

Improving Preaching (4) (2.9.1983)

by Nigel Lee

Nigel Lee's sermon focuses on the essential elements of effective preaching, emphasizing personal growth, diligent preparation, and audience connection.

Duration: 1:00:15

Scripture: Joshua 1:8, Psalm 119:105, Proverbs 3:5-6, Romans 12:2, 2 Timothy 3:16-17, Hebrews 4:12, James 1:22

Topics: "Preaching"

Description

In this video, the speaker discusses the importance of crafting a sermon that is both listenable and impactful. He emphasizes the need for effective illustration, using examples from his own experiences to engage the audience. The speaker also highlights the significance of beginnings and endings in a sermon, urging preachers to carefully consider how they will capture the attention of their listeners and leave them with a clear call to action. Lastly, he emphasizes the centrality of scripture in preaching, emphasizing the transformative power of God's Word and the importance of biblical content in sermons.

Transcript

It's eleven o'clock, let us pray. Again, Father, we commit our time fully into your hands. Help us, Lord, in that process of character growth as we learn to judge and evaluate our own lives and ministries.

To acknowledge that we do all things imperfectly. Help us, Father, to grow and be more pleasing in your sight. In Jesus' name, Amen.

We were in the middle yesterday of a series of points on how to prepare a message. And I said, first of all, it will arise out of your own life with God. It's born out of the processes of your own walk with the Saviour.

That's how you can stand and say, Thus says the Lord. You have a burden that God has imparted. Secondly, there should be, before you even get writing, get thinking, a sense of purpose behind the message.

We spoke of the overall purpose behind every message, that there should be a manifestation of God appropriate to the undertaking. This is the way Paul works. He deals with different problems in the epistles.

He brings out different facets of God's own nature and character as the answer to everything ultimately. The answer to every problem we have is rooted in the nature and character of God. Be it an organizational

problem, an interpersonal problem, a problem of the threats of unbelieving outsiders.

God is sufficient for these things. We talked about the sheer variety of technique and personalities. They will work best at different times of day.

Some are better in the morning, some at night. And we talked about the necessity, you better prepare yourself for it, for hard work. Jeremiah 48, 10 Cursed be he that doeth the work of the Lord negligently, and cursed be he that keepeth back his sword from blood.

In other words, if you're going to work to be a preacher, work hard. It is going to cost you sleep. It's going to cost you time with your family.

It's going to possibly cost you sport and entertainment and things you would otherwise do. There is hard work. There is a character-developing sacrifice involved.

And we talked about the necessity for a full waste paper basket after you'd preached, you know, plenty of scribble. If you're going to get the boat through to the end of the journey, sometimes you have to unload some of the cargo. You don't preach everything that you think in preparation.

I work in a room that has an open fireplace. And I expect a lot of what I may think. And the joy of sitting at my desk when the thing is prepared and screwing up the papers and ping into the fireplace.

And then lighting them at the end of the week. But you do need to sit on your eggs, to ponder. You remember in Ezekiel, the first three verses of chapter 3 of Ezekiel.

The prophet was told to eat the message. To eat it. To digest it, you see.

To make it part of himself. To take it in. Psalm 39 and verse 3. Psalm 39, verse 3. My heart was hot within me while I was musing the fire kindled.

Then spake I with my tongue. So we talked about the necessity as you study. To think, for hard thinking.

For sometimes arguing with yourself. To reject some of the things that you may think. To feel that that is not really the thrust of what God is trying to say through this passage or at this time.

You will have to argue with yourself as you go. And you'll have to say, now supposing I say that. As you prepare.

Supposing I declare that now as it's become clear to me. What is the immediate question that that will engender in the minds of the people that listen? That's the way Paul proceeds obviously in his epistles. From question to question, to question.

He proceeds through the psychological processes. That's often the linkage within his epistles. What he's just said will raise questions.

Because of their background or whatever. Then he moves on to answer the question. He pre-anticipates, no, anticipates.

He anticipates what the questions are going to be from his Jewish or his Gentile hearers. And then moves on to answer. It's a necessary part of the hard work beforehand, the organizing.

Sometimes you can be sidetracked into moving on into some by-path that you may think very interesting. But actually it isn't the burning question that what you have just said is going to raise in people's hearts. You need to know your people.

A man who is a preacher but never actually has contact with people. Evangelist who doesn't actually sit down and do very much personal evangelism. A public man who preaches his message and then goes off with his cronies to a hotel and has a meal.

And next night preaches again but he spends his afternoons on the golf course and his mornings in study. But he's never actually with people, listening to what they're saying. He isn't going to be equipped to know the questions that his preaching will produce.

A lot of hard work involved in the preparatory process. Now I was chatting with Peter in the corridor beforehand. I learn off him, you see, I get him to help me.

