

54 Preaching

If you think preaching is important but “it’s not really my area”, then you need to read this chapter. The emphasis is on natural approaches that you can use to spread your faith confidently and effectively. God can prepare and use you to impact the lives of others for his kingdom.

Focus passage: Mark 2:13–17

Tax collectors were loathed. They collected money for the Romans, and at the same time made a large profit for themselves. They were the most hated people in the country. No-one would choose to talk to them more than necessary, let alone share a meal with them. Yet here, in Mark 2, we have Jesus eating with this brood of money-hungry villains.

1. Why did Levi (Matthew) hold the dinner?
2. What was Jesus trying to do at this dinner?
3. Have you ever used a dinner as a preaching method? Did it work?
4. List the preaching methods you have been involved with. How successful have they been? How do you judge preaching success?

Preaching to friends

Matthew’s dinner appears to have been a preaching campaign aimed at tax-collectors and other “second-class citizens”. Apparently, Matthew had sent invitations to all his former tax-collecting colleagues to come to his house for a meal and to meet Jesus.

Jesus’ approach to preaching was first to make friends. He was prepared to talk with them, he was willing to discuss their problems with them, he was even willing to eat with them. By attending this party, Jesus was reaching out to the tax collectors and saying, “I don’t hate you. I am willing to be friends with you.” They were prepared to accept such a message because it came from someone they knew and respected.

The apostle Paul was another great preacher and used exactly the same approach. First make friends, then show them the gospel.

see 1 Corinthians
9:19–23

Some relevant passages

Instructions to preach:

Mark 16:15; Romans 10:14–15; 1 Corinthians 9:16; 2 Timothy 4:1–5; Ezekiel 33:1–20.

Examples of preachers:

Peter (Acts 2:14–41; 3:11–26); Philip (Acts 8:4–8,26–40); Paul (Acts 9:20–22; 28:17–31; 1 Corinthians 9:16–23); Aquila and Priscilla (Acts 18:24–26).

One of the most successful selling strategies ever developed is the method of party selling. It is used by Tupperware® (who make plastic food storage containers), for example. They have no door-to-door salespeople, no big advertising campaigns, no leafleting, no public lectures proclaiming the virtues of Tupperware®. Instead they ask people to throw a party and sell the products to their friends. Of course, it works. You believe your friends, you respect what they say, and you are not threatened.

It is essential that we share our faith with others, but it doesn't have to be difficult. Talking to friends is the simplest, and usually the most effective, way of preaching.

Our responsibility to preach

Before Jesus went to heaven, he left us with this instruction:

Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation. (Mark 16:15)

Paul felt this responsibility for he wrote

I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel! (1 Corinthians 9:16)

It is amazing that Jesus chose us when he could have chosen much more effective ways of spreading the gospel. We are his ambassadors, responsible for preaching the good news throughout the world.

Four steps to personal preaching

Here are four steps to help your personal preaching:

1. Ask God to help you show love and compassion.
2. Listen with understanding so as to build friendships.
3. Look for opportunities to serve others.
4. Share your faith and beliefs. Talk about them in ordinary conversation.

Four stages and only one of them involves talking about what we believe. Many of us have a tendency to rush with our preaching and forget the important ground work that is necessary.

Preaching is as much about sharing a faith and an outlook on life as it is sharing a set of beliefs. And it takes time to show others the total picture of a Christian life.

Everyone we come across is a potential disciple. But they are unlikely to be attracted to the gospel by a passing acquaintance or a brief leaflet. And God is unlikely to use us to spread his word if we are not willing to do the full job. The job of preaching involves showing interest in others, building a friendship and looking for opportunities to help as well as explaining the gospel message. This was the way Jesus often did it. With God's help, we can do it too.

The opportunity to share our faith may come suddenly or gradually. We should be prepared to take the opportunities God gives us. Paul tells us to preach "whether the time is favourable or unfavourable".

2 Timothy 4:2 NRSV

Summary

- Preaching is the responsibility of every believer.
- An effective form of preaching we can all do is talk to people we know.
- Ask God to help you share your faith.
- Think of yourself as an ambassador for God.

Thought provokers

1. There are many different preaching styles. Here are some styles with biblical examples:
 - (a) confrontational (e.g., Peter: Acts 2)
 - (b) intellectual (e.g., Paul: Acts 17)
 - (c) testimonial (e.g., Blind man: John 9)
 - (d) interpersonal (e.g., Matthew: Luke 5:29)
 - (e) invitational (e.g., Samaritan woman: John 4)
 - (f) serving (e.g., Dorcas: Acts 9)

Discuss what is involved with each of these preaching styles. Which style are you most comfortable with?

2. Consider the best ways of answering somebody who makes the following comments.
 - “What did you do on the weekend?”
 - “Did you say ‘Christadelphians’? Who are they?”
 - “I believe in God, but I don’t think it is necessary to go to church.”
 - “Don’t all the religions basically teach the same things, but just use different names for God?”
3. Divide into pairs and role play preaching to someone you know well. One of you should play yourself, the other should pretend to be your friend who is not a believer. Before you begin, establish the age, gender and interests of your friend. Then imagine you meet and begin talking about what you have been doing since you last met. In the conversation, the unbelieving friend should ask some questions about Christadelphians and what they believe. When you have finished, discuss how well the conversation went. If there is time, swap roles.
4. Read Ezekiel 33. Is there a difference between a preacher and a watchman? If so, should we be doing both jobs?
5. In Matthew 7:6, Jesus said “Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs.”
 - (a) Was he talking about preaching? If so, are there people to whom we should not preach?
 - (b) How do we decide who we shall preach to?
 - (c) Compare with Acts 10:28. How does this affect your interpretation?



Further investigation

1. Write down the names of two or three people for whom you could make concentrated effort in an attempt to bring them to the next step along the path to the gospel. For each person on your list, pray for them and consider how you might effectively reach out to them.
2. Suppose someone asks you “What is Christianity all about?” Write down your answer in about half a page. Show your answer to someone you respect and ask for their comments.

Want to know more?

- *Becoming a contagious Christian* by Bill Hybels and Mark Mittelberg (published by Zondervan and Scripture Press, 1994). Some of the doctrinal material in this book is incorrect, but it has excellent ideas for sharing our faith with people we know.
- *I hate witnessing* by Dick Innes (published by Regal Books, 1983).
- *Beyond Bible basics* by Duncan Heaster (published by The Christadelphian Advancement Trust, 1999). Study 4 “Preaching”. 38 pages.
- *Letters to George and Jenny* by Harry Whittaker (published by Biblia, 1988). Chapter 54 “Earnestly contending”, 4 pages. This provides some good advice about the “doctrinal debate” side of preaching.
- *Preaching the word* by A.D. Norris (published by *The Christadelphian*, 1967). 160 pages. This book concentrates on organized preaching activities with lots of good advice and suggestions.

▶ **See also:** 4. Does it matter what you believe?
63. Friends