

# The Importance of Preaching - Part 3

by W.H. Griffith Thomas

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*The importance of preaching lies in its ability to perfect the saints, evangelize the unconverted, and build up the Body of Christ.*

**Scripture:** Proverbs 15:28, 1 Corinthians 14:26, Ephesians 4:11, 2 Timothy 4:2, 1 Peter 4:10

**Topics:** "Pastoral Ministry", "Evangelism"

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## Description

W.H. Griffith Thomas emphasizes the importance of pastoral sermons in the settled pastorate, focusing on the ministry to believers for the edification of the Body of Christ. He highlights the need for training Christians to become evangelists and workers for Christ, stressing the significance of 'edification' in all aspects of Christian Church life. Additionally, he discusses the essential elements of evangelistic sermons, such as teaching on ruin by the Fall, redemption by the Blood, and regeneration by the Spirit, and the importance of offering Christ for present acceptance. Thomas also provides practical advice on sermon preparation, storage of sermon materials, and the art of open-air preaching, urging preachers to be thorough, tactful, and earnest in their delivery.

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## Transcript

### VI. Pastoral Sermons.

This aspect of preaching will necessarily form a prominent part of the work of the settled pastorate. The ministry to believers occupies an important place in the New Testament, because of the purpose of God for the life of every Christian. The ascended Lord is said to have bestowed the gifts of ministry for a very specific purpose; and when we read that purpose in the Greek, we see the preeminent importance of a pastoral ministry, "for the perfecting of the saints for the work of ministering, for the edifying of the Body of Christ." That is to say, ministerial gifts are intended to "perfect" or "adjust" the saints, that they in turn may do the work of ministering, and thereby help forward the upbuilding of the Church, the Body of Christ. It will therefore always be an essential part of ministerial preaching, so to teach and train Christians that they may become evangelists and workers for Christ. The New Testament lays the greatest possible stress on "edification". Everything in the Christian Church, Scripture, worship, sacraments, and work, is intended in some way or other to promote "edification". There is literally nothing provided for in the Christian Church that is not intended to subserve this very definite purpose. The Christian minister must therefore keep this aim ever in view. He must preach the living Christ in all His fullness as a doctrine and as an experience. He must emphasize labour for Christ, and show that in the New Testament every communicant was a

worker, and very worker a communicant. And thus by "feeding the flock" he will accomplish far more than he can ever dream of doing by his own unaided efforts, because the Christians themselves will go forth, some in this way, some in that, to do work for God that will both win men for Christ and build up the members of His Body.

II. Evangelistic Sermons. Although these have been kept to the last for fuller consideration, they are by no means least in importance, and it is probably true to say that evangelistic sermons are never more required than in the settled ministry of an ordinary pastorate. During the last few years it would seem as though God has been teaching His people to depend less and less upon special Mission Services, and to make more and more of the ordinary ministry for the purpose of evangelization.

While it is possibly too much to say that every minister should be his own evangelist, since spiritual gifts are diverse and distinct in the New Testament, there is sufficient truth in the statement to lead every clergyman to ask himself how far he has endeavoured not only to build up the Body of Christ, but to "do the work of an evangelist". Some time ago a friend told me that he had been for nearly a year in regular attendance at an Evangelical Church where the preaching to Christians was everything that could be desired - spiritual, strong, fresh, and Biblical; and yet during the whole of that period he had never once heard a sermon to the unconverted, or any appeal to the hearers to accept Christ.

And yet there must be in every congregation a large number of people who have never yet really accepted Christ for themselves. They have been brought up as regular Churchgoers, they are interested in Christian truth, and all the while they may be without a personal share in spiritual blessings. It is for such as these that evangelistic sermons should from time to time be attempted. What are some of the elements of ordinary evangelistic work? 1. A clergyman should not fail to teach what our fathers called the three Rs: Ruin by the Fall; Redemption by the Blood; Regeneration by the Spirit.

If these notes are lacking in our preaching, we shall never be evangelists. 2. We must not hesitate to divide our people into two classes: the Saved and the Unsaved. It is not for us to go beyond this and differentiate, but we must insist upon the fact that in every congregation these two classes are represented, and, as such, are known to God. 3. We must take care to offer Christ for present acceptance. It is unwise, and may easily be dangerous, to advise people to "go home and think about it".