He says, look, one question that people are going to ask is what about commentaries and getting aid from the great men who've gone before? How should we, preparing to speak, preparing to expound, use commentaries? Well I know the practice of many. If they've decided to preach their way through, shall we say, the book of Habakkuk, they will get their notes on what Martin Goldsmith has said about it and what the Banner of Truth has said about it and what the Tyndale commentary said about it and any other commentary they can lay their hands on. And they lay these things all out in front of them and they start to take notes on all of them and the Bible gets somehow elbowed to one side.

There's a book that you occasionally look up a reference in. I've simply found in my own experience that what I learn from other commentators I don't remember very long. It's into my mind simply for the purposes of the one sermon and then it's gone.

As a school teacher I knew that what the kids discovered for themselves, they remembered. Throw them a question, get them to work a bit, dig a bit. If you've got time, I mean in the course of a year you're teaching your way through Macbeth or something, you can throw them some questions, they can chew it over.

What they learn for themselves and can stand up for in argument, they will remember. So, conclusion, don't rush into the sticky embrace of the commentators too soon. Begin to prepare with only this book open on the table.

Now there may be questions arising, particularly about an Old Testament book, Prophet, where you need to get a bit of background. Who were the Chaldeans? What is Nineveh? What were the journeys involved in the Book of Exodus? You may need to get some historical facts, some illusions maybe, some rough background stuff. But if what you actually preach, your message, is the outline that you pinched from Brother So-and-So who maybe wrote a hundred years ago, it won't help you very much.

Chances are, therefore, because it's not being filtered through your character and your meditation, it won't help the congregation so much. Do the discovery, the hard thinking first. Campbell Morgan used to have a rule that he only went to any commentator after he'd got his own thinking pretty clear first.

And I think that's a sound rule. Because that rule has benefit for your own growth as a man of God. As a thinking person.

Otherwise, you will simply be a reproducer of other men's ideas, very few of which stick in your own brain, and the people will be less helped. You may have full shelves, but a mind that is retained very little. I would want to be able, in the closing years of my ministry, if God spares me, to be able to take you through book after book of the Bible from memory.

There are some chunks of scripture that I could expound to you paragraph by paragraph now from memory. I could take you through bits of Ephesians. I could take you through John's Gospel.

I could take you through bits of Genesis. Things that I've long dwelt on, thought about. I don't know what the commentators say about these books.

I may have looked it up in years gone by and it's been absorbed a little bit into my bloodstream. But commentators can be as much of a curse as a blessing. But having said that, none of us is going to be so proud that we think we can live for the rest of our preaching life without ever using commentators.

Go to them when you've got your own thinking a little bit sorted out. When you've begun to sense a bit of a burden in this passage. Read widely.

Read what other people say. Don't deny the value of the Tyndale commentary, the Bible Speaks Today commentary, the Banner of Truth series. They all have their values and I hope you will learn to disagree with them too.

And not simply be taken in by everything the man said simply because it's Mr. Hendrickson that's saying it. Read Barclay. William Barclay.

The man is a heretic at times, but such an illuminating heretic. He is so helpful on Greek background. He knew the first century world intimately.

He's a man who said, I have a second class mind, but I can work. He actually does not do himself justice. He also had a phenomenal memory and he could pull out from his enormous memory things that just illuminate a text.

He knew Greek and the first century world and therein he will help you. You don't need to get your theology from him. He's not at all sure about the virgin birth.

He would want to entertain doubts about the second coming. The resurrection is not a completely clear incident for him. He's not entirely sure that he would want to agree with evangelicals on their doctrine of scripture.

But the man is so helpful in what he says sometimes. So learn to read and disagree, but if you're going to prepare, do your own study first and give it time. Because you see, as I said yesterday, God gives you gifts.

Why? Gifts as a preacher. Why? So that your eternal character can be developed. It just happens that he's chosen to give you the gift that's going to develop your character best, rather than the gift of serving or administrating or whatever.

So the disciplines of being a preacher, the hard work involved, the frustrations and the struggles is all to help your character to grow. And don't dodge that process by being too quick to lean on other brothers. Can I say, I'll take this question, David, but I've got, we're now beginning to stack up because we had a lot

of questions we had yesterday.

Can we save, after this, can we save many of our questions to this afternoon? I'll take this, and then I'm going to do something a little bit radical for five or six minutes, and then I'll proceed. Right. When you say study Bible, you mean... I've never used them.

I've never owned them. I don't possess one. I don't think I've spent five minutes in my life looking at one.

So I don't know the benefits of them in my own experience. But I must confess that if someone gave me one, I would rather than saying, oh, this is the answer to the rest of my preaching. This is going to give me all the help, the outlines, the insights I need.

I would put it on a shelf somewhere and look at it occasionally and stick to my dear old revised version of 1881, which is probably bad for reading in public, but it's the most accurate word-for-word rendering of the original Hebrew and Greek text that there has ever been. And it doesn't monkey about with the meanings like the new international version does. The new international version... Cat is among pigeons now.

