

A Highway Journey and the Vowels of Preaching
A Model Proposed For Urban Pastors

PENULIS

R.T. Johnson Rain

INSTITUSI

Langham Preaching India

E-MAIL

johnsonraih@gmail.com

HALAMAN

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ABSTRACT

Christian preaching served as a vehicle of the Church to transmit God's word as revealed in the Bible to humankind, and especially to strengthen the faith of the Christians down the centuries. This article does not engage with the genres or methods of preaching (expository, topical, narrative etc.), but asks what comprises the elements of a sermon and effective preaching? Several homileticians have proposed several metaphors to answer this question. This article proposes a highway journey as a metaphor of preaching, and discusses the elements involved in effective preaching through the five vowels.

Keywords: *Highway model, Preaching method, Urban pastors.*

INTRODUCTION

Ideas have wings to fly far and roots to grow deep. History has shown that ideas have flown across the chasm of time, space, cultures and human civilizations. An idea birthed in a corner of the world since time immemorial is being embraced and even propagated in the other side of the globe today. These ideas can be theological, philosophical, agricultural, scientific, and others. And they are spread through various means—stories, books, teachers, and today through internet and technology. When it comes to religious thoughts and beliefs, especially in Christianity, missionaries, preachers, teachers and evangelists have taken the message of the Bible across the globe. Their teachings and sermons have helped establish and sustain the believers' faith in the God of the Bible. Cutting across all denominational divide, the Christian preachers have taught and preached the doctrines of the Bible, albeit by various methods. In this article, the goal is not to engage with the genres of preaching: expository, topical, narrative etc,¹ but to engage with a metaphor of preaching – preaching as a highway journey, and also to discuss the elements involved in effective preaching through the five vowels.

Over the years, various homiletics had come up with different models and metaphors for sermon preparation. For example, Ramesh Richard uses the human body model (Flesh, Skeleton, Heart, Brain);² Paul Scott Wilson uses the four pages of the sermon model;³ Jensen and Grimmond uses the archer and the arrow model;⁴ and Paul Windsor uses the map model (Country, State, City) to prepare a sermon.⁵ Their models remain valuable. But in this article, we make an attempt to look at preaching as a highway journey, having a starting and ending point.⁶ The advantage of having a model is that it gives the “congregation handles to grasp...helps them track along with” the preacher.⁷

LOGICALITY AND RELEVANCE OF A HIGHWAY MODEL

It is appropriate to discuss the logicity and relevance of this imagery at the outset. The metaphor of a highway is commonplace, but this model does not claim universal relevance for all people, cultures and churches. This model will best suit preachers who have settled in an urban setting, yet have their roots connected to the rural countryside, and who do travel on highways that connect the two places.⁸ Firstly, highway is an uninterrupted big stretch of road,

¹For a more detailed study, see Hughes Oliphant Old, *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church, Volume 1: The Biblical Period*, First Edition (Grand Rapids, Mich: Wm. B. Eerdmans-Lightning Source, 1998), 8–18.

²Ramesh Richard, *Preparing Expository Sermons: A Seven-Step Method for Biblical Preaching* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Books, 2001).

³Paul Scott Wilson, *The Four Pages of the Sermon*, Reprint edition (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1999).

⁴Phillip D. Jensen and Paul Grimmond, *Archer and the Arrow: Preaching the Very Words of God* (Kingsford: Matthias Media, 2010).

⁵Paul Windsor (International Director, Langham Preaching and Professor of Preaching), “Maps and Preaching,” *Class Notes* (SAIACS, MTh 2, 2015); The list is not exclusive. But these four models will suffice as examples for our purpose here.

⁶This highway model is adapted from Paul Windsor's “country, state and city” model, but with a different metaphor. Highway is a common sight which every preacher (both lay and trained) and the congregation can identify with.

⁷Mark Dever and Greg Gilbert, *Preach: Theology Meets Practice* (Nashville, Tenn: B&H Books, 2012), 86.

