

Pentecostal Preaching and Homiletics
Chapter Four
Foundations for Pentecostal Preaching
(Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 2005)

Pentecostal experience is pervasive within Pentecostal preaching! The power and presence of the Holy Spirit conditions the entire enterprise. First of all He influences and empowers the preacher personally. Then it influences preparation. The selection of the biblical text, the study process and the development of a preaching strategy are all guided and influenced by the Holy Spirit. Finally, Pentecost influences the preaching. The Pentecostal preacher senses the Holy Spirit and draws upon his power during the proclamation of the message. Those called to preach who have experienced the power of Pentecost will tell you the Holy Spirit is there every step of the way. They wouldn't think about "preaching the Word" without Him!

Preaching from a Pentecostal Perspective

Ray H. Hughes has observed:

"As commonly understood, Pentecostal preaching means a type of message and a style of delivery characteristic of Pentecostal worship. Pentecostal preaching the best of one's study and meditation, warmed by the Spirit of God, and made to glow in the heart by the anointing of the same Holy Spirit."¹

He goes on to note several key components that distinguish Pentecostal preaching:

- "True Pentecostal preaching must center on the Word of God
- Pentecostal preaching must always exalt Jesus Christ
- Pentecostal preaching should always be directed and empowered by the Holy Spirit
- Pentecostal preaching should be prophetic
- Pentecostal preaching is uniquely effective" (convicting of sin, producing faith, confronting demonic power, producing Godly reverence and being confirmed by the operation of spiritual gifts)²

Pentecostal preaching and homiletics – what are we talking about anyway? What is involved in the preaching enterprise, and how does the Holy Spirit influence the outcome?

Preaching can be described as the proclamation of the message of Scripture in the power of the Holy Spirit to a contemporary congregation in order to win a decision or response. It utilizes appropriate homiletic structure and rhetorical skills. Effective preaching is carried on in such a way that people hear what Scripture says, understand the truth it teaches, identify with the situations in life it addresses, become aware of how its truth applies to their lives and are led to an appropriate response or decision. Preaching is God's Word proclaimed! Ideally preaching is the voice of a human spokesman, empowered and guided by the Holy Spirit, echoing the Word of God without distortion to a contemporary audience.

The preacher who has experienced a "baptism in the Holy Spirit" – who has an experiential appreciation of the "filling of the Spirit" – quickly learns to depend upon the dynamic of His presence and leadership in every aspect of the preaching task. To the Pentecostal preacher the Holy Spirit is truly the *Paraclete* – "the One called alongside to help." In the pages that follow in this chapter we will seek to explore how the Holy Spirit assists the Pentecostal preacher in each dimension of sermon preparation and delivery.

In general, three homiletical forms and variations thereof dominate the preaching landscape: the topical sermon, the narrative sermon, and the expository sermon.

Drawing its scriptural support from a variety of locations in the Bible, the topical sermon analyzes the Scriptural data and organizes its points around logical framework. Ideally, it includes the elements of exposition, application and illustration. Unfortunately, just a good course in public speaking may be viewed as adequate training for this kind of preaching. Consequently, the risk often associated with this approach is the ignoring of context (literary, historical, cultural and situational); it has produced some of the greatest abuses of Scripture, both in interpretation and application. At the same time, topical preaching has as its benefits

responsiveness to felt need and current issues. Correctly done, topical preaching always exhibits exegetical sensitivity and would never use Scripture in a self-serving, context ignoring way.

Some of the most powerful sermons ever preached, however, have been topical in nature.

The contemporary popularity of the narrative genre in preaching is associated with the current cultural orientation to story. This is interesting, in that it is a return to a cultural characteristic very much like that of ancient Israel and the time of Christ. The preaching of Jesus was filled with the use of storytelling to deliver timeless, eternal truth. The narrative genre basically builds the sermon around a storyline, weaving the proclamation of eternal truth and application into its very fabric. The risk of narrative preaching can be that the preacher becomes more storyteller than communicator of eternal truth. Skill in weaving a good story upstages preaching the Word. Narrative preaching, however, is an approach that very effectively enables the preacher to bridge the gap between generations and has the approach of Jesus to commend it.