But the new international version was done with a particular conviction in the minds of the committee that they wanted the thing to be readable in good English. Therefore, where Paul might be using a particular Greek word repeatedly in a paragraph, so that it's not boring for the modern 20th century reader, they will try, deliberately try and use a variety of different words so that it doesn't sound boring and repetitive. Completely begging the question.

Paul was no fool. I mean, he knew how to write. Why did he use the same word again and again and again and again? I mean, take Philipians 2. The opening paragraph of that will use the word mind five times.

Have this mind in you, which was also in Christ Jesus. Be ye all of one mind, mind, mind, mind. He's talking about the mind of the Christian.

Well, you lose that in the NIV, bless it, because they will try and use different words. So, something that Paul was doing to say, look, I am trying to talk to you about the way the Christian mind is to work. He'd be a long time discovering that with the NIV because they've tried to make it easier to listen to in public.

I'm not biased against it. I have two or three copies. Mark them.

Amplified Bible can help. Yeah, but I answered your question on the Thompson chain reference. Before I go any further, I want you to divide up into little groups of about five or six people.

This is a very quick exercise. I want you quickly to pick a person who looks as if he can write as a chairperson. I want you to pull into that person's mind, he will scribble them down, the things that you want to know.

The question that maybe I haven't answered yet in this whole course. The things that you really would find most helpful to discover about preaching. You see, God, often we come to a seminar like this and what we want is an instant answer to our problem.

I've got a real hang-up. I want that solved. We've all got different problems.

And in the ways of God, we find that an awful lot of this, learning to preach, is tied up with character growth itself. Therefore it's slow. But it would help me, for this afternoon, if you could just quickly divide up five sixes, pick a chairman, throw some ideas at him, what do you want, he write it down on paper, give them in to me, and I'll see if there's any common thread so that we can be helpful.

Right. Can we conclude that little exercise? And group secretaries can give me their papers at the end. Once you let these preachers go, you know, they don't stop.

So I think during the hard work, you will get a sense of the structure of what you're trying to say. Look at, I mean, it's implicit in the text, is my conviction. God is a structuralist.

God is a God of order. Martin Goldsmith reads Habakkuk. He sees that the Prophet has two burning questions in chapter one.

Well, he's read the chapter, they have emerged as he has prayed, as he has thought about it. Well, if questions come up, God is going to answer them. The rest of chapter two, he can see God answering.

As he has thought about the text, he's begun to see that. That has fallen neatly into three morning devotional talks. So, your study will help you to see the situation, the problems that people were grappling with, God's deep answer to it.

So you've begun to sense what it is that you want to say. You then got to craft it into listenable form. You got to begin it, end it, illustrate it, apply it.

Let's think about illustration for a moment. Illustration is absolutely vital. It's part of the example of Christ.

It helps people to listen. I remember when, here we go, with an illustration. When George Voer, in 1968, met a group of us, Peter was with us, we'd been driving together overland to India.

He met us in Lahore in Pakistan. Said, I want you to go down to the south of India and join a preaching team there. I said, I've hardly done any of this before.

He said, Well, just preach what God gives you to preach and illustrate every point. Stories, pictures, illustrations. My prayer, when standing before people to preach is, Oh God, make their ears into eyes, so that they see with their ears.

So that what I actually say, and it goes in here, they can visualize in their mind by power of description, by well-wrought, sharp terminology, by the careful use of illustrative story, something from yourself or a friend or biography, so that they can visualize it. It simply makes the burden of listening to the preacher easier. Illustration is absolutely vital, and I think dull preaching borders on the unforgivable.

Turn their eyes into ears, and their ears into eyes. Now I'll talk a bit later about the danger of that getting out of control. What about beginnings and endings of a message? John Stott suggests that they should be written last.

There's fairly clear evidence that Luke's gospel, the introduction to it, was written last. Well, I think it is true that we should take special care over the way we begin and the way we end. Don't just abruptly go into a subject, but show people the importance of what it is that you want to talk about.

If you've read a passage of scripture, say now, look, this is about so-and-so. And the reason why it is important that we should think about so-and-so, this is before you ever start to say anything about the topic, the following reason why it is timely, or it is vital, or it meets a present need. So that they are made ready, got into a responsive frame of mind to what you want to say on the topic.

Otherwise, why speak about this thing rather than anything else? It whets the appetite, in other words. There are many ways of beginning preaching. The book review is a common way within OM.

But we should think carefully about our way into a sermon. It could be with a personal story, something that you've experienced that perhaps highlights an issue that you then want to address. Ease them in.

And your ending. I was talking yesterday about the danger of circling round and round like a plane in a fog. Can't get down onto the ground.