⁸For some, the incongruous expansion of roads and highways cutting through the landscape of beautiful country sides may be uncomfortable with this metaphor. A person's context and experience can paint the idea of a highway in a different light. But the truth that a highway connects two cities or towns is undeniable. Hence, its usage.

connecting major towns and cities. Even if there are ridges, there are bridges to connect the two ends of the road. Preaching also is a continuous piece of oral communication. In case of concepts that need clarification, preachers use illustrations to bridge the gap. Secondly, highway gives the impression of a journey and a destination. Not many people journey on the road without a clear sense of one's destination. A preacher exactly knows the journey of his sermon, going from one idea to another, based on the text chosen and how he would end the sermon.⁹ Thirdly, highway supports the idea of a sermon as an organic body that develops and progresses in its growth. A highway between two cities or towns does not have a sudden dead end between them, it keeps going on, and as it goes on, the towns and cities on the way are covered progressively—as a rose emerging from its bud naturally, as against the idea of forced and disjointed constructions, “a static collection of inanimate parts put together.”¹⁰ So also in preaching, the main idea and theme of the sermon grows from the text, there must be a natural flow of argument taking shape, as against forcing ideas from a different text into the sermon.¹¹ Fourthly, as we drive through a highway towards a destination, we may come across many divergent roads and roundabouts. It is possible that a particular sermon has the potential to lead to divergent trajectories. But as the driver must avoid all the other deviating roads and choose the one that will help reach the destination, preaching is also a deliberate onward movement with a clear goal, scope and time frame. Preachers cannot digress to some unrelated ideas in their sermon. They must stay on course.¹²

THEOLOGICAL RELEVANCE FOR A JOURNEY MODEL

Before we look at the metaphor of a highway journey as a preaching model, let us ask if this quest has any scriptural or theological basis. The Bible has innumerable accounts of journey episodes where God relates with his people. In fact, the stories in the Bible are sandwiched between the first journey of Adam and Eve out of the Garden of Eden in Genesis, to the final journey believers will take to heaven in Revelation.¹³ We could argue that journeys are like sermons having a starting point, a purpose, and a destination.¹⁴ Here is an attempt to make a scriptural case, to consider some biblical journeys as sermons. Below are three examples that may help elucidate this point. Firstly, in the New Testament, the journey of Jesus:

⁹*Contra*: There are some preachers who preach without a clear idea of their destination beforehand. They claim to preach “as the Spirit leads.”

¹⁰Eugene L. Lowry, *The Homiletical Plot, Expanded Edition: The Sermon as Narrative Art Form*, Expanded, Subsequent edition (Louisville, Ky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000), 8–9.

¹¹This does not mean ignoring the other related passages talking about a particular biblical theme. They must be mentioned as a reference story, an illustration or in passing. This is the realm of biblical theology, where a preacher develops or connects an idea found in others books of the Bible to the text chosen for exposition, asking what is this New Testament idea that was concealed in the Old Testament, and conversely, what was this Old Testament idea that is revealed and developed in the New Testament. This idea of “concealing” and “revealing” is ascribed to Augustine. See Ronald F. Youngblood, “Old Testament Quotations in the New Testament,” in *Rightly Divided: Readings in Biblical Hermeneutics*, ed. Roy B. Zuck (Grand Rapids, Mich: Kregel Academic & Professional, 1996), 199. But what one must avoid is “proof-texting,” trying to integrate a few independent thoughts from different passages which may look superficially coherent, but intrinsically not.

¹²The advantage of a highway journey imagery is that, even if a preacher does digress and swerve from the main direction of the sermon, they can come back again to the main highway through some connecting roads and continue with the journey.

¹³The final journey of those whose name is not found in the book of life will be the lake of fire, hell (Rev. 20:15).

