre; with their tongues they have used deceit; the poison of asps *is* under their lips:

14 Whose mouth *is* full of cursing and bitterness:

15 Their feet *are* swift to shed blood:

16 Destruction and misery *are* in their ways:

17 And the way of peace have they not known:

18 There is no fear of God before their eyes.

All of these things are taken care of by the Word of God.

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<sup>3</sup><https://www.christianpost.com/news/rethinking-church-30360/> Chuck Colson is not known for his Fundamentalist stands, but even *he* can recognize the potential problems with an overemphasis and dependence on programs and methodology.

2Tim 3:16-17 All scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness:

17That the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works.

We might think that what we want to hear about is how to have our *appetites* fulfilled. We might come seeking satisfaction with our jobs, our physical needs, or our relationships, for example. What we *really* need is to find our purpose in Christ and God's Kingdom. As we address our *spiritual* needs, everything else will be addressed as Jesus pointed out in the world's most famous sermon, *The Sermon on the Mount*.

Matt 6:19-21,25,31-33 Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal:

20But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal:

21For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

25Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?

31Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed?

32(For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things.

33But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.

### 3. True needs.

There are five basic *spiritual* needs that we have that are fulfilled by Biblical preaching. When we have these five areas addressed, our whole sense of fulfillment and purpose in Christ is met.

- The Evangelistic Need

The very first and foundational need we have is for the Gospel itself.

Rom 1:16-17 For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.

17For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith.

The evangelistic purpose of a message is to move people to salvation. There should be no mistake about the importance of this purpose in a sermon. Addressing the need of the Gospel should not be reserved only for a revival meeting or a big day when the lost are especially invited. We never know who in the pew is not saved. Visitors who come to church on regular Sundays don't let us know whether they are saved or not by handing in a spiritual resume that is missing a 'Date of Salvation.' Also, the faithful *member* who isn't *really* saved might need to hear the Gospel and respond to *truly* take care of his salvation.

It is always important to address the Gospel in every message whether there are lost people in attendance or not. Those who are saved *also* need to hear evangelistic sermons. It is encouraging to hear the Gospel all over again from as many perspectives as possible. An evangelistic message is also instructive for the saints on the argumentation that can be used in soul winning.

- Devotional and Ethical Needs

Many people can detect the devotional aspect of a message. It is the sense that is given when we preach about the attributes and work of God. His holiness, righteousness, love, grace, mercy, goodness, etc., all call for praise and devotion from us. We need to praise God. Praise for God is something so irresistible that in the end, it will be impossible to not praise God:

Phil 2:9-11 Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name:

10That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of *things* in heaven, and *things* in earth, and *things* under the earth;

11And *that* every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ *is* Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

What we have to be careful of now is merely giving lip service to God with our praise.

The ethical purpose of a sermon is to call upon people for action. We see this when we exhort people to serve and obey God. These two needs must be considered together. It is because church attenders praise God on Sunday and live like the devil on Monday that people criticize them for their hypocrisy.

John 14:15 If ye love me, keep my commandments.

1John 5:2-3 By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments.

3For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous.

Devotion and ethics go-hand in-hand.

- The Need for Biblical Interpretation

We regularly admonish people to not take our word for Bible truths, but to

read the Bible to see it for themselves. We extol the virtue of the Bereans for searching the Scriptures daily to see if the things they were told were so.

Acts 17:11 These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so.

Too many surveys reveal that people, even in fundamental Baptist churches, are woefully Biblically illiterate. We need more than just dates, events, definitions, and quaint customs. We need an intimate relationship with the Word of God and the God of the Word. Not only does Biblical interpretation provide a deeper understanding of the Bible in our personal relationship with God, but also in the understanding of the role of the Bible in our relationship with our culture. One author wrote<sup>4</sup>:

Simply put, the Bible is the most influential book ever written. Not only is the Bible the best-selling book of all time, it is the best-selling book of the year every year. In a 1992 survey of English teachers to determine the top 10 required "book-length works" in high school English classes, plays by Shakespeare occupied three spots and the Bible none. And yet, let's compare [which is greater, Shakespeare or the Bible]...Breadth of subject matter: the Bible. Numbers published, translated etc: Bible. Number of people martyred for: Bible...Solace and hope provided to billions: you guessed it. And Shakespeare would almost surely have agreed. According to one estimate, he alludes to Scripture some 1,300 times. As for the rest

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<sup>4</sup><https://content.time.com/time/subscriber/article/0,33009,1601845,00.html>



of literature, when your seventh-grader reads *The Old Man and the Sea*, a teacher could tick off the references to Christ's Passion--the bleeding of the old man's palms, his stumbles while carrying his mast over his shoulder, his hat cutting his head--but wouldn't the thrill of recognition have been more satisfying on their own?