And you should think about how you're going to end. Are you going to give them a sort of Chinese takeaway summary of all that you've said? Are you going to end with an appeal for conversion? Or a one, two, three point application? In the light of all that I've said, this is the way Paul ends his epistles. Quite lengthy endings.

In the light of the doctrine, therefore my brethren, we should be. Spell it out for them. And as you think and pray over your message, as you begin to work on the application, here comes something again that I'm going to talk about later.

You're going to have to learn to judge yourself. Put yourself under the application. Evaluate your own life.

Learn to be loving and gentle and wise at the point of application. Martin Goldsmith was talking this morning about preaching the message of Habakkuk in South Africa. And the denunciation of those people who live in homes that are wealthy but built up on the back of the labour of others.

People who turn a blind eye to those less well privileged and yet who are under equal demands in society to pay taxes and work hard and so on. Well, there the applications are fairly obvious. Maybe if he were preaching the same message, the same social justice plea, here in an OM conference, he would have to think out in more detail the ways in which we can be proud or selfish or unjust, perhaps as leaders, in the way we treat other people, on the team.

The sort of demands that we make for our comfort and our privacy and what we need as compared with the rest. But ask God to give you sensitive and loving and self-critical application points that you can simply list as your conclusion. But it is important to come to a definite conclusion.

You know the person who stands in a fairground against a board and somebody comes with a fistful of knives and they throw the knives and they... He's always missing. That's the point of the thing. Some sermons you feel, some preachers you feel, always miss, just never miss the point.

We need to be sure that people leave with a due sense of God manifest and some simple practical steps, maybe just one, that need to be taken in response to what they've said. It's very important. The thought through application.

Otherwise people go away, that was interesting, that was good, what am I going to do about it? How is that going to help me? That's just gone as notes in my notebook and nothing more. Beginnings and

endings, take care. Point number eight in my notes anyway, how do you write up your preaching notes? I mean, that's what I'm working off at the moment.

These bits of paper. All I can say to that, should you write it out in full, should you have a few words on the back of a postcard, how should you work it, suit yourself. You do what pleases you.

Peter Maiden writes out every word. You may not believe that listening to him, because he seems to have his eyes on you, but actually, page after page is written out. I have sometimes stood with a simple piece of six by four, a few lines on it.

Particularly if I'm expounding a passage of scripture that I know well, I would hardly even refer to the notes. Go through it. But I've got something in front of me.

Billy Graham would have large pieces of paper with large writing on. Partly because his own eyesight is not actually brilliant. Partly too, because his podium is there and he's standing back in the full glare of the lights and he's moving and he's glancing.

If he had a little spindly civil servant, bureaucratic, tax return form writing, he wouldn't be able to see. But Jonathan Edwards used to write like that. His writing was so small that even he could hardly read it.

And his most famous sermon, Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God, preached one night in some church, I don't know, Massachusetts or somewhere, by candlelight. He read it like this. And people were falling down in the aisles under conviction as he was reading out this powerful message.

Well, you see, so, I prefer to have the thing written with notes, some underlinings, fairly clear. But actually the process, for me, of writing it out in some sort of detail means that I don't look down at the notes at all. The thing's in the heart, it's been prayed over.

So, when I move on to the next point, I sometimes have a glance. And then I'm back to looking at the people. Because that is off-putting for you, isn't it? To have a man always sort of, and then losing his place, and getting his papers round the wrong way.

But you suit yourself. Whatever leaves you easy and natural. John Stott says he would recommend a preacher for the first perhaps 300 sermons to write the whole thing out during the week.

And then condense it to notes, which he takes with him in the pulpit. Many have done that. But some preachers use their notes as little more than something to wave at the people.

I've seen people like that. Screwed up my papers now. They all vary.

Peter and I, we're different. Spurgeon was a man who used to write fairly skimpy notes. Preachers.

Edwards, as I say, wrote it all out. It all depends perhaps on your familiarity with the theme, what you want to talk about, how settled the thing is on your heart. And you suit yourself.

Whatever is easiest. Is it a quickie? Yes. Now, you've got to role model that, looking at this rather than these.

Glance at these and do it as stealthily as you can so that people hardly notice. But if you're going to read from the Bible, it's often very good to get it up so that they can see that that's it. Yes.

And not be afraid to do that in evangelism when you've come to the moment in evangelism where you're quoting scripture. So they see that there's authority for what you want to say. Luis Palau.

Watch him preaching. Brilliant. He's talking to a mass of individuals who are already his friends.

It's important. But it's amazing too how God trains us to rely on his spirit and not on her notes. How often have we had the experience of writing the notes out beautifully and leaving them on the bus.

Or putting them on the top of the car before you drive off. They've landed in the gutter before you ever get... Or you take the wrong notes altogether. Or you go to a particular place.