¹⁴Some may argue that, thieves and robbers can take a trip without a clear sense of purpose and destination. But we could argue that theft is their purpose, and careless or unsuspecting passenger's luggage are their destination.

from incarnation, to crucifixion, and to ascension is God's sermon of his unconditional love for the world. Through Jesus' journey, God brought redemption to his creation.¹⁵ Humanity has heard it and continues to listen to that timeless sermon. Secondly, after Jesus' resurrection, two despairing disciples journeyed towards Emmaus.¹⁶ As Jesus walked with them, he saw their sorrow. During the journey, Jesus spoke hope, by reminding them of the scripture, how the "messiah have to suffer and then enter his glory."¹⁷ Later at Emmaus, as Jesus broke bread and gave it to them, "their eyes were opened."¹⁸ Journeying with Jesus transformed their despairing hearts into jubilant and burning hearts. It was a sermon in motion. Thirdly, Philip's journey with the Ethiopian Eunuch who was traveling from Jerusalem to Gaza is another good example.¹⁹ Philip was led by the Spirit to take a journey on the desert road and speak to the Eunuch, who was reading the book of Isaiah²⁰ but could not understand. When Philip interpreted the passage and also shared the "good news about Jesus,"²¹ the Eunuch opened his heart and received baptism on a road side water body.²² The short journey of Philip was like a sermon event that impacted the life of the Eunuch. These episodes and some others in the Bible justify the use of the journey metaphor when talking about preaching. Now, to understand this metaphor for preaching better, let us imagine a family who is on a journey and reflect upon it as a sermon preparation model.

"Come, it's time to hit the road" said Joshua to his family, as they said their prayers for the journey. It was Christmas time and the children are excited to spend their vacation in the village with their grandparents and extended family members. The distance between the town where they now live, and their native village is over 90 kms. They need to get going and reach the village before it gets dark. Joash, Julie, Jennifer and little Jeremy were very excited as they had been waiting for this day to arrive. "Mother, mother, come, sit with me," screamed Jeremy the youngest boy from the back seat. He had just turned six. "Yes, yes, buddy, I will," said Lucy, as she locked the front door of their house and got into the car.

Joshua and Lucy have a clear plan in their mind, even before Joshua could start the engine of the car—where to stop and relax, and where to procure the groceries and other things for the family's use during the vacation. It has been all planned out.²³ Just before they drove out of their campus, Joshua briefed them about the journey plans. They were going to stop by at three towns before they reach the village. In the first town he said that they will visit three shops – the bakery, pharmacy and sport's store. Then in the second town they will visit three families of their cousins to wish them a Merry Christmas and gift them a cake each. In the third town, they will stop by at three places: an eatery, vegetable vendor and stationery. Receiving

¹⁵Rom. 5:8.

¹⁶Luke 24.

¹⁷Luke 24:26.

¹⁸Luke 24:31.

¹⁹Acts 8:26-40.

²⁰Isaiah 53:7-8.

²¹Acts 8:35.

²²Acts 8:36.

²³Another model that has a clear starting point and destination is the archer and arrow model. See, Jensen and Grimmond, *The Archer and the Arrow*.

affirmative nodding from each one of them, he said, “Well, then let’s get going.” He started the engine, drove the car towards the highway, and off they went.

Preaching is also similar to that, it is a journey. It is a journey where the preacher must have a clear outline.²⁴ In each outline, the preacher must engage with three aspects – the aspects of explanation (E); illustration (I); and application (A), like the three activities in each of the three towns. So, “EIA” could be a part of the vowels of preaching.²⁵

Explanation

Explanation is the phase when a preacher takes his contemporary listeners back to the world of the text. Here, the preacher tries to comprehend and interpret what God wanted his people in history to understand, what God’s concern was and why did God say or perform certain things. At this stage we are not yet answering the question, “What does it mean to us today in the 21st century?” Here we are helping our listeners see what God’s words meant for the original readers in their historical contexts (social, economic, cultural, literary, religious etc.). Here, the focus rather is on the description and exposition of the text, to find out what the author’s big idea or theme was for the people.²⁶ So, at this point we are “drawing out from the Word of God what the Holy Spirit has deposited there without addition, subtraction or modification.”²⁷

Moreover, the importance is also in establishing the relationship between the chosen text and the preceding or the succeeding passages. It is also vital to relate to the larger theme of the book and finally to ask this question, “Is my explanation consistent to biblical theology?” that sweeps through the entire pages of both the testaments.

