



# **TOUGH TIMES FOR PREACHING AND PREACHERS**

**By J.J. Turner, Ph.D. ©**

It is 11 a.m. Sunday morning. The preacher has already taught a Bible class and now it's time for him to preach a message from God's word. A 30-minute sermon in which he will try to resuscitate the dying, raise the dead, inspire the discouraged, inform the ignorant, hold the interest of short attention spans, convert the lost, speak above crying babies, and not step on anyone's toes.

To preach once a month would be an awesome responsibility. But the local preacher has to stand in the pulpit an average of 48 Sunday's a year, preach two sermons each Sunday; a total of 98 each year. The preaching event is never concluded and the preacher's study is never finished.

It is Monday morning and the journey to the pulpit with a fresh serving of God's word starts again. As the preacher lingers over his study, somewhere in the corner of his mind he hears the voice of a former homiletics professor saying that for every minute you preach you need to spend an hour in study. Guilt hangs over his head. Since he has two sermons to prepare this means he needs 60-hours of study time. But how about his two Bible classes and ladies Bible class? Then there are the visits, bulletin article, counseling session, meetings, phone calls, and unexpected emergencies. The



last time he checked he only has 168 hours in a week. Oh yes, he has a family too. He feels it in his stomach and the back of his neck, the stress level is rising. His mood ring is on red. He has to cut corners, but where, what will be short changed? The sermon!

Added to the preacher's weekly stress related to preaching and ministry preparation is the fact that preaching has fallen on tough times. It is no longer held in high esteem as it once was; in fact some are advocating its discontinuance all together. In the midst of a media explosion the preacher must stand as a clarion voice for God, charged with the task of preaching the word in all seasons (cf. 2 Timothy 4:1-7). Preachers in the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century face challenges no other generation of preachers has faced. It is not so much an overt persecution or rejection, but a nice indifference. There are no banner waving groups protesting sermons; no conspiracies to do away with the pulpit. Absence is the vote cast for the preaching event.

Members can stay home and sample dozens of preachers and sermons each Sunday; hit the internet and find hundreds of lessons both in printed and download streaming formats on any subject the local preacher can preach. It doesn't matter if they miss the Supper; they had their Sunday sermon. This challenge has motivated some congregations to make a mad dash to find ways to be relevant in an indifferent and media saturated world. Others watch a decreasing membership limp toward the final closing prayer and posting a for sale sign on the building.



In the midst of all this pressure and discouragement fewer men desire to preach and more and more who preach are looking for the exit door. In his book ***Your Ministry's Next Chapter***, Gary Fenton wrote something that describes this challenge:

“Others leave the ministry completely, the most obvious way to escape, and find another way to make a living. When I have visited with ministers in their mid-forties to early fifties, I have found many had seriously considered other lines of work. A friend who had served three churches for a total of thirty years told me that not a week goes by that he does not look at the Want Ads section of a major city newspaper. I asked him why, and he replied, ‘Some days I think I can’t continue to endure the criticism and pressure’”. (p.30, Baker Books, 1919, Grand Rapids, MI).

Have you ever wondered why most preachers resign on Monday? One reason is because they are worn-out from what has happened on Sunday. They have preached two sermons, taught a Bible class and participated in a few other activities on the Lord’s Day. Emotionally they have exhausted the same amount of energy a person would spend in 24-hours of digging a ditch. He is tired and in many cases discouraged by the impact he feels his sermons and lesson failed to have. After all, his birth certificate says he is human.

What can those of us who preach, which I’ve been doing for 45-years, do to turn this tide and preach every Sunday with power, enthusiasm, and conviction?



I suggest the following solutions:

First, remember that God has chosen the foolishness of preaching to save people (cf. 1 Corinthians 1:18-25). Thus, we should not be surprised when we experience what preaching brings. We are viewed as foolish and treated as “fools.”

Second, remember we are commanded to “preach the word” (cf. 2 Timothy 4:1-7). We aren’t to preach about the word, around the word, over the word, or close to the word. We must preach the word. This would go a long way in restoring respect for preaching.

Third, we must never forget that the power to convert and direct people is in the Gospel, not human wisdom or cute skits of entertainment. The Gospel has always been, still is, and shall always be the power of God unto salvation (cf. Romans 1:14-16). Why would we preach anything else?

Fourth, we must remember our heritage. We are following in the steps of faithful messengers like Elijah, Jeremiah, Amos, John the Baptist, Peter, Paul, and above all our perfect model, Jesus Christ. None of these spokesmen for God had it easy. Why should we expect it to be different for us?

Fifth, we must schedule time for rest and recreation; time to take a break and get away in order to refresh our spirit, commitment, and passion for preaching. Jesus set the example as He led his disciples to a less populated place to rest (cf. Mark 6:30-32).



Sixth, we must recommit ourselves to expository preaching. This returns us to digging deeply into God's word; it frees us from topical ditties, internet sermons, and self-help talks. It sends us to spending time with the text, studying the grammar, historical background, finding God's intended message and preaching that message.

Seventh, we must never forget that we are preaching partners with God. We are never alone in or out of the pulpit. We sow, water and God gives the increase (cf. 1 Corinthians 3:1-11). It is His job to add the saved to the church (Acts 2:47; 1 Corinthians 12:18). Our job is to sow and water—to preach the word.

Eighth, we must remember that the Gospel has been committed to us, we are no more than "cheap clay pots" (2 Corinthians 4:7). The power is not in us but in the Gospel. Therefore, let's preach His message.

Ninth, we need to educate the congregation relative to the work of the preacher as outlined in the Bible. We teach on the work and qualification of elders and deacons, why not preachers too? I believe the brethren will be supportive of our challenges if they know what they are.

Tenth, we need to adopt the spirit of Jeremiah. He was so discouraged that he considered going into the motel business (cf. Jeremiah 9:1-3). He could not resign. Why? "... His word was in my heart like a burning fire, shut up in my bones; I was weary of holding it back, and I could not" (Jeremiah 20:9).



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Let's adopt the attitude of Jesus when He was twelve and be "about our Father's business" (Luke 2:49).