You've decided what you're going to preach on. It's a church that you go to regularly. You didn't have too much time to prepare so you pulled something out of a box.

And the person who gets up to introduce you says, I remember so well. You're coming amongst us last year. You actually preached on this, this.

And you think, help, that's what I've got in my Bible. And you've got the length of the next hymn to think of a new message. God will help you with some disasters like that.

Not to trust your notes. But to trust him and his word. And use the notes as a personal aid that you as a functioning human being need.

And also take the freedom, if need be, to depart from the notes. Don't be bound to them, if need be. Use them as an aid, as a help, and not as a master.

Every preacher's notes that you ever look at, they'll be different from the next chap. And then I finish up finally, after I had been thinking, struggling, referring to commentators after I got my own ideas a bit clear, thinking of illustrations that would fit the situation, asking God for illustrations. When I finally got the notes that I like to use down, I feel I got a burden, I then sit back and I ask four questions about it.

It's ready now. Four questions. One, am I going to be preaching scripture? Is it sufficiently biblical? Because it's the Bible that sheds light.

Not me. Not my illustrations. It's the entrance of thy word that gives light.

How often have we known the experience of just shafts of insight coming as you've been reading something from the Bible? Or as the Bible has been read out? Preachers get that, you know, it's a wonderful thing, where as you're preaching, you are suddenly seeing whole new things. Have you preachers ever had that? I have been receiving insight and it's been going out. It's not always common, particularly when I'm working my way through a book, expounding a particular book of scripture.

It often happens there. I'm seeing whole new dimensions to what I'm actually talking about, as I talk. We must be careful to expound scripture.

It's that that changes lives. All authority, says Christ, is given to me, not you. Your authority as a preacher, as you stand there, belongs to him.

Murray MacChain used to come back from preaching in those revival times in Scotland in the middle of the 19th century. And he would get into his room after great days. He would kneel down by his bed and he

would, as it were, symbolically, give back the crown of glory to God.

And he wouldn't end the day without acknowledging that every little bit of praise that had even lodged in someone's heart, everything that people had said to him at the door as they came out, every sense in his own heart that what was doing was glorious and marvelous, he gave it all back to God. That's where it belonged. Am I preaching scripture? Secondly, do I have a burden from the Lord? Do I sense a concern for God's reputation and glory in this? Thirdly, is it an organized whole? Has it got proper structure? Some preachers seem to have an amazing sort of geologist's hammer.

They can hit a paragraph and it falls into three alliterated headings just automatically. Bing! And there it is. Alan Redpath is like that, Stephen Alford is always like that, George Duncan is like that, and so on.

Well, I'm a bit averse to those kind of things, but they help some people to remember. But it must at least have structure. And fourthly, will there be passion and commitment in my own heart as I preach? Preaching is truth, clarity, and passion.

Do I feel it? Preaching is not, you see, simply the means by which the notes of the preacher are transferred into the notebooks of the listeners without passing through the minds and hearts of either. The means by which, it's not the means by which the notes of the preacher are transferred into the notebooks of the listener without passing through the mind and heart of either. And I like this one.

A black preacher, summed up preaching like this. First he says, I reads myself full. Next, I thinks myself clear.

Next, I prays myself hot. And then I lets go. That's it.

You can all go now. The man has got it. I reads myself full.

I thinks myself clear. I prays myself hot. And then I lets go.

Okay? A lot of what I've said so far has tied together your life and your preaching ministry. And I've been opposed to stress two things that have to be held in tension. One is that God has perhaps given you a gift as a preacher and God will use that gift without you necessarily being perfect.

And the fact that God is using your preaching isn't to be taken as an endorsement of everything in your character. You may have a long way to go. Gift and character are separate.

At the same time, although God uses the gift to the preacher, He wants the preacher to be passionately committed to growing himself as a Christian. His own life is so important. About three years ago I was sitting in a conference down in Wales that I was to preach at.

But John Stott also came to the conference and gave a message. And we sat beside each other at this Christian conference center eating fish fingers and baked beans and things. And I was bold enough to ask him about his personal Bible study and quiet time practice.

Dick Lucas was the speaker. I always ask these chaps. Dick Lucas was speaking at our leadership training conference and we had lunch together.

How do you study the Bible, Dick? What is your private practice? Well, John Stott told me that he likes to get up at about five every morning. It has been his habit for many years to have three hours of work and

prayer and study before breakfast. Three hours before he will eat.

He told me all about how he organizes his praying. Now he has a prayer notebook. Columns.

Divided people. A very systematic chap. And he has a column of people that he prays for every day, a column of people he prays for once a week, a column of people he prays for once a month.

And he rewrites the book regularly as names drop out and the situation changes. He is a chap who is a bachelor. He gets up early.