Furthermore, during this phase of explanation, a preacher is not a biblical tourist, hitching and camping in different biblical texts. The chosen text is “the swimming pool into which we dive to swim, not a springboard from where we jump out of the text”²⁸ into the wilderness of our own whimsical thoughts, disconnected from the chosen text to preach. The text is the

²⁴Some think that that having three points in a sermon has some advantages: It shows “developmental thought” like: “problem, plan and effects”; “beginning, middle, and end”; “what, why and how”; Whereas, some argue for the advantage of two points sermon when a preacher contrasts and uses “balanced tension”: “external and internal”; “spiritual and physical”; “divine and human”; attitude and action.” See, Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon*, 2nd edition (Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Academic, 2005), 158. Homiletics continue to debate on whether a sermon must have more or less than three outlines. Nevertheless, most agree that each sermon’s need must determine the number of the outline in a sermon. See, John A. Broadus, *On the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons: Fourth Edition*, 4th ed. edition (San Francisco: HarperOne, 1979), 133.; Jay E. Adams, *Preaching with Purpose*, Illustrated edition (Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan, 1986), 56.; David L. Larsen, *The Anatomy of Preaching: Identifying the Issues in Preaching Today* (Kregel Academic & Professional, 1999), 68.; Dr John R. W. Stott and Greg Scharf, *The Challenge of Preaching*, Abridged edition (Grand Rapids, Mich: W. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1994), 60.

²⁵For more on Explanation, Illustration and Application, see, Gary Millard and Phil Campbell, Gary Millar and Phil Campbell, *Saving Eutychus: How to Preach God’s Word and Keep People Awake*, 2nd edition (Kingsford: Matthias Media, 2013).; Dever and Gilbert, *Preach.*; John R. W. Stott, *I Believe in Preaching* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1982).; Timothy Keller, *Preaching: Communicating Faith in an Age of Skepticism*, Complete Numbers Starting with 1, 1st Ed edition (New York: Viking, 2015); Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*.

²⁶The question of how to transition from the text to the sermon, or how to identify the big idea is not within the scope of this article.

²⁷Alec Motyer, *Preaching?: Simple Teaching on Simply Preaching*, Revised edition (Ross-shire, TW: Christian Focus, 2013), 101.

²⁸Paul Windsor, “Level 1,” *Langham Preaching Seminar*, (Guwahati, January 2011).

“swimming pool in which we swim for the entire duration of the sermon.”²⁹ It is another homiletician who said that the chosen text is not “a launching pad³⁰ but a deep freeze or a supermarket” because a launching pad is nothing but a starting point and it becomes unconnected and irrelevant once the “satellite goes into a trajectory” or takes off. But the difference of a “deep freeze” and “the supermarket” is that they are “storehouses from which we bring out specific goods” for the people.³¹ So, in a sermon we *bring out* deep truths and revelation from the Word of God. The text is the bottomless reservoir of the *bread of life* and the *living water*. Then, the next vowel is the “I” (Illustration).

Illustration

Although the aim of the preacher is to make sure that the words he uses are simple and conversational, so that even the least educated member in the congregation could understand, but sometimes, the depth of God’s words seems elusive for the listeners. It is here that the preacher reaches out to the faculty of the imagination for help. The preacher employs illustration. An illustration helps open up a concept or an idea that otherwise remains closed or veiled.³² Words alone without imagination can lead to boredom and imprison a listener’s concentration. A good illustration not need to be a story, it could simply be a word or two that ignites an image³³ in the minds of the people, an image taken from the everyday life, to which the people can relate with. Paul Windsor beautifully captures this idea when he says that a good preacher-illustrator is one who sees “the spiritually significant alongside the utterly ordinary.”³⁴ During a highway journey our eyes fall on several images, and we remember some of them vividly associated with that journey, long after the trip is over. In preaching too, it is helpful to introduce some images related to the theme of the sermon, which the people can relate with as they move out from the church service.