Moody once did this in Chicago, and that very night the great fire burst out. The people never had the opportunity of coming back to hear him the next Sunday, and he himself said that from that time forward he never advised people to go home and think about it. We must press Christ upon our hearers for present acceptance. 4. From time to time when we are contemplating evangelistic sermons, it will be found particularly useful to have the offertory before the sermon, for there is nothing more distracting at the close of an earnest appeal than the work of collecting the offertory. 5.

For the same reason it will be found useful to omit the Ascription and to close direct with prayer and without a hymn. This is often impressive, and prevents the influence of the closing words of the sermon from being dissipated. 6. Whenever we feel led to have after-meetings, we must beware of any stereotyped plan. Let us trust the Holy Spirit more than we do sometimes, and let us believe more firmly in the power of the Spirit to bless and use the Word preached. Variety of method in the conduct of after-meetings is essential. (a) Sometimes while people are on their knees, we may give them the opportunity for silently surrendering to Christ, and then after a moment or two of silence close the meeting. (b) We may lead them verbally and audibly in prayer, as appropriate to our theme; and then after a

moment's pause bring the gathering to a conclusion. (c) Sometimes, though perhaps very occasionally, we may give an invitation to people to stand, or to raise the right arm as an indication of their wish and willingness to accept Christ.

But this method, as it is the most common, is perhaps the least trustworthy, because the people who ought to stand often do not do so. (d) I have personally found one method of great value as a change. It is the suggestion that the people should take with the preacher the following steps, on each of which a few words of comment and appeal, as they are kneeling, should be made. (1) I must, (2) I can, (3) I may, (4) I will, (5) I do. This may be varied by the use of the hymn, "Jesus, I will trust Thee," though taking the verses in a somewhat different order, and if the hymn should be sung verse by verse, kneeling, it would be particularly valuable to make the proper emphasis by suggesting an inversion in the singing: "Jesus, Thee I will trust"; "Jesus, Thee I may trust," etc.

These are but bare suggestions, such as can alone be included in our present space. But they may serve to show the supreme importance of these phases of ministerial work. Dr. A. T. Pierson's admirable book, *Evangelistic Work*, should be pondered by all who wish to "do the work of an evangelist". And some words which were uttered not long ago deserve to be written in letters of gold over every preacher's desk: "Preaching which is not evangelistic will soon cease to be evangelical."

#### Section 11. Materials For Sermons.

It has become proverbial that we cannot make bricks without straw, and all the foregoing references to preparation and delivery have necessarily presupposed the provision, possession and use of adequate materials for the work of the pulpit. It is to the acquisition and preservation of these materials that we must now address ourselves.

I. Materials Gathered. What are the main channels through which a clergyman may fairly expect to obtain the necessary materials for use in sermons? 1. First, and most important of all, must come his own study of the Bible. Nothing can make up for this, whether we think of intellectual consistency or spiritual force. Dr. Maclaren once told a gathering that he owed everything to his study day by day of a chapter in the Hebrew and a chapter in the Greek. No ministerial life can ever be satisfactory, and no ministerial work will ever be properly performed unless there is this constant, definite, firsthand, thorough study of the Bible.

Our methods of study will vary from time to time, but it will prove useful to have some system and order year by year. If, for instance, on our return from our summer holiday we determine to take up some book of the Bible, whether Old or New Testament, and give it all the attention in our power, we shall soon find how it will enrich our mind, widen our outlook, and stimulate our spiritual life. The greatest and most acceptable preachers of all ages have been men who through personal study have become "mighty in the Scriptures". 2.

A study of the best Commentaries will prove fruitful in connection with sermons. One of these should always be on hand. Emphasis is laid on the "best," which means those that help us to understand most thoroughly the text of our Bible. Who that has worked through a volume of Lightfoot, or Westcott, or Plummer, or Swete, or Armitage Robinson, or Vaughan, or Ellicott, will ever feel other than profoundly thankful for the ripe scholarship and deep experience which enable the student to see the force of word, and tense, and phrase, and to get at the very heart of the Divine meaning?

Any one of these Commentaries, with their minute, accurate exegesis, is an education to a clergyman. 3. The best books of theology should also receive attention. As a rule, dogmatic theology is thought to be uncommonly dry, uninteresting, and abstract, but this cannot be said of some of our modern works on the subject. It is impossible to do more than mention a few by way of illustration, but it would be possible to feel deeply sorry for the man who found no interest in Denney's *Death of Christ*, and *Studies in Theology*; Dale's *Christian Doctrine*; Liddon's *Divinity of our Lord*; W.

