

# Improving Preaching (5) (2.9.1983)

by Nigel Lee

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*Nigel Lee emphasizes the importance of physical fitness, emotional health, and preparation in effective preaching.*

**Duration:** 1:16:12

**Scripture:** John 1:1

**Topics:** "Preaching"

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## Description

In this video, the speaker emphasizes the importance of practicing and honing the skill of summarizing sermons. He encourages individuals to condense their messages to two minutes, removing any Christian language that may be unfamiliar to non-believers. The speaker also advises against lengthy sermons, suggesting that shorter, attention-grabbing messages are more effective in today's fast-paced society. He shares a humorous anecdote about a minister using his watch to signify the length of the sermon. The video concludes with the speaker highlighting the need for systematic and thorough exposition of the word of God, while also acknowledging the importance of adapting to the television age and keeping sermons concise.

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## Transcript

As I said before, an hour of preaching is worth six to eight hours of physical labour. You know, if you preach three or four times a day, and some days when you're on tour, when you're ministering in some countries, they will just want to soak it out of you. I remember preaching in a meeting once, they didn't get very much.

We preached the message, they said, we'll have a hymn, and now you preach another message. And then they said, now we're going to break bread. And then you preach another message.

And then we had a hymn, and then I preached another message. I had to preach four times for lunch. Seven times in the day, sometimes.

They say that the amount of energy expended is six to eight hours of physical labour. As you can see, you get exhausted. You need to be a fit man.

You need to keep your body in some sort of training. Now, that doesn't mean to say you have to be an Olympic athlete, but you need to be able to walk five miles at a brisk pace, or play some sport. My biggest

regret about being on OM, I said yesterday I must be the happiest man, but there are times when I regret being on OM, and it's Saturday afternoons.

I used to play hockey for a club in London, and I loved it. I used to play cricket for a club in the evenings when I was living down in London. My main regret is that I don't have time to play sport.

Now, when you've got a travelling ministry, or you're on a team that's got activities, you cannot perhaps join a team. In some places you can. Mike Hyde last year joined the local rugby club in Ireland.

Got in amongst the rugby players. Also was fit. At the very least, you can take a regular walk.

Spurgeon used to say that the next main need for a preacher after prayer is oxygen. Now, I was sharing about this with a group of friends. I have a group of prayer partners at home.

They meet seven o'clock every Friday morning, and we're praying over matters in the church and also my own ministry. And I talk very freely with them. I say things with them that I wouldn't even say perhaps with you.

And one of them says, you know, I'll play you a game of squash every week that you're here, if you're willing, as part of his attempt to contribute to my staying healthy. I've never yet beaten him. He plays two or three times.

We've had breathless draws. I've been thrashed out of sight. I've made him break sweat.

I've never beaten him. I'm going to this winter. But, you know, we do have a tough life.

And the emotional strain is great. You need to have a body that's kept in some sort of trim. Face that.

There are dangers, I think. I wake up in the early hours of the morning when I'm in the middle of a campaign. My sleep gets disrupted when I'm on a mission.

I often don't sleep more than three hours at a stretch. Wake up thinking about people. And you need to take rest after times of intensive outlay.

God knows our frame, that we are but dust. Psalm 103, verse 14. He doesn't expect you to be cast iron.

Paul Bull, it was, who said, The sins of God's people come mostly through exhaustion. Work out your own way. If you have a sport you can play, if you just want to walk, do something, to keep yourself pumping the right amount of oxygen.

We were leaving at the end of the August conference on the Saturday morning. Early in the morning, my family and I, we were going away for two weeks of holiday, camping in Brittany. We got up, tiptoed up.

We had a little bit of breakfast. We're trying to just put the last things in the car. And there was a... verve.

Before anyone was out jogging along. He sort of leaned on the edge of the car and prayed us all off to France. I respect that.

Keeping himself in some sort of trim. And the final thing before lunch, and we touched on this before, it's good to be able to take criticism, even to seek it, good friends, people that you trust to say things with your best interest at heart, a wife, fellow students of God's word. We all need it.

I need it. You may help me. If there are things that I've done that have been irritating to you, even during the course of these days of sort of practical talk through and instruction, why don't you let me know? Please? I won't, you know, drum you out of OM or smash you one in the face or... If I can... If there's some feature of my preaching that you've noticed in the conferences, I'm only giving you this permission.

But if you want to share anything, please feel free to do it, you know. Because we need to learn from one another and be open to help and criticism. Now, time is gone.

We're going to have a word of prayer together and then I'll ask for the little group notes to be given in so that I can look through and see if there's anything that we should touch on in this afternoon's time. Dennis? Thank you very much for the various questions and bits of feedback that came in. I was surprised at one or two things.

I had expected, I think, more overlap. In fact, it was like standing in front of a shotgun being fired. There were so many different requests.

I've written down a number on paper here and I'm going to just respond in this session, first session this afternoon, which is always the most difficult because of the general time of day and sleepiness. I'll just respond quickly to some of these questions that you asked. I haven't prepared the answers.

All I've done is write down the questions or at least Peter Conlon wrote some of them down. How does one get started in preaching? How does one actually begin? How did you? Well, I was asked at college if I would cycle out about eight miles from where I was studying at the University of England and take a service in a small Baptist church in the middle of England. So I duly did.