Look at Jesus, the master preacher and illustrator. Sometimes he tells a story to drive home a point, for example he narrates the “parable of the unmerciful servant” in Matthew 18:23-35, to illustrate his teaching on forgiveness. At another time, it was just two words, “mustard seed” to teach the kingdom of God (Matt. 13:31-32) or about faith (Matt. 17:20). The primary purpose of an illustration is not to have another parallel story running along with your sermon, fighting for the centre stage. It is neither a walking stick that your sermon leans upon, nor a makeup behind which you hide, because of a mediocre preparation. Rather, it serves as a window that “brighten(s) up the sermon with light.”³⁵ Like a window it also cross-ventilates

²⁹Paul Windsor, “Level 1.”

³⁰Peter Adams also says that the text can be used as a “launching pad for a discussion of some other subjects as a mere issue-raiser. The commonly quoted warning against this is that ‘a text without a context is a pretext.’” Peter Adam, *Speaking God’s Words: A Practical Theology of Preaching*, Illustrated edition (Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 2004), 102.

³¹Motyer, *Preaching?*, 36.

³²Should every sermon have an illustration? Perhaps, no, particularly when you’re preaching from a narrative or a story. This discussion will not be covered in this article.

³³Paul Windsor also emphasises the importance of a “prevailing image,” so as to spark off the imagination of the listeners. Paul Windsor, “The Magnifying Glass.” *UESI Staff Training*, July 2016; Also read Keller, *Preaching*, 169.

³⁴Paul Windsor, “What Is Preaching?,” in *Text Messages: Preaching God’s Word in a Smartphone World*, ed. John Tucker (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2017), 10.

³⁵Charles Haddon Spurgeon, *Third Series Of Lectures To My Students: The Art Of Illustration: Being Addresses Delivered To The Students Of The Pastor’s College, Metropolitan Tabernacle* (Lynchburg: The Old-Time Gospel Hour, 1984), 2.

the “stuffy exegetical room” to bring in fresh air. Arguably, “a sermon without illustration is like a house without windows”, but “a sermon with trivial or pathetic illustrations is worse: it is like a house with broken windows and the holes stuffed with rags and straw.”³⁶ In contrast, “good illustrations are like street lamps, scarcely noticed, but throwing floods of light upon the road.”³⁷ So, a good illustration serves as a springboard for your sermon; it enhances the sermon’s impact by enlightening the mind of the listeners to truths which they otherwise could not have grasped. The third vowel is “A” (application).

Application

And now it is time to talk about what the ancient text and messages mean to the YouTube and Instagram generation today. It finally boils down to the question, “So what?” Should a sermon always end with an application? What is wrong if it does not? Is implication not enough? Speaking about his friend D. Lucas, John Stott affirms that Lucas’ sermons were not only faithful to the text and relevant to the culture, and the world of his congregation, but he makes great effort in his application, by labouring to find appropriate application until the deadlock is “cracked,” because he is convinced that “God’s Word is timeless and timely,”³⁸ for his people at every age of human existence. There had been voices against the idea of preachers making applications during the preaching event because of some bad experiences.³⁹ However, it must not nullify its usefulness and “deter us from seeking out and confronting the consciences of our hearers.”⁴⁰ Frank J. Retief rightly says, “people listening to us need to have a sense that the Bible passage we are expounding has something to say to them, today.” In other words, the ancient biblical truth given for another people, culture and time should be made relevant for the people of today. People should walk out of the church after the church service saying, this biblical truth is speaking to me in my situation – “he means me.”⁴¹

It is helpful for a preacher to remember that the congregation is made up of people carrying different baggages and undergoing various struggles. Their needs are all different, as are their ages and gender, and so with sensitivity, the preacher’s aim is not only to inform but persuade his listeners.⁴² A true preacher therefore, must make efforts to find ways to make application possible as Prophet Nathan confronted King David saying, “you are the man,” but

³⁶As quoted by Lloyd M. Perry, *Biblical Preaching for Today’s World*, Revised, Subsequent edition (Chicago: Moody Pub, 1990), n.p..

³⁷Perry, *Biblical Preaching for Today’s World*.

³⁸John Stott, “Foreword,” in *When God’s Voice Is Heard: The Power of Preaching*, ed. Christopher Green and David Jackman (Leicester: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 9.