N. Clarke's *Outlines of Christian Theology*; W. A. Brown's *Christian Theology in Outline*; and not least, Litton's two great works, *Introduction to Dogmatic Theology*, and *The Church of Christ*. Such books as these will put iron into our convictions as well as give freshness to our theological outlook. We are not to be supposed to endorse everything that may be found in these books. They are only mentioned as illustrations of what can be read and should be read by every clergyman. 4.

The best books of devotion will occupy an important part in our ministerial life. Sermons, as we have seen, can never be wholly intellectual. "It is the heart that makes the theologian," and it is the heart that will make the preacher. By "best" in relation to devotion, we mean books that will suggest thought as well as stimulate to meditation. It is a great mistake to think there is any incompatibility between earnest thought and earnest devotion. Books like those of the late Dr.

George Matheson will show what is meant. We shall probably find ourselves disagreeing with Matheson's interpretations again and again; but they compel us to think, and this is a great virtue in any book. An author of an equally helpful kind, and always true to the cardinal points of New Testament teaching, is the Rev. W. M. Clow, whose *The Cross in Christian Experience*, *The Secret of the Lord*, and *The Day of the Cross*, will rejoice and inspire the heart of every one who reads them. 5.

The best volumes of sermons must not be overlooked. Of course there is danger here, especially if a man has an assimilative mind and a retentive memory; but he must resist the temptation to incorporate unduly, because of the absolute necessity of studying the finest possible models of sermon work. For this, I put Alexander Maclaren high above everyone else, past and present. For a combination of gifts - exegetical insight, homiletical power, spiritual insight, illustrative fertility, and literary grace - I do not know of any preacher to equal him.

Not far short of Maclaren is Dr. J. H. Jowett, of New York, any of whose volumes will be found abundantly helpful to preachers. From another point of view, the volumes by Dr. W. L. Watkinson will be found truly helpful for their suggestive thought, their acute analysis, and above all for their wealth of apt illustration. I took the trouble once to make an index of all the illustrations in one of Dr. Watkinson's books, and was astonished to find how much space was needed for it.

Dr. Joseph Parker and Bishop Phillips Brooks will also prove a mine of wealth to the preacher, nor will it be time wasted to give attention to some of the more important of the Puritans, like Howe, Owen, and Goodwin. Even though their style may be regarded as heavy, their insight into Divine truth and their marvelous facility for homiletic analysis cannot help being of value to a preacher. Dr. Alexander Whyte is never tired of speaking of Thomas Goodwin as still our greatest commentator on St.

Paul. Volumes of sermons by English Churchmen, though helpful to read, are not as a rule so useful in providing materials of expository and homiletic suggestion. But of course every man will naturally favour this or that preacher, according to his own mental and spiritual temperament. The names now mentioned are simply offered as the testimony of one who has found their work abundantly helpful to mind and heart.

6. Books of sermon outlines will, if studied, have to be used with the greatest possible care.

It is always valuable to see how another man treats his subject, but intellectual honesty must be kept constantly in view, or else we shall have to preface some of our sermons, or some of our sermon outlines with: "Alas! Master, for it was borrowed." It is believed that by means of these channels every preacher will be able to provide himself with ample material for all the sermons of the longest ministry. Once again let it be said that the first of these channels, the personal study of the Bible, must be kept paramount, and every other method made strictly subservient to it.

II. Materials Stored. It is one thing to amass materials, it is quite another to keep them in so convenient a form that we may be able to avail ourselves of their help even after some period of time. Many a man has read, and noted what he has read, and yet has not been able at the psychological moment to find the material through a lack of method or system for storing the results of his reading. What then are we to do? The following suggestions are made as the result of a good deal of personal experience and not a little outlay of money in order to arrive at some practical results.

If only beginners are warned against the mistakes and failures of the writer, the suggestions will not have been in vain. 1. A clergyman should index his books. This at first may seem somewhat remote from the present subject, but in reality it has a definite and practical bearing on it. The card index system is in every way the best, and even though a man may only have a few books there is no reason why he should not commence the work of indexing at once. A few cards with a small tray to hold them will suffice for a start.

The books should be indexed under three heads, Author, Title, and Subject; and there is no reason why all three should not be kept together in one tray in alphabetical order. The use of the guide cards will help to find readily what is required. The young clergyman who is only just commencing his library should not think this work of indexing unnecessary until he obtain a larger number of books. If he commences the work at once, and then adds to it as his books increase, it will be no labour, and the results will prove their value all through his ministry. 2.