Martyn Lloyd-Jones used to get up at about seven. And I said, well, did you read the Bible early before breakfast? And so, no, no, no, he said, no, no. No, he said, I used to get up and shave and get myself gradually on the go and take the wife a cup of tea and help get the kids up and get them dressed and we'd have breakfast together as a family and only when my wife had taken the kids off to school, he said, then I would go into my study.

I would be in my study by nine o'clock. And he wouldn't get me out until lunchtime. He used not to answer the telephone or read the newspapers or look at the mail before lunch.

That was his constant habit. And even when he went on holiday, he said, he would have a bargain with his family. He would say, you give me your mornings.

You give me the mornings. I want to study and read and pray in the mornings. In the rest of the day, I will do whatever you want.

I will go with you wherever you want. If you want to go to the beach, I will go to the beach. If you want to go climb a mountain, I suppose I'll climb a mountain.

I'll do whatever you want, but give me my mornings. There are some marvellous photographs of him in these books. And I was listening to his daughter explain that he used to read in the mornings, even if they went to the beach.

They would sometimes persuade him to go to the beach, but he would have his suit on and he would sit, facing away from the sea, reading. Neither of them liked the sea actually very much. His wife was very scared of it.

The nights when the high tides were running near Aberavon and the waves were thundering on the sand down there, his wife was terrified because she thought that the house would collapse. She wasn't converted until some years after Martin Lloyd Jones had married her. She was converted under his preaching.

He used to smoke regularly until some years into his ministry. These men are unusual. Spurgeon, of course, smoked until the day he died.

Dick Lucas gets up at about six. Another bachelor. And he will get in a couple of hours before breakfast.

But he has five libraries not far away from his home. And he will go to the library, the public library, and sit and work there, and he will only tell one person where he is. And he varies.

He alternates between his libraries, you see. So he cannot be tracked down regularly with the same library. Simply in order to get his privacy in study.

And if he has to preach an evangelistic message, as he has to at Tuesday lunchtime in his church in London, well, he'll come back for that. He wears the most decrepit old clothes, chatty old pullovers, sits in the library, reading, studying, praying. Like Karl Marx a hundred years ago.

Every Thursday night or Friday night, I forget which night it is, I think it's Thursday night, he catches a train from Waterloo and goes down to Lewes in Sussex and spends the night with his mum. Takes a day off with his mum, looking after his mum, chatting to his mum, comes home in the evening. He has a prayer partner.

One prayer partner. And once a week, where possible, he will get together with that prayer partner, they will have a meal together, and then they will spend the rest of the evening in prayer together. Done it for years.

John Stott's habit, his policy, as far as his other reading, not just his Bible study reading is concerned, is this. This is the minimum that he aims at. He will read other books, Christian books, church history, whatever, biographies, anything that he happens to want to read.

He will read for a minimum of an hour a day. Every day, he will set aside an hour. He will set aside half a day a week.

A four hour uninterrupted period. Per week. As well.

He sets aside a day a month. One day, there's just a line through his diary, he'll go away and spend the whole day reading. And he will spend one week a year just reading.

He'll go away to a cottage somewhere, take a suitcase of books, and read them. Uninterruptedly. If you were to do that, that would amount to over 600 hours a year in reading.

The lifeblood of these men's ministry. The man who has influenced me more than any other is again an unmarried man, a man nearly 60, professor of Old Testament Greek in Northern Ireland. He has a full time job.

He comes home about six in the evening and have his supper. Often he's preaching in the evenings. Even if he gets home from his preaching at ten o'clock at night, he will then sit down and do two or three or four hours Bible study every day.

Often not in bed before two or three in the morning. As some of us who have tried to keep up with him can testify. He'll get up at about 8.30 in the morning, he doesn't have a quiet time in the morning, he doesn't believe in it.

Very much. Gets up, off to work, soaking his mind in scripture, studying God's word. And if he goes away on holiday with people, and bachelors sometimes need to do that and like to do that, he'll spend the day with the people, doing whatever they want to do and then when they stagger off to bed at ten, eleven o'clock at night, he'll get down to work.

And you can hear his typewriter going or studying away, his lights on until two, three in the morning. A man who knows his Bible as one of the richest Bible teaching ministers that I've ever met. Well, I share

that for your benefit.

I myself, when I'm at home, things permitting, try and follow the Martin Lloyd-Jones pattern. I'll help my wife with the kids, cup of tea, get the show on the road, off to school, into the study in the morning. Study there through until our 12.30 lunch at home.

I asked Martin Lloyd-Jones about his quiet time. He said, well, you know, often the problem is just coldness of heart in the morning. He says, I need to spend some moments sort of priming the pump.

He says, I was singing Welsh. Or, because he was completely bilingual. Or he'll read a good devotional book just to get his heart warmed up.

And then he'll spend perhaps half an hour, 40 minutes in his devotional reading, maybe an hour. He used to believe, like Ralph Shallis, in the value of reading the Bible through every year. Many of these men do it.