Although all three approaches to preaching are valid and have proven records of effectiveness, I believe that anointed expository preaching ought to be viewed as the foundational method. When the fundamentals of this approach to preaching are mastered it provides a strong foundation for effectively and safely utilizing other methods. Expository preaching is enjoying a resurgence of popularity today. People long for the pure, unadulterated proclamation of the Bible. More and more pastors are realizing that God's Word has incredible power to change lives when it is preached with clarity in the power of the Holy Spirit.

I hear people all of the time who pull no punches about it – they go to church expecting a significant encounter with the message of Scripture! They are tired of religious talks on contemporary topics basted with a slight hint of the Bible. Their heart craves more than a string of proof texts pulled together without regard for context in order to prove a pre-determined point.

People are frankly edgy about a message developed around an isolated phrase taken from a remote passage of Scripture that upon closer examination has no connection whatever to the biblical writer's purpose. Modern hearers, secular as they may be, innately long for the "pure milk of the word." (1 Peter 2:1-2 NASB) Christians in our churches crave the clear, Holy Spirit anointed, proclamation of the Bible that feeds their spiritual longings, gives direction to their daily lives, and meets their deepest needs!

Good expository preaching is spiritually satisfying, personally engaging and relevant to life. It addresses the felt needs people wrestle with. It is not an abstract, analytical, pedantic, running commentary on the Bible with an appended application. Neither is it a dry, dull, verse-by-verse treatment of a book of the Bible without regard for the natural divisions of Scripture or the different ways the various literary genres express truth. Properly understood, expository preaching is not to be equated with phrase-by-phrase, word-by-word exegesis, filled with disconnected lexical, grammatical-historical and cultural comments. Neither is it random devotional comments made as a preacher reads through a Scripture text. Instead, expository preaching proclaims the message of a passage of Scripture to a contemporary audience in such a way that people hear what a passage of Scripture says, identify with the situation it addresses, become aware of how it applies to their lives and are led to a decision. It is a *sermon* delivered in the power of the Holy Spirit!³

As a result of this conviction, the preaching approach that will be used as the model for discussion for this chapter will be expository. The fundamental components of biblical preaching – exposition (or explanation of the text), application, and illustration – that are common to all effective sermonic structure are to be found within it.

The Pentecostal Preacher and Preparation

Few things are more frustrating to the person who hears a sermon than to detect evidence of a lack of prayer and study preparation. Not only is the hearer negatively influenced, but neglect of spiritual and biblical preparation is counterproductive to the overall effectiveness of the sermon. The law of sowing and reaping in life applies in this area as well!

The Study Phase

Perhaps a useful way of thinking about the study phase of sermon preparation is that of filling a reservoir with water. As a young man growing up on the farm my father would always seek to keep the reservoirs full. The results of the preacher's Bible study become the reservoir from which the sermon is developed and crafted. Study must precede sermoncraft!

The wise preacher would not think of excluding the Holy Spirit from the study. In fact, I have made the words of the Psalmist my personal prayer before every study session for a sermon: "Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law" (Psalm 119:18) It is amazing how the Holy Spirit comes in answer to that prayer to enable, enlighten and empower! He accomplishes what Paul articulated in his great apostolic prayer: "I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his comparable great power for us who believe" (Ephesians 1:18-19). Serious engagement with the Biblical text and analysis of it are undertaken but they are given new depth and possibility as the Holy Spirit comes to illumine and apply the truth. Always begin the study phase and proceed with the personal presence and invited assistance of the Holy Spirit!

Four general stages of study characterize the diligent preacher of the Word. Embedded within these four stages are ten study tasks. The Holy Spirit must be practically involved at each stage and within each task of study!

Stage 1 – Observation

The first stage of study involves careful and close observation. In many years of teaching Bible study methods to those preparing for ministry at a Bible university I have become painfully aware of how superficial and cursory the observation skills of many ministers are. We simply do not look long, carefully and prayerfully at the Biblical text – even though the Holy Spirit stands ready to sensitize the eyes of our hearts to what the Biblical text teaches. Most preaching would be upgraded exponentially by simply improving the observation skills of the preacher! The key questions are answered at this level of study: What does the Bible say and how does it say it? Quality Bible study in preparation for preaching involves at least four observational tasks that provide answers to these questions:

Task 1: Determining the boundaries of the passage.