I cycled eight miles. I preached to 20 people and I cycled home again. And these poor, dear, long-suffering people had a... Every Sunday they had a different student who cycled out, preached and came home again.

Church life had this major disadvantage and that was how they went on. I think one took bits and pieces of small opportunities. Any of you here who are staying on into the conference and would like to have opportunities in this area, I would be delighted to give you jobs as discussion group leaders and so on, would help you formulating your thoughts in public.

If people ask you to give your testimony, have you actually sat down and written out your testimony? At any stage. It's a very good discipline in the early years. Write it out so that it takes two minutes and you have ruthlessly chopped out every bit of Christian language that wouldn't be understood by a normal person, you know.

Normal newspaper reader. So that it's simple, clear, to the point, makes one point and then you shut up. That's good training, good practice.

When people ask you to perhaps say something in the open air, don't plan on speaking for 25 minutes, plan on speaking for about four minutes maximum. Have you ever had to give out announcements at lunchtime or on the team? Aim to be attention-grabbing, clear, anticipating their questions, to lighten it, perhaps make the announcements an interesting thing and not a switch-off, boring thing. That's further practice.

Any opportunity you get, and for a little bit of public, organized speaking, take it. It was in O.M. that I got pushed much more into regular teaching and preaching. With a team in North India, most of them had never lived more than a few miles away from their village.

They found themselves on a team. I was the leader, the driver, the study program chap, everything. So after lunch we would sleep and then when it was a little bit getting towards cooler, we would have an hour, hour and a half of study every afternoon, which I used to teach, which I used to prepare in the mornings usually.

Valuable opportunity, which may come to you in O.M. Next question. It's to do with your morning reading of the Bible. And the question was raised, very valuable this.

Is there a difference between reading devotionally and reading as Bible study? Yes. Griffith Thomas, a great Thringlian preacher and teacher, used to say, you need two Bibles, two Bibles. I mean what he meant was, you need to approach the Bible in two different ways.

Read for the heart. Read for that heartwarming, personal word from the shepherd. My sheep know my voice.

Something from him get you going. Doesn't need to take very long. But a preacher also needs the discipline of regular study, book by book.

So that you say, look, between now and Christmas, I am going to tackle one book and I'm going to work at it, read it again and again, thirty, forty times, think about it, try and break it down into some structure, sense its argument, so that by Christmas I could stand up and know how to apply that book. Every book of the Bible has got a different purpose. It meets a different need.

They're not sort of identical. If you had a problem in an OM team, they were all doctrinally sound, they could all sign the basis of belief, they all had some sort of heart for world missions. It's a problem not of false teaching.

The problem is on this team they just don't like each other. They can't stand each other on the team. Has God, anywhere in the Bible, given us the answer to that situation? You're into the book that I would want to expound.

Philippians is addressed to a church that hasn't got a doctrinal problem like the Galatian church. It's a relationship problem. And I would want to expound my way through Philippians to meet that kind of need.

Now that is not the same need as the books before and after. Different situation, different need. And God has written the books in different ways.

So you need to do the discipline study as well as the heartwarming devotions. In the morning perhaps, if you have a busy team life, you have your morning quiet time, it's the word from the shepherd for you. The counsel to approve, to encourage, to rebuke, whatever you need.

It needn't take three hours, that needn't. But then at least you should be having a certain block of hours in a week where you're going to get down to some serious discipline study. Next question.

What happens if I'm asked to preach and I feel unable? Generally speaking I would say then don't. I mean if you really find the challenge that's put before you absolutely overwhelming, then don't necessarily take it

on. However, many, many times before we get up to preach, we feel as if we don't have what it takes.

So it's a question that you answer at different stages of your ministry. In the early years, you shouldn't necessarily be pushing to get preaching every time. God will open up the door in good time when you're ready.

God is more concerned about giving you something to say than giving you opportunities to speak to start with. But in years to come, you may often feel yourself unable, quite panic stricken. Well don't, don't worry about that.

Get a hold of yourself. Trust God, commit it to him, go and do your best. People have the liberty not to invite you back again.

To make amends a bit. So that question would need a little tying down to the stage in your preaching. The next one.

What happens if you're, while you're speaking, you feel you're not getting through? You're talking, you're saying what you wanted to say, you feel you're not getting through. Well, there are many, many times, I think, in a person's ministry where this happens. And all you've got to do, so far as I can see, is faithfully give them what God has given you to give.

You can't do more than that. It is a fact that people's hunger for the word of God increases as they get more of the word of God. People are at different stages.

You'll learn this in your masters. Imagine a series of, a middle line. Above the line they are converted.

Below the line they are not converted. And this is a scale of spiritual progress. Up here a person is going on.

Up here, they've heard a lot about the gospel. They're already under some conviction. They're not yet in the kingdom.

Everybody you meet is somewhere. And not everybody, when you finish with them, is going to finish up there. You may actually move this man to there.

That's a good job done. Because he's going in the right direction anyway. Or you may see some people go there.

The important thing is to move everyone in the right direction from wherever they're at in their spiritual progress. Now down here people will have very little hunger for the word of God. They won't understand always what you're saying.

But there might be something in what you say or your approach. And your faithfulness in preaching what God has given you to say they will, although it's difficult, help people at this stage. Now Isaiah was told that he was going to preach to people who wouldn't listen.