And then he would get down to his serious study of Scripture and of other books. Lloyd-Jones was a constant reader. Always books in his pocket.

He loved reading. He would read anything. Anything.

And he loved argument. He was a very slow reader. But he would sit down and argue with you your theology or argue history with you.

And one of his other loves was horse racing. Fascinated by horse racing on the television. These men are human.

And he would want to argue about horses with you. Because, of course, he came from a family where they'd run a big stables and farm down in Wales as you read his biography. But, in addition to your Bible, read biography.

Read history. I would recommend you to read the newspaper. You don't have to get a daily newspaper.

Because often there's not time. And some of us are away from home anyway and it's useless paying money for a paper that you don't read. But you can get a weekly newspaper.

And in the weekly newspaper, I concentrate, after I've read the sport, on the book reviews. Because we need to know, in addition to the cricket result and the football result, we need to know the books that are coming out on the market. That something like, in my case, the Guardian Weekly sees fit to review.

I love to read the book reviews. So I can, although I can't read the books, I can keep up with what's going on a little bit. I read novels on occasions.

Poetry sometimes. Partly because it was the study that I did at college. I knew an Oema who, during the course of an August summer campaign, read four novels by Charles Dickens.

One a week. Now they average around about eight, nine hundred pages each. I knew another one who read two Dickens novels on the overland journey out to India.

Make time for reading. These men have done. John Wesley demanded that his preachers, his travelling itinerant preachers, read, not just the Bible, but philosophy, medical books, geographical books, travel books, read for a minimum of five hours a day.

Wesley himself used to get up very early in the morning for prayer. Of course he was preaching often at six. Get up at four.

When he finally got married, just out of the blue, he suddenly decided to get married and it doesn't seem to have been a very happy marriage for his wife. Left him after a short while. He suddenly seized upon some older lady and married her, you see.

And it was a disastrous arrangement. And she left him. And he wrote cryptically in his diary in Latin.

I didn't leave her. I didn't send her away. I won't recall her.

And that was the end of Wesley's marriage. But as a friend of Wesley's was heard to remark, if he'd had the misfortune to be married to Mrs. Wesley, he too would have got up at four o'clock in the morning. Part of the problem, one of the reasons why she left him was because he got up early in the morning like these other chaps, to read and study and pray.

Now this leads us on to another thing. A discipline of life. Deciding what it is that we're going to set out to achieve and deciding what it's going to take to achieve and then learning to say no.

Discipline of life. Laziness in a preacher is unforgivable. You've heard the old remark about a preacher being six days invisible and then one day incomprehensible.

But there is much in scripture about the tongue, for instance. How easy for a preacher to have a tongue that's used in two quite different ways. For the edification and for clowning about and abusing people and poisoning people's minds.

It's a battle that all of us face. Peter Maiden has rebuked me on occasion for trying to be both a clown and a prophet. He says you can't do it.

I think there are four common attacks where our discipline is undermined. Four things that I find anyway to greater and lesser degrees. One is the use of your mornings.

The use of your time. A preacher must have privacy sometimes. That is an absolute.

You cannot prepare to preach consistently, regularly and fruitfully in a crowd. So guard your mornings. Guard what you do about your time when you're free to govern it.

The year program is a lot better than the summer. The accommodation is usually in smaller units and there are times when some teams will agree that certain rooms should be quiet. You may be studying sitting in a room like a library with other people around getting quiet.

Sometimes it's possible to work out if you're working with a local church or you've got other Christian missionaries around to go and spend a set time in someone else's home if they've got a study or a well stocked library to go and do that. In most teams I would have thought it was possible somewhere in the team house. I mean I had my little corner you remember in Kathmandu.

There was a world of activity, people coming and I had a little spot and I got a long way with John's gospel in Kathmandu over the nine months that I was there. I was facing in a blank wall. I had some books and papers and so on.

There would be noise around me. You'll have to learn to block out noise. But get a place that's your own a desk and so on.

For study and for prayer you can always walk. Get out and walk. We'll talk about that next.

As you may guess I'm not I don't believe that every Christian should be so sober and you know. I think it depends on the use of time. Sometimes I mean humour is a gift of God.

Very very important. And it's good to have fun on your teams. It can also take up too much time just swatting jokes and batting stories about.

It can be destructive of people's feelings. There it's becoming bad. In preaching if it's humour it's simply for humour's sake.

Because a man likes, he likes telling funny stories. He gets a kick out of it. And so he tells a string of funny stories that actually have no very obvious purpose in the progression of that message.

Then I would say it's clowning. But you will tend to find that the people who have less of a gift of humour are the ones that write more harshly about humour. John Stott is gracious enough to say that he finds humour in the pulpit extremely difficult.

He's by temperament opposed to it. But that he says is perhaps because his gift doesn't go that way. There are some other preachers who are able to be humorous and yet the humour serves the ultimate purpose.