A passage is the natural unit for preaching. Various terms have been used by to describe a passage. Some refer to a “paragraph” or a “natural literary unit.” The terms “account,” “story,” “episode” or “periscope” have been used with narrative literature in the Bible. Biblical poetry has tended to speak of a “song” or “hymn.” The term “oracle” or “vision” has been used with prophetic or apocalyptic literature. The term “paragraph” is especially useful when dealing with epistolary literature. I find the term “passage,” however, to be the most generically useful term to describe a preaching unit. A “passage” can be defined as any quantity of Biblical material that clusters around a key idea. Consequently the best way identify the boundaries of a

passage is to evaluate where a biblical writer begins discussing a key idea or event and where he ends that discussion and transitions to a new one, irrespective of chapter or verse boundaries.

Task 2: Identify the central idea of the passage in the writer's own words.

Once the passage boundaries have been identified, the next study task is to identify the central idea of the passage in the writer's own words. This is not always a simple task. I have discovered that an effective approach is to "take nominations" for the key idea and then evaluate them. Which of the possibilities relate best to each part of the passage? Which ties everything together in the text? In this task it is absolutely essential to try to follow the writer's train of thought. In the final analysis, the key idea of a passage often "grows on you." At this point in your study a prayerful attitude of dependence on the Holy Spirit, the ultimate author of the text is very beneficial!

Task 3: Analyze how the biblical writer develops this theme in the passage.

The next challenge is to follow the writer's train of thought. How does the Biblical writer develop the central truth of the passage? Developing an analytical diagram of the passage can be of great assistance at this stage of study. The analytical diagram is an effective tool for analyzing how a biblical writer develops his point within a passage and it has the added benefit of providing a permanent record of your analysis of a passage.⁴

For purposes of sermon preparation, each major development of truth within a passage should be treated as a "paragraph" within the passage regardless of its length.

Often, while diagramming a passage and analyzing closely its contents, I have experienced the power of the Holy Spirit, making real the truth of the passage real to my mind and heart in powerful and life-transforming ways. These are "God moments" experienced in the

process of Bible study and textual analysis. I had come to the Biblical text to analyze it and before I finished I discovered the Holy Spirit, through the text, had analyzed me!

Task 4: Find the “situation clues” and “purpose clues” in the immediate and broader context.

The final task of observation is to identify the “situation clues” and “purpose clues” within the passage itself (as well as the broader context).

A situation clue is anything within the Biblical text itself that points to the situation the Biblical writer was writing to, from or about. These clues may be expressed in the form of historical information, socio-political data, or cultural matters. They may also be warnings, exhortations or descriptions of problems or feelings that tip us off about the situation the Biblical writer was writing to, from or about. Such clues tell us what was going on back then and there. The Bible is not an ethereal book, addressing abstract issues in mystical and ambiguous terms! It is a vivid, practical book dealing with real issues in human lives. Accurate situation analysis is critical in order for Pentecostal preachers to address the issues the Biblical text addresses and the challenges that people face in today’s world.

Just as Pentecostal preachers need to engage in situation analysis by identifying the situation clues within a biblical text, they also need to learn to identify its purpose clues. Every passage of God’s word was written for a purpose! A purpose clue is anything within a Biblical text that indicates the purpose of the inspired human writer or what God was trying to accomplish in a given situation. These may be expressed in the text as commands, appeals, encouragement or warning. They are often expressed through imperative verbs, purpose clauses, emphasis, repetition or the logical flow of a passage. Accurate purpose analysis gives direction to a sermon and helps determine how an appeal, invitation or altar call is approached. A sermon

is most anointed and powerful when it is preached in keeping with the purpose for which the Holy Spirit originally inspired the Biblical text.

Stage 2 – Interpretation

Interpretation addresses the issue of meaning – especially as it relates to the first audience that received God’s word, read its message, heard the truth proclaimed or experienced the Biblical events. Interpretation seeks to determine meaning “then and there.” A preacher that ignores or overlooks interpretation and moves directly to application does so at great risk. Whenever interpretation – establishing what a passage meant “then and there” – is overlooked or neglected the chances of misinterpretation or misapplication go right through the ceiling! When time is taken to establish the meaning of a passage within its original context, it’s proper application is insured, the Holy Spirit inspired purpose is honored and its communication is more effective.

There are four tasks within the stage of sermonic study that we call “interpretation.”

Task 5: Write a paragraph summarizing the situation the passage addresses.

A helpful discipline in preparation for crafting a sermon based upon the chosen passage is to pull together all the situation clues within it and its broader context and write a brief paragraph summarizing them. This helps provides the situational background for properly understanding what the text teaches. It supplies the then and there perspective for interpretation.