That you'll preach, you'll preach, and they won't pay very much attention. But I want you to go preach. Jeremiah was told the same, and Ezekiel was told the same.

Most of the great prophets were told that things were not going to be very easy for them. Don't know how you get people to get up and walk out after five minutes, you know. There's nothing much you can do about it.

Start sort of pursuing down the corridor. And so faithfulness, accept the fact that your reactions may in fact be wrong. In some of the most dead feeling meetings people get converted.

Give them what God gave you to give, and you may well be part of the early process of training them to have an appreciation for the things of God. So many of these questions are, I can imagine different situations. I went and spoke to a youth group meeting in a vicar's house in the middle of England, and they were a wild bunch.

And I was asked to come and speak on something, and it really wasn't very appropriate. And I didn't feel as if I got through. And frankly, if I was invited back there again to speak to the same group, I probably wouldn't go.

Because I accept the fact that I'm not very good in certain situations. It used to be the same when I was school teaching. I would far rather talk to people who were sort of 16 to 18 than 12 to 14.

I'm prepared to admit that I'm better at certain kinds of things than others. So you might, I mean, it depends on the circumstances. Your question is a difficult one.

You might want to say, well, I won't go and speak there anymore because I don't know anything to say to them, I'm not the right kind of person to talk to them. I really find it hard to give a principled answer to what is such a vague question. I would usually have a, if I've done it one or two, three times, and there haven't been any unconverted people there, shall we say, then I would begin to talk to the elders about this.

Now, I mean, at the stage I'm at now, I would feel I had the right to say, look, there really isn't a lot of point in me coming and, you want me to preach the gospel, don't you, and to explain the way of salvation, but the people that are there have all heard it a thousand times, and the last three times I've been, there hasn't been anybody there who actually needed to hear the way of salvation explained. I'm willing to come, if you're willing to have me speak to the people as they are, I'm not willing to come to go through the charade of preaching the gospel again. I have been bold enough to say that on occasion.

And I might then address the people as I feel them to be. But there are some places where I would now feel, I've preached there a number of times, there was very little response, no message, you know. Maybe my time is better used, especially if you get a lot of invitations to speak, and you have to choose between them.

I would tend to choose where I felt, after a while, that my own contribution was going to be better used, you know. A question is asked, what about women preachers? What about them? Well, scripture speaks of women prophesying, so long as they have their heads covered. Praying and prophesying.

So obviously, they were not in all circumstances totally silent. Paul says that he himself in the churches that he had had a hand in starting did not allow women to have a teaching ministry. They were not to be given that authority.

But no one can deny that women like Elizabeth Elliot and Helen Rosbeer, a woman like the Maréchal in France in years gone by, had a powerful men-convicting ministry. So I am left with one of those difficult

situations. In my own local church, if you are interested, we don't have women preach.

They pray in the prayer meetings. They share in the house meetings when we have home Bible studies. But we don't put them up behind any pulpit and ask them to preach in the morning service.

And I myself am happy with that situation. I don't really want to go very deeply into that controversy, because it is complicated. But I would be happy to have someone like Helen Rosbeer come and preach at this conference, because I believe she's got a ministry.

I would listen. There are many women ministers around the country. I wouldn't cross the street, really, to go listen.

But maybe I'm prejudiced. But I was asked the same question yesterday and I gave more or less the same answer, didn't I? I haven't changed my view since yesterday. Yes? If that's the choice.

Yes. I personally feel that so many of these questions involving the role and the rights of women that have come up all over the place in the last 15 years, in society and in the church, the root of many of them is the men failing. Failing in the home, failing in the pulpit, failing to take right leadership in the church, and that if only the men were as Scripture shows them to be, then the women would feel that they would feel satisfied with a place that was less vocal.

They would feel loved, respected, given due honour, taken into consideration, ministered unto, fed, and they'd be happy with their God-given role, which I take to be less vocal. I'm not one of those that say the restrictions on women preaching are merely poor within his culture. Because he goes for the source of his arguments always back to Genesis, and pre-fall Genesis.

And that has normative value for us throughout time. But let's leave that one. How can we deal with nerves? I don't, I don't know.

I mean, Billy Graham has just stood up in the Evangelists conference in Amsterdam and spoken of the fact that before he gets up to preach, his hands are all sweaty and he's, you know, he's, even now, and the man has preached to more people than any of us are ever likely to. Still he gets nervous. I go through times of tremendous nervousness.

I'm in and out of the toilet before the meeting. Terrible troubles, you see. Other times, I feel much more confident.

I think practice, committing the situation to God, just emotionally getting a grip of yourself and getting up and getting on with it. I mean, there's going to come a time in the meeting where the man is going to say, now, there you go. And whether you're nervous or not, you have to begin.

I don't know. Do you want to say anything? I have nothing more to say than that. It's just practice and getting a grip.

My nerves normally come out in the middle of the night, less in front of the people. I normally look fairly much as if I know what I'm doing and I'm doing it under control in front of the people. But it's at night that I panic and wake up and pray and sweat and can't sleep and turn over.

I go through agonies in the middle of the night. Why, I don't know. And he was tremendously nervous about this.

And he got the passage in Isaiah 6 about the angels, you see. With twain he covered his face. With twain he covered his feet.