It's a gift used for the glory of the giver. So use of your time mornings particularly. This doesn't affect some of you but it will eventually.

Relationship with your family, your wife and kids. How often Satan will get us into a collision, a conflict, a trouble just before we go out to preach. Oh I mean I've had the agony of a row with someone at home but I've got to go and preach.

And the issues are so complicated and how do I get it sorted out because I can't stand and preach with wife smouldering at home. I have phoned her from London airport about to go off for two weeks. Tightness, tension before we left home.

Me mind not on her and the family but on the job being a bit abrupt. I've had to just repent over the phone and ask for forgiveness before I even go. I've had the bus ride from home to the airport to think it through and I was wrong and I'm sorry and forgive me because I want to be right.

And still feel rotten but go anyway. The most painful moment I think of my ministry. I feel it, the knife of it like yesterday or some years ago when I was off to preach one afternoon evening and my oldest daughter stood at the door pleading with me not to go.

Just crying out, Daddy don't go. And I mean you can see it still hurts. So relationships at home are so important and I believe that the home needs to be prayed about and guarded in this sense because it is easier for Satan to get at you through that.

Now I've talked this over with my wife and she, dear lovely girl that she is, I can see her taking steps to try and be more positive, loving, constructive in the time before I have to go when she would naturally be

tending towards tenseness and uptightness and so on. But be aware as a preacher that your close relationships now for some of you perhaps you could apply this to the team, are a way of Satan getting at you by the back door. So keep, watch that.

Thirdly the private use of money. Preachers get given money more than others. You're public.

The chap who works in the garage is probably suffering trying to see his support level raised. The man who is out taking the meetings is receiving money. Therefore the discipline of giving money away is good for you.

And particularly giving perhaps to those whose ministry is enabling you to have yours. Don't just treat the money that comes. See, I work, I'm attached to STL.

I'm also attached to my local church. I can carry on doing what I do because of a number of people doing what they do. Office staff, people who will arrange travel, people who will arrange prayer letters so that I get prayed for, people who put things on the prayer phone that we have in London, so that I get prayed for.

And I may be the one that gets given the gift but actually before God a lot of it belongs to them. Because I couldn't do what I do. I actually deserve very little of the money that I get.

My wife also deserves a chunk. Because if she weren't at home looking after the kids and supporting the family and keeping it going and washing my clothes, I couldn't go. During the last six months my wife and I have talked more than ever before about what I would do if she were taken.

If she died, I, my entire work depends on Tricia. If she were taken, when she goes, I mean supposing there was a road accident, when she was on her home, on her way home on Sunday, back, I've got to stay here, she's got to get the kids back to school. If there was an accident and she was killed and I was left looking after the kids, that would be the end of my work for the time being.

I couldn't do anything without her. So any gifts that I get, you know, I've got to be very careful to talk over the spending of it. It's not my money.

The amount that belongs to me is actually very small. Yes, I've done a bit of work in the study and I've prayed a bit and so on. But it actually also belongs to a lot of other people.

So be careful of money. Think right about money. And then a matter that I don't need to elaborate on because it gets a lot of feelings within your sexual imagination.

Because a preacher has a position of popularity and influence and attractiveness and a man has to be particularly careful. I notice this and my wife notices it even more. Somehow girls will want to get counseled or want to talk or they will respond to you.

And that is a position of emotional trust. Maybe they don't know always the implicit trust that they are putting by responding often as they do. But you've got to be careful with that trust.

An evangelist will have people coming to see him. And the possibilities for thinking wrongly about yourself and wrongly about those that come to you. They are legion.

Satan is a master of that. And so be very careful to not let your imagination and your habits your counseling habits get out of control. Please maintain a good testimony.

Watch it. In my missions if I know that there is a particular girl who has made an appointment to come and see me I will often try and get one of the the lady assistant missionaries that we have a team of us to be there as well. Because I know that when it comes to seeing through girls women are they have an extra sense.

We men are often a bonehead dumb sorry chaps. It is true. We can be taken in, some of us so fast.

And the women see through each other much more quickly than we do. So those are areas where you've got to watch it. Prayer.

My prayer life is I don't I'm never going to write books like Ian Bounds does. I'm never going to write books on prayer. I constantly feel inadequate and unworthy.

I pray while preparing momentarily if there's verses or passages or I don't understand something or if I'm looking for applications as I sit at my desk It's a constant prayer. Thinking, talking, praying back to thinking, studying, praying Let prayer soak the process. If you come across something that you don't understand you're struggling with it, prayer and a good night's sleep can often see a breakthrough.

It's amazing how the subconscious will sort something out.

Audio: <https://sermonindex1.b-cdn.net/29/SID29319.mp3>

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/nigel-lee/improving-preaching-4-291983/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net