³⁹Frank J. Retief gives these arguments people make against making applications in a sermon. Firstly, they say that the listeners are “quite able to work out the application themselves” and so applying for them in a sermon is nothing short of insulting them. Secondly, they say, “great offence may be caused if lessons are applied too directly.” Thirdly, they say that a preacher must proclaim the message and leave the matter of application to the Holy Spirit to “apply the meaning to the individual.” Fourthly, the mistake of some preachers applying the sermon in an “offensive and crude” manner repelled many listeners; Frank J. Retief, “Preaching That Grows the Church,” in *When God’s Voice Is Heard: The Power Of Preaching*, ed. Christopher Green and David Jackman (Leicester: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 131.

⁴⁰Retief, 131.

⁴¹Retief, 132.

⁴²Norval f. Pease says that “preaching is persuasive speech.” Norval F. Pease, “Charles E. Weniger’s Theory Of The Relationship Of Speech And Homiletics” (Michigan State University, 1964); Also See, Austin B. Tucker, *The Preacher As Storyteller: The Power Of Narrative In The Pulpit*, First Edition (Nashville, Tenn: B&H Academic, 2008), 68.

the preacher's attitude must certainly be to build the person, and speak the truth in grace.⁴³ While interviewing a pastor of a Baptist Church in Manipur, India on the issue of sermonic application, he answered figuratively by saying,

“although pigs love to eat potato and some other delicious food, they run away, if the food is thrown at them...although it is the Bible, sermon, and spiritual food, if we do not try to win the hearts of the people with love but instead with our power and authority, that will not make the church very healthy. People will stop coming to the church.”⁴⁴

The highway preaching model ends with “EIA.” But if we are to talk of the complete vowels of preaching, then we could add two more letters – “OU,” which are indispensable for the ministry of preaching. We must acknowledge preaching as an oral (O) communication, and that it is empowered through the unction (U) of the Holy Spirit. Below, we will briefly discuss the remaining two.

Orality

There are people groups in the world with oral tradition and culture,⁴⁵ but the focus here is not in discussing orality as a tradition that transmits and stores indigenous knowledge, rather one that communicates the gospel as opposed to written and visual means.⁴⁶

Preaching is ultimately an “oral communication,”⁴⁷ not a visual presentation, nor a written letter.⁴⁸ I agree with Wayne McDill that,

“Oral communication is presenting a spoken message for aural reception...Oral communication, then, is speaking by mouth to be received by ear. Sermons are oral communication. A sermon is an oral presentation of theological truths to a particular audience at a particular time. The sermon does not come into existence until it is preached.”⁴⁹

Needless to say, preaching is achieved through spoken words. Long before the invention of the computer and PowerPoint presentation (PPT), we find examples in the Bible on how

⁴³Retief, “Preaching That Grows the Church,” 43.

⁴⁴R. T. Johnson Raih, *Expository Preaching in a World of Spiritual Nominalism: Exploring the Churches in India's North East* (Carlise: Langham Monographs, 2021), 144.

⁴⁵For example, before the advent of Christianity and literacy in Poumai land (a tribe in Manipur state in India), our cultural traditions and heritage - history, language, religion, social norms etc., were passed down through oral communication; For more information on oral tradition read, Yer J. Thao, *The Mong Oral Tradition: Cultural Memory in the Absence of Written Language*, Illustrated edition (Jefferson, N.C: McFarland, 2006), 171.; Patricia Leavy, *Oral History: Understanding Qualitative Research*, Illustrated edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 3..

⁴⁶For more on orality as a preferred means of communication, see,

<https://www.lausanne.org/networks/issues/orality> (accessed, November 23, 2018).

⁴⁷H. C. Brown, Jesse J. Northcutt, and H. Gordon Clinard, *Steps to the Sermon: An Eight-Step Plan For Preaching With Confidence*, Revised edition (Nashville, Tenn: B&H Academic, 1996), n.p.; Fred B. Craddock, *Preaching* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2010), 17. *Contra*, there are others who disagree with this definition. They would include “visual communication” like movies to preaching. Timothy B. Cargal, *Hearing a Film, Seeing a Sermon: Preaching and Popular Movies* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 2007), 5.