With twain he covered his flies, he put. And the whole place just fell about laughing. I suppose that doesn't translate into German, does it? I'm sorry about that.

You'll have to explain it privately afterwards. Dick, you have a question? I'm not sort of conscious of those shades of meaning. I just feel.

I think for all practical purposes there isn't very much difference. Well, not before you stand up to preach. When you're sitting down and waiting to come on to speak.

But I think actually as you pray about this God does answer prayer. I have known myself in real uptightness. And as I've prayed I have physically felt tension draining out.

Not all the time. But there have been times when a very important message. I can remember once at a university I was asked to meet with many of the members of staff.

The professors. These were some of the top people some of them in their field in the country. And I was asked to speak to them for 20 minutes.

To explain what this mission was. And I said a little bit about the mission and then I told them about the resurrection and I told them that they were all under the judgment of God because that was the implication of the resurrection. That's how Paul preaches it in the University of Athens.

God has set a day in which he has appointed the world under judgment and he's appointed a man by whom we may be saved you see. Now I felt nervous before that but when I stood to speak to these men they were as every bit lost and needy as the students I'd been speaking to the night before the undergraduate. God had taken it away.

Sometimes he doesn't seem to. I don't know. Larry? Think about the people's needs.

Yes. Yes. There are various imaginative tricks that one goes through one imagines what the Lord would say to them.

I sometimes have a whole sort of screen running in my mind imagining the Lord talking to these people how would he be? And that gets your mind off yourself too. Someone asked a question about do you practice in front of a mirror? You know gestures and things. No.

I mean some may do. I am prepared to meet every kind of unexpected habit among preachers. But I would think that was ridiculous.

I would think it was so false. You are to be there as the man that God created to be yourself. But then in some preaching classes people have to preach sermons in front of videos and then they have to look at the videos and they get people criticizing their video performance.

This goes on in some technical colleges. Well what's the difference between that and criticizing yourself in front of a mirror? I don't know. But I wouldn't waste the time of day having a try out in front of a mirror.

That can destroy people from ever, ever preaching. You know. The most depressing thing for me ever is to listen to myself preaching.

I got a few tapes at home and it's awful. I get discouraged by that. Even messages where people have been converted and God's blessing.

I feel, oh do I really sound like that? It can be destructive, you know, this video thing. Anyway. How often do you use sermons? You know, when you preach them, you've got the notes.

You put it away in a little box and get it out later? Use it again? Or is that wicked? Does God have to give you every message fresh, new, before you stand and preach? Well Martin Goldsmith was very interesting this morning admitting that he preached this same series earlier this summer in South Africa. I also happen to know, I think that he preached the same thing to the students at Cambridge University last winter. And George Whitfield used to say that he never felt he had really got a sermon to its peak until he had preached it 40 times.

The same sermon. And Peter and I were chatting after lunch and he was telling me about Josh McDowell has some particular messages that he brings to students around the world. And there's one message to do with sex.

It's ultimate sex. It's an evangelistic message that starts out with talking about sex and he's preached it well over a thousand times. You said possibly 15,000.

I thought that couldn't be possible. 1,500. So don't throw away your notes.

I have got some boxes of notes at home and the stuff is filed away. It's useful. But don't ever just flip the box open pull out something, go up into the pulpit and preach it.

Every message must be must have the fire rekindled again. You're going to have to prayer walk it in or think about it in quietness for an hour or two again. Get the thing fresh.

Maybe change the illustrations. And actually you will find that if it's a year or two since you last preached on a particular passage or verse or topic your ideas may well have changed. So you may find that you've actually got to write out the notes all over again because you want your emphasis to change as you get older.

That has happened to me constantly. I very often find that I pull the notes out of a box but I finish up not using them but rewriting the thing because your experience grows. Your ideas change.

Your insights and scripture change. New things come into your experience that you can use as illustrations. But don't just think it stand up and think that last year's fire will still rest upon it.

Someone asked a question Do you require Bible college training? And they quoted the verse from 1 John chapter 2 and verse 27 which is this verse As for you the anointing which you received of him abided in you and you need not that anyone teach you but as his anointing teacheth you concerning all things and is true and is no lie and even as it is taught you ye abide in him. The implication seemed to be that no one needs to teach you anything you don't need to go to Bible college you just stand up and with the anointing that's upon you out it comes. Well why did you come to this seminar then? Or why did John feel it necessary to write his epistle if people didn't need any teaching? We all need teaching and Bible school

may well have its value its place.

I myself have never been to one and don't intend ever to go to one for a number of reasons none of which need become your reasons. Some of you have been to Bible college or hope to go to Bible college well and good if God is leading you there. There are certain dangers you must face the danger of professionalism the danger of elitism the danger of imagining that only someone that has been to Bible college can stand and preach God's word.

The Christian church history is riddled with this professional experts and no one else has the right to say anything it's built into the Roman Catholic system and in the half-reformed churches the majority of churches that came out of the Reformation I would believe are only half-reformed it remains there too and so people sit in the pews imagining that only the one man who's gone away and studied for three years in some monastery sorry for going so fast David has got the right to say anything. We need to have modelled before us the the layman who can study and preach because otherwise people sit in the pew listening to you thinking well only you can study and understand God's word because only you have had the time to go away and the money to spend for three years of Bible study. But actually it is everyone who is supposed to be studying their Bibles and learning from them and so I'm happy to stand and preach and if people ask me where I got all this stuff well by reading the Bible by spending hours reading the Bible at home on journeys, in trains as God gave me the time because they know they can do that as well they maybe never are going to get away to Bible college you can see that I come from a a background that has been influenced by the brethren.