Then he should commence a series of cards on which he enters under the appropriate texts anything that he may read from time to time. This series of cards should be kept in Bible order, and as anything is read it should be placed on the cards. In process of time it will be found that everything a man has in his study will be available for reference by means of this index. Thus, if he feels led, say, to preach on the subject of Genesis 28, or any verse in that chapter, he turns to his card under Genesis, and the whole available material will be found ready for reference.

It is impossible to exaggerate the importance of this method of recording the results of our reading and study. As time goes on, and cards increase, it is possible to obtain cases, or sections of drawers according to need, but until it is found possible to gauge with fair accuracy what extent of card index is likely to be required, it will be wise to keep the cards in the drawer of a desk. It is well known that there are systems of card indexing which allow of a constant addition to the cases as required. 3.

A notebook for extracts is also very necessary. There are books and magazines belonging to other people which we read from time to time, and from these we are often desirous of making extracts. In the old days this was done by means of a familiar book known as the Index Rerum, which was a manuscript book divided up according to the letters of the alphabet, with so many pages assigned to each letter, but this does not prove convenient, for the simple yet adequate reason that it is impossible to say beforehand precisely how many pages will be required for a particular letter.

The result is that in many cases we have too many pages for one letter and too few for another. The only possible notebook for these extracts is one which has an alphabetical index in front, and then pages which are, or can be, numbered. The result is that if we read anything on Temperance, we can put it on page 1, and then index it under T, and if afterwards we read anything on the Atonement we can put it on page 2, so long as we index it under A. By these means we can utilize every page of the book, and have all that we need for reference in the index.

Of course, if it is preferred to index this material on cards, there is no need to have the alphabetical index in the book, but only an ordinary well-bound quarto size notebook in which the pages can be numbered. 4. The question of newspaper cuttings is one of the greatest problems of a clergyman's life. After putting several methods to the test and rejecting them for one or other reasons, the conclusion has been forced upon me that the only real way to preserve these helps in a conveniently available form is by means of what is known as the Envelope system.

A number of large-sized manila paper envelopes should be obtained, and the subject of the cutting put outside. If these envelopes are kept in alphabetical order, and from time to time a fuller and more detailed index is made of subjects which allow of various departments, or aspects, it will be found that the cuttings are ready for use, as they are in no other system. Here again, speaking from personal experience, it is imperative to commence in the early days of the ministry, and even before Ordination, if we have begun to gather these cuttings.

A little attention paid to this week by week will prevent arrears, with all the trouble and sometimes the disappointment that arise if the work is left over. There is so much that is permanently valuable in newspaper cuttings that it is a great pity if a man is unable to preserve and arrange his material in a way suitable for use in sermons and addresses. 5. The preservation of sermons which are reported in newspapers is also of value. From time to time our weekly papers and monthly magazines contain sermons by leading preachers which are not always available afterwards in book form, and many a suggestion for study and preaching will be found in this way.

The best method of preserving is again the envelope system, or else by means of cardboard boxes with springs for holding the papers as in a file. These envelopes, or boxes, should be arranged in the order of the books of the Bible, for this will be found in every way the easiest and most convenient plan for reference. 6. The preservation of pamphlets is also not to be disregarded. There is much material available today in booklet and pamphlet form which will be of true service to a clergyman.

After several experiments and many inquiries, I have been led to the conclusion that the best possible way for preserving pamphlets is by means of binders with long pieces of wire at the top and bottom which can be turned inwards, and in which the pamphlets can be safely held. When the pamphlets in any particular case are indexed on the inside cover they are readily available for use. It is a bounden duty to call attention to this simple and admirable system, particulars of which can be obtained from Miss Vickers, 13 Maxilla Gardens, London, W.

The cost of the covers is very small, and the convenience is very great. 7. It is difficult to describe the method of storing which we have purposely left to the last. From time to time in our reading and study we have suggestions both of texts and subjects for sermons. What are we to do with them? By some preachers these hints are recorded in commonplace books which are looked over from time to time, added to, and then in due course used. But the trouble is that there is no system in the paging of such a book,

and an important topic may easily be overlooked and lost.

We have therefore found again by definite experience that the best way of preserving this material is by using pieces of glossy manila paper, 9 inches by 5, indexed in the order of the books of the Bible. Whenever an idea or a subject presents itself, one of these pieces of paper is taken, the notes jotted down, and the paper inserted in the proper place under the text which it is proposed to treat. These papers can be looked over from time to time, and as the result of that process known as "unconscious cerebration," the materials can be added to and developed.

