

A Priority in Sermon Preparation

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Prayer. Every preacher of the gospel would heartily, happily, and immediately affirm this as a “given.” But I ask every herald: *‘how much time this week did you devote in specific times of prayer for your sermon?’* We know we must pray. It’s taught in seminaries. It’s read in every homiletical book. It’s proclaimed at pastor’s conferences. But is it *really* practiced in our own service to the Lord?

In this brief essay, I want to provide 5 simple ways that we men of God can pray in the sermon preparation process.

1. Pray **BELIEVINGLY.**

We pray. We know we must and we affirm that we do. But do we really *believe* that God hears *and* that God will act because we have prayed? Do we believe that the Lord has the power to not only create the world but to save sinners *this Sunday* through the sermon that goes forth? Really. Do we believe that God is watching over His Word to perform it. Do we believe that God’s Word will not return void. Do we remember how the disciples could not cast out the demon when Jesus came down from the Mount of Transfiguration and how Jesus said this kind only comes out by prayer? Do we forget that sometimes, like the disciples, we can do ministry in wonderful, flashy human abilities yet the spiritual, deep, soul-work requires prayer. Prayer! O let us pray believingly to a Father who hears and who has promised to answer and grant what we ask! O pray with faith! Pray with confidence! Pray with dependence! Pray with joy!

2. Pray **CONTINUOUSLY.**

Throughout the entirety of the sermon preparation process, bathe it all in prayer. From the initial readings of the text itself, bathe it in prayer asking the Spirit for illumination. From the studies in the original languages and the word studies, ask God for help. In the construction of the outline and illustration and cross-references, beg for God’s assistance. In the urging of sinners to close with Christ and come all the way to Him in faith and in the specific application to believers, see that these times are relentlessly devoted to prayer throughout. Pray continuously before, during, and even after the sermon is preached! Let us be men entirely devoted to God for strength and wisdom and entirely dependent (yes, even desperate!) for His precious illumination to know His Word, to bring the message together, and to deliver it with unstoppable power and understandable clarity.

3. Pray **WORSHIPFULLY.**

As a minister of the gospel, the greatest task in the universe rests upon the preacher to search and study, dig and deliver, research and reveal the mind of God from the Word of God to the people of God. So, men of God, worship God *as you study*. Let it never become a duty or a chore to study the precious words of God in Scripture. As it has been said, never lose your awe

of God. As you preach the gospel to others, never forget you need that same gospel *first of all*. As you herald the message to others, remember that God has providentially given that text to you *first* to study and apply it to yourself. As you preach the Word to others, be sure that you preach it first to your own soul before you endeavor to press others to hear the Word. Let the Word work its way through you -- in both conviction and consolation -- before you speak it boldly to others. Men of God, study as worshipers *first*, not as preachers. God has called you to preach. But whether or not you preach till you die, you are to be a worshiper. So, pray in worship. Pray in thanksgiving. Pray in awe and wonder. Pray in repentance and confession. Pray in specific petitions. Pray for the flock entrusted to your care. Pray as a man whose soul is ignited with boundless love to Christ because of His bottomless love showered upon your soul.

4. Pray BIBLICALLY.

God loves to be reminded of His own signed Word. So when you pray, plead His Word in your supplications. God cannot reject His own signed documents. So when you show Him His Word, and show Him His promises, and remind Him of His documentations, you make a case with God. And cannot reject His own Word. So pray biblically. Pray through I Thessalonians I about the Word coming with power, the Holy Spirit, and with full conviction. Remind God that He is the one who made man's mouth (Ex 4) and that you need His help. Remind Him that His Word is living, active, powerful and sharp (Heb 4). Remind Him that He watches over His Word to perform it (Jer 1) and certainly remind Him of all the glorious characteristics of His Word and the results that flow from His Word (from Ps 19). O pray through your text and plead these promises from God! Press Him! Hold Him to His Word. Make a case with God. Pray prayers that He cannot refuse!

5. Pray DESPERATELY.

In all this, come to God as a fully dependent man. Come to God as a desperate servant of the living God. As a slave would come to the King and present His case humbly, confidently, and dependently, so let us do the same to our great God and King. As you begin the sermon preparation process, desperately ask God for wisdom to ascertain the meaning of the text and to craft the message in a way that would be most glorifying to Christ and helpful to the people of God. Especially as the sermon preparation progresses and the occasion to herald draws near, pray all the more desperately, continually, and thoroughly even by spreading the sermon notes before you and asking for God to take the work and use it mightily and supernaturally for His glory. The morning of and even moments before the opportunity to preach, constantly focus and refocus on God in prayer by recasting and refocusing and reorienting your confidence fully, entirely, and thoroughly in the power of the Spirit. Remember that any good that comes from the preached Word requires the unction of the Holy Spirit. Even during the preaching of the message, during pauses and various gospel pleadings, call upon God silently, briefly and urgently for His help and saving grace to work through the faithful heralding of His Word. After the sermon is through, go home and call on God. Even Monday morning, don't neglect desperately asking for supernatural fruit to come from the Word -- that it would have fallen on good soil and that the Word would have sunk deep into the ears and hearts of the listeners. O let us be men with holy desperation.