Task 6: Write a paragraph synthesizing the purpose clues of the passage.

It is equally important and helpful to write a brief paragraph that synthesizes the purpose clues that have been identified in the text (and its broader context). Everything within the passage needs to be viewed through the lens of the writer’s purpose. This discipline helps the

preacher keep the Holy Spirit inspired purpose of the text in focus during the crafting of the sermon. It provides the perspective and direction for interpreting the details of the chosen text.

Task 7: Develop a descriptive outline tracing the argument of the passage.

At this point in the study process, the preacher will be greatly aided by developing a descriptive outline of the passage. It should be noted that this outline is not a sermon outline, made with the needs of the congregation in view; it is an outline (drawing upon what has been discovered with the use of an analytical diagram) that reflects the way that the Biblical writer develops the central theme of the passage. Although not a sermon outline, this descriptive outline helps provide the foundation for crafting the sermon outline that will follow.

Task 8: Engage in further study using quality resources.

Note that in the process of study for sermons defined thus far, the emphasis has been upon the primary source of God's inspired Word, not secondary sources. A glaring fault of much sermon preparation is that more time is spent with books *about* the Bible than *in the Bible itself*. The approach in this chapter reverses that trend. It directs the preacher to God's Word first of all, forces deep and personal involvement with the Biblical text, encourages the preacher to invite the Holy Spirit into the interpretive process and only then turns to secondary outside sources.⁵ Secondary study sources should be used mainly to supplement or correct what the preacher may have missed in study. Never forget this axiom: Truth that communicates best – that powerfully connects with a congregation – is personally encountered, Spirit illumined truth, not borrowed truth!

Stage 3 – Application

This stage of study addresses the question, “How does the truth of this passage apply here and now to the congregation I preach to every week? It should be noted that the ministry of the Holy Spirit, both historically and biblically, is very oriented to application. He convicts! He makes truth real and personal! The preacher’s powerful encounters with God in the study of the Biblical text need to be transferred to the everyday lives of people or such encounters make little difference.

Task 9: Identify how the passage applies to similar situations today.

After establishing what the text means within its primary context and to its original audience, the key question for preachers is, How does the truth of this passage relate to similar situations in our lives today? The goal is to identify a transcultural principle taught by the text and apply it to a situation people face today that is analogous to the one in the passage. To accomplish this, the preacher must pay attention to how the particulars between the “then and there” of the text and the “here and now” of the congregation are both similar and different. For application to be valid there must be a line of continuity identified between the two worlds.

This then leads to the final stage of study of a passage for a sermon with its accompanying task.

Stage 4 – Response

This stage of study seeks to answer the question, “What am I going to do *personally* about what this passage teaches?” The preacher must *personally* tackle the tenth study task.

Task 10: Personally respond to the teaching of the passage.

It is not enough for the preacher to simply think in terms of the congregation when studying for a sermon. A Pentecostal preacher will personally respond to the truth of the passage!

I have often heard well intentioned comments within sermons, designed to create identification with the audience, that go something like this; “I want you to know that this truth is just as much for me as it is for you.” I understand the underlying sentiments such a statement expresses, but respectfully, that issue should have already have been resolved in the study! Personal response on the part of the preacher is important because that is where the intended meaning of Scripture becomes personally real. This is where the power and authority of the Bible is discovered through the work of the Holy Spirit. This is the point at which Scripture ceases to simply be words on a page and we have an encounter with the Living God! This is the point at which our lives are personally changed! This is the place where authority is discovered and conviction to proclaim the message with power begins to emerge!

The Strategy Phase

After the study phase the challenge facing the Pentecostal preacher is to carefully and prayerfully craft a preaching strategy – to develop a sermon manuscript or outline. Some preachers feel more comfortable with a manuscript, other prefer an outline to prompt their delivery. Others are able to memorize their messages. This writer operates best from an outline complete enough to prompt his memory but also allowing him the freedom to respond spontaneously to the dynamics of the preaching event.

Several steps are important for a well-crafted sermon.

Step 1: Prayerfully reflect on what you have studied.

Since the preacher’s study serves as a reservoir from which the sermon flows, the first step in sermon preparation is to prayerfully reflect on the results of that study. This is a very enjoyable and stimulating task. In involves getting a good cup of coffee or tea, sitting back in a

comfortable chair and praying, “Lord, now how should I approach communicating the life-changing message of this passage to my audience? Oh God, please help me!