Then when the time comes for a sermon to be prepared on any of the topics, the rough paper is naturally torn up, because there is no further use for it. This provides against the trouble and inconvenience of having a notebook in which the pages still remain, even after the material is used. Sometimes this method of storing sermon material is called the "stock pot". In housekeeping arrangements we believe that such a receptacle is of the very greatest importance, and the additions to it go to provide the foundation of the soups that are served from day to day.

A clergyman will find these notes a veritable "stock pot," for they will hold him in good stead on many an occasion when he finds his mental powers tending to droop, and in need of some fillip from other days and other men. As the reader reviews these seven methods, he will probably think them far too elaborate for ordinary use; but he ought to be assured that they are by no means so elaborate as they appear. When once the plans are adopted, it is surprising how easily they work, and how satisfying and gratifying it is to feel that our reading can be stored for future use.

And even though it may be years before we need the material for sermon preparation, it is ready at hand with a minimum of trouble, and the thoughts and illustrations which we felt to be of value are at length to be utilized in our work of proclaiming the everlasting Gospel.

## Section 12. Open-Air Preaching.

No one can question the splendid possibilities of open-air preaching. It affords an occasion of testimony for Christ to many who never enter a place of worship. Every Church should make the most of this opportunity by suspending indoor week-evening meetings during the summer months. There might easily be at least three open-air meetings each week; one on Sunday, and two on the weekday evenings. They should be held at different places in the parish, at any rate on the week evenings, though perhaps it is best to have the same place permanently on Sundays. To those who are responsible for the management of open-air work the following considerations may be commended.

### I. Carefulness.

All the arrangements should be thought out and planned with care. The music should if possible be a special feature, though it should never be forgotten that many open-air gatherings are held without much, if any, singing. Still, when singing is available, there is no doubt as to the value of the help; and while the music is never elaborate, it should always be good. The accompanist should know his tune book thoroughly, and the choir, even though small, should be as efficient as it can be made. A platform (not a chair) for the speaker should be used if practicable; it gives a vantage ground that will prove distinctly helpful. An arrangement can be made for utilizing the platform as a box for the harmonium and hymn books. For a hymn book for use in the open air there is nothing to compare with Sacred Songs and Solos, as the choice of bright, telling, and thoroughly Gospel hymns is wide and varied. Solos sung at an open-air

meeting should be very few and far between, and never permitted unless the singer's voice is clear and penetrating, with a distinct enunciation of the words. There is nothing more trying than to hear a thin feminine, or tenor voice in the open air which does not carry more than a few yards. A soloist ought to be able to sing.

## II. Thoroughness.

It is fatal to think that anything will do for open-air speaking. On the contrary, the very best is absolutely essential. Those who are called upon to speak at these meetings should be urged to prepare thoroughly, and to give the people that which is really worth hearing. A definite message of God's truth well steeped with the elements of reason and persuasion should characterize every open-air address. Of course a simple personal testimony to the grace of God is quite different. If any workers should be found to have rambled on without any special point in their address, they should not be asked to speak again unless they are prepared to put some preparation into their messages.

## III. Shortness.

All prayers should be short. Passages of Scripture read should be short, addresses should be brief, and hymns should not be too prolonged. Twelve or fifteen minutes will be found enough for an address as a rule, because it is not so easy to hold an audience in the open air as indoors. The best speakers are always the shortest, and those who have least to say generally take the longest time to say it.

## IV. Naturalness.

As a rule, it will be found helpful not to announce the text as though it were a sermon, but instead to plunge in at once by some illustration or incident. Indeed, it will be wise to make the address as unlike an ordinary sermon as possible. The speaker should not shout, but allow his voice to sound at the usual pitch. Penetration, not volume, is what is really required. Of course the speaker will have to dispense with all notes and deliver his message purely extemporaneous. Anything else would be fatal, for the attention of the audience would not be held.

## V. Definiteness.

The one aim of open-air work is to win men for Christ, and everything must be strictly subordinated to this purpose. Speakers should not range from North to South, still less endeavour to give the Christian system of doctrine complete in one address. One point driven home, or at most two points, will usually be found enough. The arrow must be sent home, pointed, barbed, and ready for use by the Holy Spirit.

## VI. Earnestness.

A speaker in the open air should be cheerful and yet serious, with no attempt at cheap wit, or unworthy humour. If a man feels led to preach on the dark side of God's truth, and refer to the future consequences of sin, he must pray to be faithful without being stern, to appeal, rather than to denounce, to be loving and not hard. The issues at stake are so serious that a man needs much grace and wisdom from on high to say the right thing in the right way.