Now we have two full-time workers in my own church and I am a full-time worker giving time to the study and preaching but I know that I need to learn I don't think one John 2.27 has got anything to do with it. Learn all you can from others but don't confine your learning to Bible college. How do you keep to time is another question that has been asked.

I knew a man who was absolutely brilliant at this he would tell you to the minute when he was going to end if he was going to do a two minute book review he would end within ten seconds of his appointed time. A chap called Stan Warren he used to be a civil servant not a trained preacher at all a man who lives in England works now he is a retired man goes around among missionaries encouraging, teaching, preaching practice, discipline and a willingness simply to stop when the time comes. Now I am not very good at it I suppose I get a reputation for going on a long time.

There were two little lads who met somewhere in Lancashire a Roman Catholic boy and a Baptist boy and they were talking about each other's churches and the differences and so they agreed to go to each other's churches and so the Baptist boy went along to the Roman Catholic boy's church and everything that happened, the processions the bowing up and down and the candles what's that mean? What's that about? and the Roman Catholic boy explained everything you see that was going on and the Baptist boy was nodding, taking it all in and then the following Sunday it was the turn for the Catholic boy to come to the Baptist church and he started asking questions and the minister got up in the pulpit what's this mean?

What's going to happen now? and the minister very solemnly took his watch off his wrist laid it down in front of him on the edge of the pulpit and the Catholic boy said what's that mean? and the Baptist boy said absolutely nothing at all I'm afraid as they all say people can only take in through their ears as much as their bottom can bear on the seat you know I am a believer in longer rather than shorter sermons John Stott I think quoting someone else said sermonettes make Christianettes people need to hear the word of

God systematically expounded and at length but we live in a day of the television age of the quick advertisement of everything being instant and you've got to be good if you're going to be long and it's awful to be boring have you ever been bored by preachers? so I don't know how to keep the time other than galloping towards the end and then stopping God will use his word Jonathan McCloskey was down in the tent the other day saying that so far as he knows when he has preached evangelistically he has never in his lifetime's ministry seen one person converted and yet people have been converted through his ministry usually when he's been preaching to the believers and accidentally I mean as he would regard it I mean God knew what he was doing it often happens you know we had an evaluation form handed in by someone from the summer conference this year one of the questions put on the evaluation form what was the best thing that happened to you this summer and this person said I got converted they'd gone through the Akron conference in the States they'd come over to the European conference they'd listened to the tapes they'd read the books and half way through I think the July conference they found the Lord they got converted well I don't know what the message was on whether it was some instruction on the drivers or something I don't know but God is so marvellously sovereign I deeply dislike the kind of children's story that gives them the nice story and then pops in the pill at the end because it's such a switch off isn't it you've got to learn I don't want to get into children's messages because that's a whole extra skill and the Child Evangelism Fellowship know a lot about it although one wouldn't always agree with everything one's got to learn to have the point implicit and woven in as you go otherwise it finishes up like those old moody science films you get the very interesting science bit and then there's Irwin A.

Moon with the magic bible always just popped open at the page he wanted and then he preached at you educationally that was old fashioned Martin Lloyd Jones used to expound the word whatever he felt it was there whatever was there he used to just say it's there, that's what God is saying through this passage and it'll the word will touch believer and unbeliever sometimes we can be too false in sort of trying to cut both ways preach God's word, what does it say and why does it say it what does it mean unless you're in a situation where it is to be a clear evangelistic message, that's what you're there for to preach on the deity of Christ or the meaning of life but if you're expounding the word be faithful to the word and beware of these little bits that get tacked on if there are any here who so and so because it seems so false doesn't it God's word is quite powerful to do the job enough I hope I have not neglected the one question that you wanted answered I threw quite a lot down on paper Peter helped that's what I'm finished up with yes, try how do I study you want the truth I do various things and I go through different kinds of years there are some times in my life, like shall we say the OM conferences, don't imagine that I'm doing a lot of bible study during these conferences it's morning till night dealing with practical issues some preaching but the amount of time in a day when I read the bible at an OM conference would be less than half an hour and some days I don't get to read at all today I got up I was woken up by my wife at 7 and she reminded me that I had a meeting of the doctrine committee at 7 this morning they were expected to meet in my office to discuss a matter to do with the believer and demon possession or oppression or what is all this and where does OM stand on the believer and demons, now you imagine that at 7 o'clock in the morning I was tired, I didn't get to bed till quarter to 12 last night I asked my wife to go and get some breakfast up to the room and then I had to go and meet with Dave Hicks Paul Troper, Dennis Wright Peter Maiden, Dr.