If literature doesn't interest you, you also need the Bible to make sense of the ideas and rhetoric that have helped drive U.S. history. "The shining city on the hill"? That's Puritan leader John Winthrop quoting Matthew to describe his settlement's covenantal standing with God. In his Second Inaugural Address, Abraham Lincoln noted sadly that both sides in the Civil War "read the same Bible" to bolster their opposing claims. When Martin Luther King Jr. talked of "Justice rolling down like waters" in his "I Have a Dream" speech, he was consciously enlisting the Old Testament prophet Amos, who first spoke those words... A

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- The Doctrinal Need

Besides understanding the interpretation of Scripture, we need to have a thorough understanding of systematic doctrine. We can be driven by our devotion to God to make prayer a habit. We can examine the interpretation of any passage of Scripture on prayer. However, it is when we when we put all those passages together that we can set up a definition of what prayer is. We are told in Scripture to pray according to the desire of our heart, but then we are also told to pray according to God's will. We may safely say conclude a doctrine about prayer that when our heart is in tune with God's will that we are more likely to understand God's answers to our prayers.

John 7:16-17 Jesus answered them, and said, My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me.

17If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or *whether* I speak of myself.

Rom 6:17 But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you.

Rom 16:17 Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them.

Numerous preachers, however, have reacted vehemently to the complaint that "doctrine divides, but love unites."

When they explain their objection to doctrine, they usually insist that a concern with right doctrine destroys both the unity of the Church [and/or] her ability to serve the world. They will point to the obvious faith of other Christians and say that they do not want to be parted from them by **a mere difference** in a few words,...that the world's needs are far too great to spend

time disputing a few abstract ideas.

...[Christian doctrine is ] both elaborate and specific, even in the short form of the Nicene Creed. The Christian doctrine is not just "Jesus is God's Son," [the Unitarians, Christian Science, Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses agree to that, but then they apply their own definitions to the word "son." The Nicene creed gets specific and says] that he is "one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten son of God, begotten of his Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, Begotten, not made, Being of one substance with the Father," and so on. This statement about reality is both complex and detailed.

These doctrines are so elaborate because they express in propositions the truths of God's revelation...articulated by many very learned and wise and holy men, who had to answer a number of very dangerous errors so precisely that no one could make those mistakes again even by accident. (In other words, so that in the future such beliefs would be heresies and not honest mistakes.)

—David Mills, "Necessary Doctrine, Why Dogma Is Needed & Why Substitutes Fail," <sup>5</sup>

Abandonment of doctrine will erase the lines of distinction between Christianity and other religions. This will create a hunger for the confidence that comes from sound doctrine. If preaching doesn't provide that confidence, then the cults will fill in the void with their self-assured teaching. Paul spoke powerfully to the Ephesians about the value of sound doctrine against the craftiness of deceivers:

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<sup>5</sup><http://www.touchstonemag.com/archives/article.php?id=15-02-023-f>

Eph 4:14 That we *henceforth* be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, *and* cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive;

- Social Needs

God created man to live socially.

Gen 2:18 And the LORD God said, *It is* not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him.

Eccl 4:9-12 Two *are* better than one; because they have a good reward for their labour.

10For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow: but woe to him *that is* alone when he falleth; for *he hath* not another to help him up.

11Again, if two lie together, then they have heat: but how can one be warm *alone*?

12And if one prevail against him, two shall withstand him; and a threefold cord is not quickly broken.

We are social creatures and have societal needs. Preaching will address what we encounter as we live in the world, what the world's arguments are, the social impact of a problem, and the social impact of Biblical solutions. The Bible speaks to how we live and work together in the world.

- Apologetic and Polemical Needs

Apologetics refers to giving a defense of the faith. Polemics refers to attacking false doctrine. We need to not only declare *what* we believe, *why* we believe, and *how* we live out our faith, but we also need to defend the attacks that Satan hurls at the faithful. Paul instructed Titus about the qualifications of the mature believers who should lead the churches as elders:

Titus 1:9-11 Holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers.

10For there are many unruly and vain talkers and deceivers, specially they of the circumcision:

11Whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole houses, teaching things which they ought not, for filthy lucre's sake.

I would not blame the young or the worldly sophisticated for looking at the church as weak and powerless if all preaching amounted to is some kind of feel-good exercise. We need robust preaching that speaks critically to the world and makes a difference, but we also need Christians who are looking to grow in the power of God's Word.

Heb 5:12-14 For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which *be* the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat.

13For every one that useth milk *is* unskilful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe.

14But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, *even* those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.

We do not have a blind faith, but a well-informed faith. Sometimes people don't understand the Bible and don't know what to look for. The *preaching* of God's Word can help that. However, when people dismiss the Bible saying they read it and were not impressed, they will only get it when they open their heart to receive it.

2Tim 2:15 Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman

that needeth not to be ashamed,  
rightly dividing the word of truth.

1. Our general need. Matt 3:1-3, Acts 20:24-27
2. Perceived needs. Rom 3:10-18, 2Tim 3:16-17, Matt 6:19-21, 25, 31-33
3. True needs. Rom 1:16-17, Phil 2:9-11, John 14:15, 1John 5:2-3, Acts 17:11, John 7:16-17, Rom 6:17, 16:17, Eph 4:14, Gen 2:18, Eccl 4:9-12, Titus 1:9-11, Heb 5:12-14, 2Tim 2:15