## VII. Tactfulness.

There is scarcely any form of Christian work in which the leader needs "sanctified common sense" so much and so often as in open-air preaching. When the crowd has gathered, it is not wise to continue the singing of hymn, but to stop at once and go on with the preaching. If the crowd should show any indication of moving, the speaker should be ready to close at once, ready with his application to drive home the message immediately. If any opposition should arise, it will need to be dealt with wisely and firmly. No discussion as a rule should be permitted unless the meeting is intended for this purpose, as is the case with the Christian Evidence Open-Air Gatherings in Hyde Park and elsewhere. Ordinarily, however, it will be found in every way wise to ask the objector to speak privately after the meeting in order that the point raised may be discussed. Workers should not be allowed to do anything in the way of tract distribution or personal appeal during an address. All this should be done either during the singing of a hymn, if opportunity affords, or, still better, at the close of meeting, after the benediction has been pronounced. The choice of tracts and books demands a good deal of wisdom lest inappropriate, and therefore ineffective, literature should be given.

These hints will probably be endorsed by all who have had experience of open-air work, and it ought to be added that the Open-Air Mission will be found, at any rate in London, though often in the country as well, a very real help in this form of service. During my London incumbency we had visits from members of the Mission regularly during the season, and it is possible for Churches to obtain thereby the help of experienced workers in addition to their own staff. Some books on the subject will be found included in the list at the end of this volume, and it only remains to be said that together with these suggestions the open-air preacher should seek to be filled with the spirit of trustfulness, believing that his Master's Word shall not return void.

### Section 13. Some General Counsels.

It is of course quite impossible to cover in our present pace the whole field of sermon work, and the reader must necessarily be referred to authorities on preaching for a complete treatment of this preeminently important subject. But there are a few considerations that still remain to be noticed by way of conclusion.

I. The Use of Illustrations. No one doubts for an instant the supreme value of "letting in the light," illustrating our sermons. Sometimes the illustrations may be in the form of similes to adorn our style, but for the most part they will be incidents or other forms of illustration for the purpose of explanation and persuasion. The value of an illustration will lie in the following fourfold characteristic: (a) It must be clear; (b) it must be telling; (c) it must be attractive; (d) it must be brief.

The illustration must be to the point, or else it will do harm rather than good. If we favour the use of anecdotes, we must take care that our stories are true; and speaking of anecdotes, it would be worth while avoiding that which is hackneyed, and keeping as closely as possible to that which is fresh and suggestive. An interesting article appeared some time ago in the *Christian World* entitled "S.D.W.S.P.I.," with a subtitle, "A Sorely Needed Society". The meaning of the initials was "A Society for Doing Without Some Pulpit Illustrations".

The article recorded a conversation held between a number of preachers, and one after another gave his opinion as to the illustrations that might be allowed a rest from use. Among them was the story of a gentleman who was engaging a coachman, and asked all the applicants how near they could drive to a precipice close to his house; the story of Havelock on London Bridge; the Dutch boy who stuffed his hand into a hole in the dyke; the incident of Napoleon and the English drummer boy; of George Washington and

his axe; of Michael Angelo and the marble block, were cited as examples of illustrations to be avoided.

Hackneyed quotations were also referred to. Longfellow's "Psalm of Life"; Browning's "God's in His heaven"; Tennyson's "Flower in the crannied wall"; Bailey's "We live in days, not years"; Lowell's "Truth forever on the scaffold". Ministers who have been in the Holy Land were to be warned that there are some advantages in not having visited Palestine, and allusions to pictures like "Diana or Christ" or "The Doctor" were thought to be somewhat too familiar for use at present.

No one can question the value of these suggestions, and it is to be hoped that every clergyman will constitute himself a member of this very valuable Society. Literature will of course provide many illustrations for sermons, so also will fiction, history and science. One of the most striking features in the sermons of Dr. W. L. Watkinson is the marvelous fertility and felicity of his scientific illustrations. Dr. Jowett and Dr. Maclaren are scarcely inferior in this respect.

Illustrations must always be kept strictly subsidiary to their purpose. Someone has well said, "Don't construct your ornament, but ornament your construction." Illustrations are best gathered by reading and by cultivating our powers of observation. We may occasionally find it necessary to buy books of illustrations, but there are obvious dangers in such a plan, and by far the best way is to keep our eyes and ears open and make our own compilation. One thing is certain, that our people will often remember our sermons by some illustration which we have been enabled to include in it.