And the Lord will help! The Holy Spirit comes in answer to this prayer and enters into a kind of dialog with the preacher as he or she considers the various possibilities for approaching the message, developing and delivering the sermon, and finally appealing to the audience to consider their personal response to its truth. The Holy Spirit stimulates effective creativity and will lead the preacher to communicate “not in words taught by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words” (1 Corinthians 2:13). Praise God for the possibility of such a Divine – human enterprise!

Step 2: Write a theme statement for your sermon.

In preparation of the sermon the preacher will want to develop a succinct, well-crafted theme statement to focus his or her thinking and give direction to the development of the message. The best available advice regarding crafting such a statement is provided by Haddon W. Robinson. He recommends a two step process in which the preacher first of all identifies the broad topic or central idea the passage teaches – what he refers to as the “subject.” The second task involves determining the “complement” of the central idea – what the passage teaches about that idea.⁶ This should be stated in a simple declarative sentence something like the example provided in the model at the end of this chapter. A simple, focused theme state is a key to effective sermon preparation. The Holy Spirit will help the preacher to craft and refine such a statement.

Step 3: Identify the “felt need” that the passage addresses.

Preaching that connects – preaching that changes lives – addresses the felt needs of people. An absolutely critical step in the development of a sermon strategy is the identification

of the “felt need” that a sermon addresses. This is best accomplished as the preacher considers again what was discovered during study about a situation addressed by the passage and how it was analogous to one that people face today. It has been my experience that this is one of the most difficult tasks for those learning to preach. As preachers we find it very difficult to think from the perspective of “the pew.” In fact, sometimes the best approach is to actually go into the auditorium where the sermon will be preached, sit down “in a pew” and say to yourself, “Now, what felt need does this passage address if I am sitting here as a truck driver, businessman, housewife or nurse?” The felt need the message addresses must be framed in those terms to be effective. (See the “Felt Need” in the model sermon page 136.)

Step 4: State clear objectives for your message.

The preacher needs to establish a goal or objective for the message. It should be framed in terms of behavioral change, how you are expecting members of the congregation to respond – what behavior he or she is expecting members of the audience to change. Well-crafted objectives include three things: What individuals in the congregation will do (expressed with a concrete, observable verb), the truth they will respond to, and how they will demonstrate their commitment or response.⁷ It is helpful if objectives are written for both the believer and the unbeliever. (See the “Objectives” in the model sermon outline on page 137)

Step 5: Brainstorm with a creative team about media and drama support.

Effective preachers are discovering that the visual orientation of today’s audiences require the use of media support to communicate the message of the gospel effectively. We live in a culture where visual images are used to capture attention, deliver a message and persuade people to respond. The visual images of television, the attention getting commercial, the dramatic portrayal of a life situation on screen now form the way people think. Consequently,

the incorporation of computer presentation software for projection, video, and drama in preaching the message of God's Word are quickly becoming standard.

I have used and recommend the use of a creative team within the local church to help the pastor in the delivery of sermons. This team would include people with skills in using presentation software, video production, drama, lighting and sound. Early in the week, after the preliminary preparation for a message has been completed, this team would be pulled together to pray and consider, along with the pastor, creative ways to help deliver the message. They would then go to work to make the plan a reality. It should be noted that this team does not need to be large to be effective. One or two gifted people are a place to start. The fact is, there are creative people in every church who can be identified, involved and discover fruitful ministry helping fulfill this important role.

Having used such a team, I can testify to the special sense of God's presence that often comes as together, with the pastor, this creative group of people share in prayer and planning about how to creatively communicate the message of God's Word. However, take care to coach such a team in their role, its description and its limits. For example, if a team is used to produce a special feature to introduce the message, talk about the nature of introducing something. You want them to set the stage for the message, not preach it.

Step 6: Come up with a good introduction.

There are several things that a good introduction should accomplish. First of all, an introduction should capture the attention of the audience. It isn't adequate however to simply capture attention – a bright tie or unusual jacket can do that. As noted, an introduction should set the stage for the sermon. It should introduce the truth of the passage and help the audience see its relevance to their lives. The person who preaches can depend upon the fact that the Holy

Spirit has been at work beforehand preparing hearts to receive the truth of the message. Consequently, an introduction should be approached as an act of cooperation with God to accomplish what He has already begun in the hearts of the listener. He can be depended upon to provide the creative approach necessary to set the stage for the proclamation of God’s word.