Payne we sat and we discussed demons over breakfast and that went on until 8.30 by which time I was due to start the meeting in the tent I had to rush down there and set Martin Goldsmith going, followed by a prayer time then there was confusion because there was a question and answer time due to start in the tent and there was nobody there to answer any questions I got Martin Goldsmith up and got him launched and sent a message to look for George Verber then I had to go off and arrange for a birthday cake for little

Jed Brewster to look for a girl to appear on the platform, but they were all in the wives conference and deal with different things like that I can't remember the different things so today I haven't had, yesterday I got a good time reading in the Psalms now when I'm at home

the end of the conference I'm going to settle down to my regular normal path and I know quite clearly what I'm going to do I've got it all planned out, I've got a stack of notes on Ephesians but they're all sort of, I haven't thought them through I can't preach the whole of Ephesians yet it's like stuff that's been simmering on the back burner for 18 months probably, I've preached bits of it I could preach you from memory through from chapter 417 right through till 521 I've got that but some of the early parts of Ephesians I don't understand the thought flow of that yet, I've got some tapes of a friend of mine this man I was mentioning this morning, on Ephesians and I'm going to sit down every morning, listen and study listen and study, get his input study Ephesians and I want to finish

up by Christmas time able to preach Ephesians from memory knowing the thing that's the plan now, there's a mission coming up in a university in Britain there are weekends I'm away different consultations, I've got all kinds of things when I'm away, my whole life program breaks up, I can't walk in my usual places, I can't jog, I can't play squash with that friend of mine and I'm away from my books and things things go wrong when I come back, I get back to the basic pattern in with that there's going to have to be individual messages coming up particular conferences that I've got to get something ready for well, I'll throw them in as well but I'm going to get those mornings in Ephesians and related reading from now on until Christmas how many hours it will amount to, I don't know but that's

the plan I mean Ephesians is going to produce a few sermons and I get people asking me to preach on such and such they may say, look we want you to expound the book of Micah one of the P.U.'s this last winter said, look you're coming for our house party we want you to do four talks on the book of Micah I had to go and do six talks on the sermon on the mount you're going to have to sit down and do a lot of detailed chugging but that is in order to preach Ephesians, I've got no commitment to preach on Ephesians yet see the difference, the study for study's sake and the study to preach the study for study's sake is the study to know what God has said in his word well an offshoot would be I'll probably preach it sometime, someone's going to get Ephesians with both barrels but the study to

preach is different and my contention is that preachers need to study for God's sake as well as for preaching's sake so that, I mean I told you what I'm going to do now I've done this kind of work that you've said on a variety of books in the bible John Galatians, 1 and 2 Corinthians, got them 1 and 2 Timothy Hebrews Genesis up to 24 Exodus is on the back burner the book of Judges is on the back burner it's half done I've preached through Daniel but I've preached it before it was ripe I've lost a lot of it yeah, I will read the thing through, simply from start to finish however long it takes, just read it through maybe 15 times many many times, just read through when you get to the end, start again read through and look for a number of key things one, does the book itself tell you why it

was written some books do Paul writing 1 Timothy says look I'm hoping to come on to you shortly but if I am delayed I have written these things so that you might know how men ought to behave in the household of God the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth that's 1 Timothy 3 no, not by heart 14, 15 1 Timothy 3, 14 15 John 20 verses 30, 31 John says look, these signs we have written, I have written so that you might believe and at believing you might have life in his name, many other things did Jesus which are not written in this book but these ones have been written in other words, I've done some editing I've pulled out certain significant things put them down for this purpose, John tells you Peter tells

you in his epistle 1 Peter we have written unto you so that

you might know what is the true grace of God well if I've just read the book 5 times and then Peter tells me it's really about grace, you know then I go back and start seeing where he's talking about grace, God's grace and you find the book will break down into about 5 sections and grace is the key thing to each one I mean if the author helps me, that sets me going, or if I notice certain repeated phrases, almost like book markers it could be something like that or it could be if you read through Genesis you'll see about 11 times the phrase, these are the generations of somebody and then it'll tell you his story for a bit and then these are the generations of someone else now if you write them all down, all 11, you'll see some are quite short, some are rather long this is the history of

Joseph and a guy like Ishmael or Esau will get dismissed comparatively trivially but the story of Isaac and the story of Jacob, the story of Abraham and Joseph will take passage so that God is sort of developing a line through and at these significant divisions we have to see why he's going on with this one and not with those another key to Bible study, and it connects to something I said earlier, is what picture does the book give you because I believe that every book of the Bible will show you a slightly different facet of God's eternal character his multi-personal character so the names of God are very important we mentioned Philippians how is God pictured well, God the Father isn't referred to over much but God the Son is pictured as a servant more than once and Paul as a servant and

Timothy and Epaphroditus as servants there's an awful lot about service and Christ is a great picture of a servant but when Daniel writes for the benefit of his people, he's not talking about God as a servant, that's camps refugee camps by the river Chebar off in Babylon, he talks about God most high ruler of heaven and earth it's a completely different picture side of God's nature, that is a key to Bible study helps you know why he's talking so I look for those things but we'll veer off if we're not careful into a seminar on Bible study methods have I given you a bit to be going on did I answer your question what was your question again how do I prepare, how do I study what do I feel about reading systematic theology would I shock you dreadfully if I confess that I find systematic

theology books among the most boring books ever printed and I'm I've often felt grateful to God that he didn't write systematic theology when God wanted us to know about himself he didn't do Birkhoff's work for him and write a systematic theology textbook, he gave us the Bible so that he could be seen and understood and glimpsed in life as we ourselves grow up in life so that we can see the issues in say Abraham's life relative to our own as we grow up that's the way God has chosen to reveal himself, it keeps pace with our growing maturity, so although I do occasionally dip into these books and I've got Birkhoff sitting on my shelf and various other books I must confess they're not my bedtime reading but greater men than me like Martyn Lloyd-Jones may use such books for their bedtime