#### I. Preaching old Sermons.

This is a question that comes up in ministerial life from time to time. There is no reason why old sermons should not be blessed quite frequently. George Whitefield used to say that he never felt satisfied with a sermon until he had preached it about twenty times. But we must be particularly careful to prepare them over again and let them pass through the alembic of our present experience. Bishop Temple in an address at our ordination advised us to burn our old sermons every ten years for fear we should be tempted to preach the man and his experience of ten years ago. Bishop Whittaker of Philadelphia once told of a young clergyman whose pastoral charge had fallen to him out in the thinly populated end of a Western State: -

"Riding the circuit of his tiny churches, he never imagined that the auditors of one town ever sat under him in another; and so he had been delivering everywhere the same sermon, and it seemed to take well; just how well that preacher never guessed until one Sunday he was stopped at the church door by an old negro. [Dialect removed.] 'Pardon me, sir, for a moment,' he said, with a respectful bow. 'I just want to say that I certainly have enjoyed that sermon. The first time I heard it, sir, I liked it, and the second time I liked it better, and as I have been following you around, it just keeps growing on me. Now, sir, I'm sort of in the preaching business my own self and it just occurred to me that you are going to wear out that sermon some fine day, and then I want to buy it. When you get ready to sell it, sir, I stand to give you fifty cents.'"

#### III. Plagiarism.

This is one of the perennial problems of the pulpit, and it must be confessed that the position is one of genuine difficulty. We must preach, and we ought to read, and yet we are warned of plagiarism, and so we fear to read. Our work presses upon us, our body is weary, our mind is dull, we call spirits from the vastly deep, but they do not come. What then are we to do? If we use other men's materials improperly, we are despised and thenceforward always suspected; and yet if we fail to use the work of others, we and our

people will be all the poorer. How are we to define plagiarism? It has been defined as the adaptation of other material without any attempt at mental assimilation.

The story is told of a preacher who was given to making extracts from leading preachers, and he did not realize that just under the pulpit he had as one of the congregation a fine sermon-taster. When these various extracts came out, the man in the pew gave audible utterance to the author's name, saying from time to time, Tillotson, Barrow, Jeremy Taylor, Simeon. At length the preacher heard these expressions, and was much irritated, and leaning down he said, "Sir, if you don't keep quiet, you must leave the church." The man at once remarked, "His own". Originality is thought that has not been conceived by anyone else, and this is of course quite out of the question and impossible for ordinary preachers.

True originality in preaching is really a new presentation of old thoughts so as to show our own work. There is nothing finer in a preacher than his ability to "glorify the obvious," and to give at least some freshness to familiar truths. How, then, is a man to use the material of other men properly so as to avoid plagiarism and at the same time to provide himself and his people with all possible intellectual nutriment?

1. We must think hard and long before reading. It is only by and after the exercise of our own mind that we are enabled properly to approach the minds of others. There is probably far too much reading today and far too little thinking.

2. We must think out fully all that we read. There is not enough independent thinking at the present time.

But if we read, pencil in hand, ready to criticize and discuss at every point, we shall make the most out of the books at our disposal.

3. Above everything else, we must keep mind and heart close to the Bible for devotional purposes. This is the secret of perennial freshness, for a man who puts the Bible first, and steadily maintains his quiet time day by day for personal, direct meditation will not only possess in himself a fount of real interest for his people but will thereby be enabled to make the best and truest use of all that he reads.

Whenever there is any phrase or sentence that comes direct from another mind, we must of course acknowledge it; but we must also take care not to allow our sermons to be a mere cento of quotations from other authors, strung together by our own effort.

#### IV. The Power of Interesting through Preaching.

Archbishop Magee is said to be responsible for a brief description of the three types of preachers. "There are some whom you cannot listen to; there are some whom you can listen to; there are some whom you must listen to." Sermons should "grip" their audiences, and in order to do this they must be characterized by the three essential features of all acceptable speech: placere, docere, movere. A young preacher once asked an older man how he could interest his people. The reply was "Give them something to interest them." But in order to do this the preacher must himself be interested in his subject. The very word "interest" seems to suggest the secret: "interesse," that is, there must be something "between" the preacher and his hearers. He must get in touch with them. The famous John Gregg, Bishop of Cork, said, "First, throw the subject into yourself, next, throw yourself into the subject, and then throw yourself and the subject into your hearers."