Step 7: State each point as a principle.

A well crafted sermon is comprised of several points. The number of points depends in part upon the way the Biblical writer developed the truth within the passage or the logical development of the theme. Various genres develop truth differently: Epistolary literature is often a chain of logic, narrative is a sequence of events or scenes, and Biblical poetry often utilizes parallelism, imagery, or the elements of a particular poetic form. The points of the sermon will tend to reflect the development of the passage. Too many points confuse the hearer. Simplicity of sermon structure should be the goal of the preacher. “Study until simplicity” is a favorite truism of mine. I have discovered that stating points as principles rather than simply descriptive statements about the contents of a passage helps effective communication and application. Consider the following comparison of the two approaches taken from a message entitled “Thank You for Giving to the Lord” (Text: Philippians 4:10-23)

Points Stated as Descriptive Statements	Points Stated as Principles
1. Their Gift: Prompted Paul’s Rejoicing (vv. 10, 20)	1. Giving Prompts Praise (vv. 10, 20)
2. Their Gift: And an Important Lesson Paul Learned (vv. 11-13)	2. Giving Helps Put Things in Proper Perspective (vv. 11-13)
3. Their Gift: A Partnership in Ministry (vv. 14-16)	3. Giving Demonstrates Partnership in Ministry (vv. 14-16)
4. Their Gift: An Investment and More (vv. 17-18)	4. Giving Is a Heavenly Investment and a Pleasing Sacrifice to God (vv. 17-18)
5. Their Gift: Leads to a Wonderful Word of Assurance (v. 19)	5. Giving Results in a Wonderful Promise of God’s Provision (v. 19)

Step 8: Explain and apply the text for each point.

The logical sequence in any sermon is usually explanation (exposition) and application. The expositor will move from meaning to significance – from the “then and there” of the Biblical text to the “here and now” of everyday life.

The same Spirit that moved the Biblical writer to pen the words of Scripture will help the preacher find effective ways to make the text understandable. Exposition or explanation should always keep in mind the frame of reference and the experience level of the listener. Generally it should avoid technical jargon or “Christianeze” to be effective. Yet it should not insult the intelligence of the listener. Language does not have to be esoteric to be profound.

Legitimate application should seek to establish a line of continuity between the world of the Biblical text and the world of the listener. Application should always seek to answer “so what” for the modern listener. The effective preacher should seek the Lord’s help in identifying situations in the daily lives of his listeners that are analogous to the one in the Biblical text. This is a key reason for doing a quality job of situation analysis in the study phase of preparation.

It has never ceased to amaze me how the Holy Spirit will direct the preacher to applications that are both appropriate and timely in the lives of a congregation.

Step 9: Identify apt illustrations.

Illustrations are such an important part of effective preaching! Exposition and application are critical to effective preaching, but an under-illustrated message can leave those two elements floundering like a fish out of water. Unfortunately, most preachers under-illustrate. They minimize its importance. My teenage son powerfully made this point one day several years ago. In a conversation about preachers he liked and who had impacted his life he remarked, “Dad, I’ll tell you who are good preachers. They’re the ones that tell lots of stories!” If the truth were known, a resounding chorus of hearty amen’s would echo through congregations around

the world to that statement. And all of those people would be on the same page with Jesus, of Nazareth – the Master Illustrator!

An apt illustration has incredible power! Properly understood, an apt illustration actually functions as exposition. It causes the listener to pause and remark, “Oh, now I understand! That’s what that verse means!” Finding the right illustration for a point is a critical matter. An illustration must bear the burden of the point it relates to. Realizing the importance of illustration, I find myself on many occasions in the study with head bowed beseeching God to help me find the right illustration. How many times the Holy Spirit has come through – reminding, prompting and guiding me to just the right illustration!

Step 10: Prayerfully craft your conclusion and appeal.

The conclusion and appeal of a sermon should never be left to chance. It should be prayerfully crafted with the guidance of the Holy Spirit in such a way that it applies the overall truth of the passage to the lives of the preacher’s listeners, calling them to an appropriate response. Ten key characteristics should be evident in effective sermon conclusions:

- They should evidence prayer and thoughtful preparation.
- They should be brief and sincere.
- They should be prepared with the purpose of the passage in mind.
- They should be the logical extension of the truth of the passage.
- They should provide the emotional climax of the sermon.
- They should personalize the application – moving the sermon from second and third person (“others”) to first person (“me”).
- They should seek a verdict based on the evidence presented in the message.
- They should seek a commitment from the hearer.