⁴⁸Some may argue that Apostle Paul preached through his letters. Although we could agree that he did preach in his letters, they were still letters, not verbal or oral communication delivered in person.

⁴⁹Wayne McDill, *The 12 Essential Skills for Great Preaching - Second Edition*, Revised, Expanded edition (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2006), 202. Also see, David M. Brown, *Transformational Preaching: Theory and Practice*, Revised edition (Texas: Virtual Bookworm.Com Pub Inc, 2008), 132.

sermons were verbally delivered by the prophets, by Jesus Christ and by his disciples. We also learn from church history that the early church fathers and subsequent preachers did the same.⁵⁰ With the gift of modern technology, many consider PPT as a handmaiden of preaching task. There certainly is a place for it, as the outlines of the sermon and scriptural texts on PPT give a clarity for the listeners, especially for note takers. However, PPT must not be excessively used.⁵¹ The danger of having PPT is the tendency for the listeners to shift their attention from the preacher to the LCD projector, and if there is a constant back and forth movement, it can cause distraction and disruption of attention for both the preacher and the listeners. This is because in preaching, the preacher must be constantly connected to the listeners by his “facial expression, tone of voice...vocal variables,” and eye contact, during the entire sermonic delivery.⁵²

Also, as an oral communication, the manuscript of preaching must be written in a conversational style—with shorter syllable and sentences, and not as an academic treatise with long sentences, that need to be footnoted. Here, our goal is, “writing words that are to be spoken”⁵³ both to the young and the old, literate, semi-literate or even illiterate; thus, shorter sentences, simpler expressions⁵⁴ and avoidance of jargon is suggested. Theological jargon is a sermon killer, especially for the lay listeners. If the preacher wants to introduce a technical phrase or term to the congregation, it must be simplified or explained, or else it will put off the listeners.⁵⁵ Then, the fifth vowel is the “U” (unction).

Uction

The person and work of the Holy Spirit is indispensable to the heart of preaching, although his work is invisible. It must be affirmed that the impact of the sermon is determined by how the Holy Spirit works in the minds and hearts of the “listeners as well as the preacher.”⁵⁶ This is because ultimately, the Holy Spirit holds the key to all the secrets of “God’s wise plans.”⁵⁷ Moreover, the ability to “create faith or change in the listeners is not our skill, nor eloquence or lack of it.”⁵⁸ Never should preachers consider themselves as self-sufficient, for

⁵⁰Joe Babendreier, *The Faith Explained Today* (New Rochelle, NY: Scepter, 2014), n.p.

⁵¹There are some preachers who give a mini verbatim of one’s sermon. This brings conflict between the senses the eyes and ears, and so instead of helping, many can get distracted.

⁵²McDill, *The 12 Essential Skills for Great Preaching - Second Edition*, 207. The issue of gesture in sermonic delivery is an important topic, but we will not discuss further here, as it is not within the ambit of this article.

⁵³Richard Carl Hoefler, *Creative Preaching & Oral Writing*, Illustrated edition (Lima, Ohio: CSS Publishing Company, 1978), 93.

⁵⁴Keller says preaching as an oral activity must avoid bringing up “many ideas” but be “more repetitious” and “use simpler vocabulary.” Keller, *Preaching*, 178.

⁵⁵The listeners can feel inferior, intimidated or ill-equipped to be a follower of Christ without going to a Bible college; This practice can also unconsciously build an attitude of “unspoken elitism” in the mind of the preacher.

⁵⁶Keller, *Preaching*, 11.

⁵⁷Keller, 11.