reading although he said that on a Saturday night he always used to sit his sermon was ready it was all set, he wasn't still trying to get it together on a Saturday night he would sit down quietly somewhere with one of the biographies of the great saints a great Christian leader just read a biography, because he said it always humbled him to see these men and their ministry good therapy on Saturday night reading such a book hey, tea time there's a way to stop, eh let's break, twenty minutes or so or as soon as you can, have a cup of something come back suitably refreshed and we'll finish off, and the only way you read this bible is in order to get messages from it, that man is already on the slippery path to danger, your bible is so that you might have the revelation of God not so that

you might earn your living talking about bits of it, the business of using the old notes without warming them up in your heart, it's all part of professionalism watch out for it being over familiar with the seriousness of the job you have and divine things, secondly beware of your natural strengths and gifts getting out of control, so that you're actually relying more on a certain innate natural ability than on the due processes of preparation on your face before God it may be your natural eloquence, or a gift for sarcasm, that can get out of control your messages can sound pretty salty at first and then they begin to have a negative effect let's think of the question of humour and when it gets out of control in the pulpit, Elton Trueblood has listed 30 passages in the synoptic gospels

that he says are funny and intended to be funny Christ was no stranger to using humour but in a study of all of them, he says the purpose of Christ's humour was to clarify and never to hurt to help people see their own follies the silliness of their attitudes, the irony particularly very ironic stories, the irony of their actions, but never to hurt them you know that business of swallowing the camel, that must have actually caused quite a chuckle to people who knew camels, can you imagine a farfetched, quite long bony legs, the big, flappy pads at the bottom, the humps can you imagine a hairy hump going down a bit too humped camel an extraordinary sensation and he's laughing at people who would swallow a camel with hardly noticing it, and yet would strain out a little mosquito you know

they swallow that now it's perhaps not very rolling in the aisles kind of humour in our culture, but plainly it was intended to be ironic, to be sharp to be humorous, to make fun of a particular characteristic in the Pharisees but you should never ever be humorous about God or the cross the resurrection the deity of Christ these friends are not funny topics, and never will be be as humorous as you like about yourself about the foolishness of men and some of their evasiveness of truth or their funny reactions illuminate things to do with people but be careful what you make humorous especially in evangelism if you start being funny about God or his gospel you will actually be going backwards in what you're trying to do rather than forwards, but the value of humour it seems to me, I can pick

out three values one is it breaks tension if you're listening, concentrating, trying to understand the point the man is making feeling the challenge of it in your own heart and then suddenly he makes you laugh well, it's easier to be tense on the edge of your seat for an hour is a very exhausting thing and the tension becomes counterproductive people stop concentrating they're worn out just by listening to you to make them laugh can relax them so that you can get better attention afterwards you'll find it breaks tension secondly, it can break down defenses break down defenses if you get a room full of hostile people who don't like you or your message, this is particularly true in evangelism, to make them laugh a little can be very helpful, Billy Graham does this all the time after the

earthquake, a still small voice, as somebody put it and then humour can be used to prick people's pomposity, just to deflate, take the air out of the windbag and it can help you not to appear over pompous if people are encouraged perhaps to have a chuckle at something that you did that was a bit foolish or silly they will like you the more, they will actually listen to what you're trying to preach that is of truth and of value more if they have begun to like you as a rounded human being the value of humour but let me say that some people are naturally funny and some people won't be and you are the way God made you and nothing is worse than forced laughter if you're not naturally an amusing preacher don't think that God has missed bits out in making you you are the way you are just be

yourself Whitfield was hardly ever known to make people laugh in his preaching because he was an intensely serious man in fact he was hardly ever known to speak of people going to hell without breaking

and crying he felt it so badly but a man like Spurgeon used his laughter all the time he spoke in terms of opening people's mouths up with laughter in order to pop the truth in so be yourself and don't try and be amusing if you're not naturally and if you have a strength a natural gift in humour be aware of the danger of that natural gift getting out of control because I've heard men and heard of men speaking and they're perhaps going to be talking about the cross and the resurrection and the most serious events that ever happened on this planet and they'll spend the first 30 minutes with

people rocking around rolling, laughing and then suddenly they'll start to be talking about hell and judgement and it doesn't always go well and yet I think I would have to admit that some preachers and sometimes it's true of myself it's a sign of nervousness to be funny you can respond to your own tension by making a few jokes it's got to be controlled in the long run thirdly watch out for popularity Dayton has various ways of getting you and destroying you in the long run he will definitely attack your life that is private with God your prayer and your study, that he will zero in on but you may get your defenses built there you get some good habits, you get a wife who keeps people away from your study time you know you're winning on that front and you're beginning to be known as a man

who has something to say that is going to help people, then what will happen you will find invitations coming in to speak here and speak there and go here and go there and suddenly it seems as if the floodgates are open and you're overwhelmed with popularity and Satan can be right there just as much seeking to ride you to death and before long you find yourself in the middle of the barrenness of an over busy life, perhaps on this morning, perhaps in the question and answer time in the tent not every invitation that lands on your desk is necessarily to be accepted turn some of them down learn to pray over them, don't take them all as a compliment, don't assume that because people have invited you that they've necessarily got it right, it might be someone else who would be better to go to