- They should be specific about what the preacher expects the audience to do at the close of the service.
- They should be sensitive to the working of the Spirit in the heart of the hearer.

The Pentecostal Preacher and Proclamation

Few things are more satisfying than to proclaim the timeless truth of God's Word to a group of modern hearers, to sense the enabling presence of the Holy Spirit, to experience the liberty in delivery that He brings, to sense His presence working powerfully in lives and see the fruit of His convicting and transforming power as people respond during the appeal. The Holy Spirit must be at work in the preaching event. We are ineffective without Him!

Study of the Scripture is basic and provides a solid data base for preaching. Preparation involves taking what has been studied and fashioning it into a sermon with the guidance and help of the Holy Spirit. But the task is only partially done when the strategy is on paper. Presentation – The actual preaching of the sermon with the Holy Spirit's help is what brings the harvest and changes lives.

First of all, the Holy Spirit enhances the presentation of the Pentecostal preacher. Study is finished, sermon outlines have been developed, and public speaking skills utilized as the sermon is delivered. It is good to know, however, that the Holy Spirit is able to lift the preacher's efforts to new levels of effectiveness. He is able to provide the clarity of thought, the stability of emotions and the personal poise so necessary to persuasive presentation.

Pentecostals prize a sense of dynamic freedom and sensitive flexibility in their churches. Preparedness is important, but bondage to notes is viewed negatively. Those who attend Pentecostal churches are drawn to preachers who are at home enough with their material that

they can minister to the needs under the direction of the Holy Spirit. The ability to move away from notes and the pulpit periodically and look the audience in the eye is important.

If we ask Him, the Holy Spirit can help preachers overcome distracting mannerisms and idiosyncrasies. He can free preachers from the destructive self-consciousness that destroys effective communication. The Holy Spirit can help provide the emotional security that enables communication with authority. He is also able to help the preacher maintain a clear sense of objective so that freedom and flexibility do not degenerate into pointless and aimless wanderings – “chasing down rabbit trails” if you please.

Good sermons have a beginning and an end. It is appalling when week after week a preacher barely gets through an introduction. Such a practice is certainly no sign of spirituality. If the preacher will ask Him, the Holy Spirit will enable a realistic evaluation of time so that a fully developed sermon can be preached. Pacing (the judicious management of time) should be practiced. If the teacher asks, the Holy Spirit will give a nudge when it is time to move on and will provide wisdom in making minor adjusting in the sermon plan. If self-control is a fruit of the Spirit (and Galatians 5:22-23 indicates it certainly is), then it applies to this concern of preaching.

There is an appropriate sense of authority that comes from the Spirit of God at work in the preacher’s life. Jesus “taught them as one having authority” (Mt. 7:29; Mk. 1:22). At the same time, humility and meekness are virtues of the Spirit. The Spirit-filled preacher is called upon to project a blend of these virtues. Preachers are to be humbly assertive and at the same time assertively dependent on the Lord in their preaching ministries. They must not feel they have to play the power game, act the demagogue, and throw their weight around behind the pulpit. On the other hand, the preacher must not be intimidated by the congregation. Timothy

was told, “God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but of power and love and self-control” (II Tim. 1:7 RSV). Granted, part of this comes from adequate study and preparation. However, that does not account for all of it. The Spirit of God produces God given authority within the preacher.

Sometimes the unexpected and disruptive takes place in a service. The guidance of the Holy Spirit along with the preacher’s interpersonal skills are critical to dealing with such times. Pentecostal preachers must believe that the Holy Spirit will be present to help them manage and deal with these disruptions. God given authority and a Biblical awareness of what constitutes doing everything “in a fitting and orderly way” are critical so that these things do not become destructive. Preachers must recognize God’s Spirit is at work within them providing the resources necessary to deal with these occasions (cp. Eph. 4:1-3; 23-32; Col. 3:12-14 with Gal. 5:16-25).

In addition to the Holy Spirit’s work with the teacher during the preparation and presentation of the sermon, one of the most exciting and dynamic dimensions of His ministry is within the congregation. Apart from the Spirit, the sociological dynamics within a congregation are exciting, but add the personality of the Spirit of God to the context and the possibilities are unlimited!