But the question still remains as to how this is to be done, and the answer is that it is probably more personal and moral than anything else. The better the man the better the preacher, and no personal

development, whether intellectual, social, or moral, will come amiss. (1) There must be more labour in thinking out our subject. No work ought to be regarded as too great, no trouble too severe for the pulpit. (2) There must be more courage in speaking out our subject. The man must be faithful whether people hear, or whether they forbear. (3) There must be more earnestness in living out the subject. The life as well as the lips must speak; and lest anyone should feel that this is impossible, it should never be forgotten that what is known as personal magnetism is not a gift, but a grace. Some time ago a College President had to choose a man as a member of his staff. One person was recommended to him as possessing every qualification. He was entertained at the house of the President, who, after the man had gone, asked his wife her impression. It was given with reluctance: "He could never lead the boys." The President had formed the same opinion, and the man was not chosen, for notwithstanding all his scholarship and his beautiful character he lacked personal magnetism. But how is this magnetism possible? It may be said without hesitation that it is due to: (a) a healthy body, (b) a youthful soul, full of true sympathy and enthusiasm, (c) a Christlike spirit desirous of living and labouring for the Master. No man need have any fear about interesting his hearers if only he will endeavour to "dwell with the King for His work".

#### V. Books on Preaching.

Theological students and young clergymen frequently inquire as to the best books for use in connection with speaking and preaching. As the subject has long been one of keen interest to the writer, he has endeavoured to collect most of the important works on this subject, and at the end of this book a list will be found. Amid so much that is valuable it is difficult to make distinctions, and yet in order to be of some service to younger men, we will venture to put above the line those books which we know best and to which we owe most. It would be impossible to say how much the writer owes to the suggestions and counsels provided by these great "Masters of Assemblies".

VI. The Deepest Secret of All. As we draw these considerations to a close, it is impossible to avoid repeating and emphasizing the truth that the most important factor of everything is the man behind the sermon. "Thou must thyself be true, if thou the truth would'st teach." St. Paul told Timothy to take heed to himself before he spoke of taking heed to the doctrine. Someone has truly said that "a sermon gets to be a sermon, and not an essay or lecture, by being made and delivered in the power of the Holy Ghost."

Sir William Robertson Nicoll was preaching some time ago on this subject, and urged his hearers who had the work of preaching and teaching not to go forth until they were clothed with the power of the Holy Ghost, saying, that "we cannot deliver the saving message with converting power unless we are clothed. Some shining robe must cover our poor, weak, frail personalities": - "Study is needed, preparation is needed, but when all is said and done it is this clothing, this robe of light that we must seek first, and without which we can do nothing.

Have you not known it to be so again and again? You have listened to famous men, and to what are called great sermons, and they have not touched you. You have heard broken words from those whose natural gifts were small, and you will never forget them even in the new country. Why? Because they were spoken in the power of the Holy Ghost." To the same end are the words of a well-known American Professor who, in addressing the students of the Bible Teachers' Training School in New York some time ago, spoke as follows: - "The future sphere of the pulpit is along the line of devotional inspiration, to elevate the spiritual part of man to a dominant position in his life, to make his religion not occasional but constant.

This can be done only by men in the pulpit who have so entered into the spirit of the Gospel that it clothes them with ambassadorial rank and makes them able to speak with regal authority. Such men can be found only among those who stand close to the Bible and whose allegiance to that Book is based upon a knowledge of its contents more profound than anything which intellectual astuteness can discover." For all this we must have our times of retirement and solitude. If we are to come forth with power, we must have what the old Puritans used to call the spirit of "recollectedness," the habit of communion with God.

In spite of its familiarity we will dare to call renewed attention to the story of Christmas Evans, the great Welsh preacher, whose absence in the vestry after the time for commencing the service was a great perplexity, until someone went to the door, and heard him pleading with God, "I will not let Thee go, except Thou bless me." In a few moments he came forth clothed with power, and preached in demonstration of the Holy Spirit of God. A seer is one who sees, and it is the man of spiritual vision who will do the true work of preaching.

"Solitude is the mother country of the strong," and we shall never be strong preachers unless we take time to wait upon God. Then we shall go to the pulpit, and our heart's desire and earnest prayer will be: -

"When telling of Thy salvation free,

Let all absorbing thoughts of Thee

My mind and soul engross.

And when all hearts are bowed and stirred

Beneath the influence of Thy Word,

Hide me behind Thy Cross."

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Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/wh-griffith-thomas/the-importance-of-preaching-part-3/>

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