that place in fact you might be able to think of someone to write back and suggest that they would do better than you you'll have to guard against being exhausted through popularity, Jesus knew how to say no at times I read you some scriptures yesterday no I'm not staying here I'm going to go on I'm going to move on he knew how to get away out and maintain his privacy, they wanted him to be a king in John 6, 15 he withdrew from the scripture didn't run away, didn't flee he withdrew calculated retreat in order to preserve his ministry and the Lord would speak of the Pharisees as people who love the praise of men rather than God how easy it is for your motives in mid ministry suddenly you find that they're bent all out of shape and you want people to think well of you and you're made proud

by the number of meetings you're going to the number of engagements you can put in your prayer letter and you're actually operating way beyond what you can adequately deal with you're beginning to live off memory and the study life is dying away and your prayer is getting thinner and thinner and it's tragically easy to go down that road and people don't realize for a long time you're actually heading into a desert simply because you haven't learned how to control popularity doing well in any Christian work includes as many challenges as doing badly and Satan is just as capable of using success as he is of using defeat you begin to start to try and please the crowd rather than the God who sent you in the first place fourthly beware of what I call destructive preaching I want to try and

briefly explain what I mean there is a certain kind of preaching that does not build up it simply casts down perhaps you are a theological argumentative kind of person and you want to attack this view and that view and show the flaws in that and expose the problems with this and it's negative, negative, negative and you justify it on the grounds that some negative is necessary, you know, you quote Tozer that it's necessary

sometimes to tear down before you build up but actually you don't do very much building up you don't spend very long warming people's hearts towards the Christ in whom they are to put their faith a certain kind of ministry that is challenge, challenge challenge, challenge actually pinches up slogging people into the ground they come out feeling loaded down with burden

and you, you Pharisee have done this, done the loading and you haven't given them anything which makes them feel stronger you know you must give people that which will strengthen their faith, a challenge does not strengthen someone's faith by itself you need to talk to them about God, about Jesus, about his ways, his words, his grace his character, his mercy, what he's done in history, then you can challenge them, otherwise they will just feel loaded with the burden and you haven't actually made them feel stronger or to change the metaphor people very often don't feel very rich in their own souls and I may be talking to a room full of people and 99% of you, which is true, you hardly know what I'm talking about, because you live in a permanent state actually of a spiritual poverty that

you've come to accept we need to feel rich in our souls full with with enthusiasm for Jesus John Waveley used to say that he kept himself ready to pray or to preach or to die at a moment's notice ready to pray, preach or die at a moment's notice kept his soul rich had that in his mind and his heart and his soul which he felt was strengthening him he was a rich man in other words he had that which he could give away a pauper, a beggar has nothing to give away and we need to maintain ourselves in such a state of heart that we are able to give away riches from the word of God so beware of a kind of preaching or of team leadership that is all challenge and no feeding it's destructive in the long run and you'll finish up with your people worn out you are making people slaves are people at the

end of your your time of ministry feeling that they have to go and do whatever it is the next bit of the day's work because well it's got to be done, I'm on OM this is the way it is this is what true Christian life really is I've got to get my teeth and blood on in a prison camp that's the way people were before they became believers the beginning of Ephesians 2 Paul pictures the human race in bondage, in prison he has a vision of the entire race as it were in a prison yard at exercise time walking under the power of the prince of the air, there on the walls of this prison, gazing down at men and women trudging around in life it's Satan the governor of that prison so everyone down there Jesus has come in and delivered out of the prison and yet preachers of legalism, preachers who have

only a ministry of challenge without anything to to build faith to strengthen the soul to encourage the heart, they leave people unable to meet the challenges, it's actually a complete waste of time because if people aren't helped to meet the challenge that you've given them, well why bother giving them into the process it's a waste of time freedom destructive preaching and fifthly beware of the failure to judge yourself, and I touched on this already today, you know being harder on yourself than others, I've got to watch this I come very close to the borderlines of this we need to judge ourselves many of the things I've said during these two days are a challenge to me in the area of consistency because it's easy to slip below the standards that you know are ideal but in 1 Corinthians 5

you remember in chapter 5, one among the Gentiles and he is to be confronted with this there is to be judgment, the church being gathered together, and I with you in the spirit says Paul, have already removed this man, he is to be judged and disciplined and the word judge, judge, judge comes out again and again but then when you look at chapter 6 there's a challenge for the leaders of the church the first four chapters of 1 Corinthians are all about unity you must be united with one another in Christ how to be united the moment you get into where to be disunited where to bring the doors in the church where to

make the cuts where to put people outside there's been a lot of the wrong kind of division going on to start with now he wants to talk about the right kind of division and it

involves judgment and the church is going to have a discipline among the believers, lawsuit they're taking each other to court and he says, isn't there one among you elders of the church able to judge in this matter don't you know that you in the church are being educated through church life to judge angels some of you are going to have to evaluate the service that angels have given, what a responsibility to decide whether it was as it should have been or not so that life now is a training in judgment that's why the man who is to be a church leader is to be one who has learned how to judge his family well spend the rest of the afternoon talking about this learning to judge is a mark of leadership

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