At times a special sense of the Holy Spirit’s dynamic presence exists. The auditorium seems to be alive with His presence. The audience is “vibing” with the teacher, if you please. The temptation inherent in a situation like that, as exciting as it may be, is that we will try to bottle up those moments, try to recall what we were doing when those special “God moments” happened, and try to make them normative (something we try to recreate in every sermon). In doing this, it is not long before we begin to try all kinds of silly antics to resurrect these special

moments. I believe God would remind us that He works with imperfect preachers to accomplish His will and that the Holy Spirit is active among us whether we are especially aware of His anointing or not.

The preaching of the Word has often given rise to faith and the Holy Spirit's activity among God's people that provide the setting for the miraculous to occur. Scripture clearly teaches that the manifestations of the Spirit ("the word of wisdom, word of knowledge, faith, gifts of healing, working of miracles, prophecy, discerning of spirits, tongues and interpretation of tongues") are to be expected in the gathered assembly where God is present (I Corinthians 12:8-10). The spiritually informed, alert and sensitive preacher will recognize God's desire to manifest Himself in these ways as the Word is preached and allow for it. What vitality, expectancy and excitement this will add to a service! Paul said, "If an unbeliever or someone who does not understand comes in...he will be convinced by all that he is a sinner and will be judged by all, and the secrets of his heart will be laid bare. So he will fall down and worship God, exclaiming, 'God is really among you!'" (1 Corinthians 14:24-25). Who ever said the authentic working of the Spirit was not attractive and effective with seekers?

The very nature of Pentecostal experience is pervasive. The Holy Spirit pierces hard hearts, smashes resistance, breaks down walls, opens doors, and slips in through the smallest of crevices. He seasons and influences everything. The Holy Spirit's pervasive presence is clearly documented in the book of Acts in particular and the entire New Testament in general. At the first Pentecost, He came like a wind that "filled the whole house where they were sitting" (Acts 2:2). Each life was impacted as what appeared to be "tongues of fire...came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the

Spirit enabled them” (2:3-4). That experience became a life in the Spirit that gave birth to a generation of Pentecostal preachers who were “scattered everywhere” and “preached the word wherever they went” (8:4)! Nothing has changed! Pentecostal preachers today appreciate and depend upon the Holy Spirit’s dynamic, empowering influence in every aspect of “preaching the Word.” The Holy Spirit powerfully influences their study for a sermon and their preparation of the sermon strategy or outline. He also enables and empowers their delivery of God’s Word.

Endnotes

¹Ray H. Hughes, “Preaching, A Pentecostal Perspective,” in *Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, eds. Stanley M. Burgess and Gary B. McGee, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1988), 722.

²Adapted from Hughes, 722-24.

³For an excellent description of what does and doesn’t characterize good expository preaching consult Walter E. Liefeld, “The Importance of Expository Preaching” in *New Testament Exposition: From Text to Sermon*, Ministry Resources Library, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), 3-25.

⁴Different terms have been used to describe what this author calls an “analytical diagram.” Dick Dresselhaus, in chapter 2 of this book, uses the term “syntactical, analytical, outline or layout.” Some in English Bible studies have referred to this as “an analytical chart” (Irving L. Jensen, *Independent Bible Study* [Chicago, Moody Press, 1972], 144-45, 154-55) or a “mechanical layout” (Haddon W. Robinson, *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages* [Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1980] 215-16). In Greek or Hebrew studies the terms “structural analysis” are used (Gordon D. Fee, *New Testament Exegesis: A Handbook for Students and Pastors* [Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1983] 60-77), or the “syntactical display” (Kaiser, Walter, Jr., *Toward an Exegetical Theology: Biblical Exegesis for Preaching and Teaching* [Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1981], 99-103, 165-181). I have found the approach presented by Irving Jensen in *Independent Bible Study* to be the most helpful for English Bible students.

⁵This writer is often asked for recommendations for building a library of quality commentaries and other Bible study sources. Several excellent lists are available. I recommend two sources: “Appendix: The Evaluation and Use of Commentaries,” in *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1993) 246-254, and J. Scott Duvall and J. Daniel Hayes, “Building a Personal Library,” in *Grasping God’s Word*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 2001) 401-422.

⁶Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 66-68.

⁷*Ibid.*, 107-12