⁵⁸Johnson Lim, *Power in Preaching* (New York: University Press of America, 2002), 21.; Anyone who thinks otherwise is like “the foolish rooster [which] thinks he causes the sun to rise, and the foolish preacher [who] thinks he causes faith to grow.” Lim, 21.; See also, Edward F. Markquart, *Quest for Better Preaching: Resources for Renewal in the Pulpit* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress Pub, 1985), 151. For more on Holy Spirit’s role in preaching, Haddon W. Robinson, *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages*, 2nd edition (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 20; Phillip D. Jensen, “Preaching That Changes the Church,” in *When God’s Voice Is Heard: The Power Of Preaching*, ed. Christopher Green and David Jackman (Leicester: InterVarsity Pres, 2003), 141. .

they must cultivate the “humility of dependence”⁵⁹ or else pride will destroy their preaching.⁶⁰ This is so because human preachers are “finite, fallen, frail and fallible creatures” and we need God’s Spirit to enter the “the mind, heart, conscience and the will” of the people to transform their lives.⁶¹ It is not in the power of the human preacher to bring to life and transform the spiritually dead people “imprisoned by Satan.” This transformational action can be achieved only when the Holy Spirit awakens “the conscience, enlighten the mind, fire the heart, move the will, (and) give life to the dead.”⁶²

So, then, when is the work of the Holy Spirit active, before, during or after the preaching? The answer is obvious, in all three. Before – as the preacher reads and observes the text, imagines and crafts his manuscript, he actively surrenders himself and seeks the Holy’s Spirit guidance. In doing so, he empties himself of his pride and self-reliance. The Holy Spirit is also convincing and bringing people to the church because he seeks for people who seek his intervention in their lives.⁶³ During – as the preacher stands to deliver, the Holy Spirit anoints the preacher; frees him from his own limitations; lubricates his tongue; brings to remembrance appropriate ideas, ideas not necessarily in the manuscript;⁶⁴ build a wall of defence against distractive thoughts in the preacher and listeners; and blows the wind of conviction and urgency upon both the preacher and listeners. After – as the listeners go back, the Holy Spirit continues to nudge people to apply what they have heard, to enable them to hatch behavioural changes in their lives. As for the preachers, after the delivery of the sermon, the Holy Spirit helps them to fix their hearts and attitudes towards God, and not to absorb or take in any praise or glory, which is due to God alone. In all these, we can therefore say that the unction of the Holy Spirit in preaching affects the head (renews their mind); moves the heart (convicts their inner being) and propels their hands and feet (towards behavioural change).⁶⁵

CONCLUSION

And finally, the journey of the family came to an end. Now, they are at the grandparents’ home, the car is parked, and everyone is sitting around the fire place, as the cold wintry mountain breeze descends on the village. It had been a long day but the children were still looking fresh, perhaps because they were waiting for grandpa’s bed time stories. Relaxing now with a glass of warm water, Joshua thought, “We stopped by at three towns and in each one of them we had three activities performed,⁶⁶ it had been a long day, nevertheless it was a

⁵⁹Stott, *I Believe in Preaching*, 328.

⁶⁰Stott, 329–30.

⁶¹Stott, *I Believe in Preaching*, 334.

⁶²Stott and Scharf, *The Challenge of Preaching*, 89. *Contra*: As an exception and fore-warning, Jesus taught about the conditions of the human hearts and their different responses to God’s word, in the parable of the four types of soils (Luke 8:1-15). We find in the Bible that although Jesus preached and taught in the power of the Holy Spirit, many people did not experience repentance, e.g., Iscariot Judas, many Pharisees and Sadducees. So, a godly preacher, preaching a good sermon through the power of the Holy Spirit may not necessarily guarantee a change of heart of the listeners. The type of soil is important for the seed to take its root and grow. Darrell W. Johnson, *The Glory of Preaching: Participating in God’s Transformation of the World* (Downers Grove, Ill: IVP Academic, 2009), 235.

⁶³In this same way, Johnson says that “Zacchaeus seeks Jesus who was seeking Zacchaeus.” Johnson, *The Glory of Preaching*, 235.

⁶⁴We can call it the pulpit inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

⁶⁵Paul Windsor, “The Five Corners,” *Class Notes* (MTh. SAIACS 2014); Also see Keller, *Preaching*, 166.

⁶⁶So also the “EIA” elements of preaching: First town – EIA; Second town – EIA; and Third town – EIA.

good trip.” By now, the laughter of the children went up by several decibels, drowning out his contemplation. Grandma then announced, “Dinner is ready, go and take your seat.”

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