

Rise Up and Build 1997 Conference-37

Readable Writing

by William MacDonald

William MacDonald emphasizes the importance of unity, coherence, and readability in Christian writing during the 1997 conference.

Duration: 57:46

Scripture: Psalm 19:1, Matthew 6:33, John 3:16, Romans 12:2, 1 Corinthians 10:31, Ephesians 4:29, Colossians 3:23

Topics: "Readable Writing"

Description

The video discusses the characteristics of a bestselling book on preaching the word of God. The author emphasizes the importance of keeping the chapters short and simple, using familiar language to ensure understanding. The book promotes the idea of showing random acts of kindness and highlights the need for unity and coherence in writing. The speaker also advises against overusing adjectives and repeating significant words, as it can become tiresome for readers. Overall, the video encourages effective communication of the Christian message through concise and impactful writing.

Transcript

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I think we're probably all here and we might as well redeem the time going on our little discussion on Christian writing. Let's just look to the Lord in prayer. Father, we thank you for this group that's gathered here this afternoon with some desire at least to use the view in the written ministry.

We just pray that you would sanctify our pens and our computers, our word processors as well as our tongues in telling forth the wonderful story of your love. Pray that you'll set this hour apart, that it might be useful in days to come for your glory. In Jesus' name, amen.

There are some here in the audience who should be up here instead of down there. I realize that very, very well. And you may be one of them.

All you really need is to attend this seminar with an interest in writing. I'm going to start off with the very basic three words that are basic to all writing. It doesn't have to be Christian writing.

Those words are unity, coherence, and emphasis. Every good piece of writing should be characterized by unity, coherence, and emphasis. What do you mean by that? I mean that in any piece of writing there must be unity.

One theme must be followed throughout. One theme must be followed throughout. There must be that sense of oneness in the writing.

You say, why do you say that? Because there's a tendency among people when they write to go off on side tracks, to go off and bypass meadows. You're writing along, you come to the word snow, and then you think of a rabbit jumping in the snow, and you introduce that. It has nothing to do with the subject of all.

Do you know what I mean? It's really a great temptation to do that, to just insert things that are really not essential parts of it. So you must have unity in the theme. You must have unity in each paragraph, too.

In each paragraph. Every paragraph should be one subject in itself, and it's a building block. You think of the whole article, and each paragraph is kind of a building block, building up to the completion of your subject.

That's what we mean by unity. It's easy to stand here and say it. It's difficult to do it.

It's really difficult to do it. And you have to guard against distraction. The second thing is coherence.

And that means that the parts of your writing must be tied together in a smooth way, in a smooth way, so that the reader's mind is carried along without jerking. That's what coherence means. You come to the end of a paragraph, the beginning of the next paragraph should somehow link with the paragraph that you have just ended.

It should link smoothly. The most mechanical way of saying that is, well, first we want to think of, and then second, but that's rather mechanical. It's better if you can do it more subtly than that, you know.

If you can carry people's minds along without their knowing what you're doing, and they're just having pleasurable reading, and their minds aren't being jerked, that's what happens if you do not have coherence. The minds of your readers are being jerked, and they're losing the flow of thought. Incidentally, this is quite a problem in Bible study, to get the continuity of what Paul is saying sometimes.

Have you noticed that some of the epistles are rather easy to analyze and to outline? I think Romans is quite easy, and I think the Ephesians is quite easy, but some of the others aren't quite so easy. I think when Paul wrote them, the readers had no problem at all. I think they just flowed very, very smoothly.

But they suffer in translation sometimes as far as these things are concerned, as far as unity and coherence. And then the third thing is emphasis. You must be building up to either getting your readers to take some action, or building them up to a pleasurable conclusion to your subject, or to a challenge.

In most writing, in most beginner's writings, the tendency is to spend all your time on the first paragraph or two. And then when you get to the end, let's say you're writing a track, and you're really careful with the first parts of the track, and you give it all you have. When you get to the end, you're tired.

And what you do is you take a whole bunch of verses, and you just throw them at the reader. And you've read tracks like that. I'm sure you've read tracks like that.

It's not good. It's not good. The ending, in a way, should be the climax of your subject, and it should just bring them to the point where they're faced with something.

And as I say, they have to take action. They have to listen to a challenge. In the case of a gospel track, well, it's very obvious what it should be, isn't it? To put their faith and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ.

So I would say that's where you begin, really, in Christian writing. Unity, coherence, and emphasis. Now, the rest of the time, I want to spend on that section of your notes.

I think it begins with page 25. Is that Christian writing tips on how to achieve readability? Is that right? Is that page 25? We're going to just turn to that, and we're going to be thinking of that. Some years ago, a man, a secular man, wrote a book called *The Art of Readable Writing*, and his name was Rudolf Flesch.

I think you can still buy it in Dalton's or Walden's books. And if it's a paperback, it should be quite reasonable. And if you're really interested in pursuing the subject, I would recommend that you make a small investment in it.

And some of the things that you're going to read that we're going to go over here are found in that book he developed. But this is the current wisdom in writing today, much of what we're going to go over. Notice, in recent years, the emphasis has been in writing in a conversational way.

Rudolf Flesch says, and I think he proves it. He can prove it by a formula, actually, a mathematical formula. He can prove it.

The more you write in a conversational way, the way you talk, the more your readers will be gripped. Now, that's funny, isn't it? Because we don't think that way in religious language, in Christian language. We tend to be formal.

Don't have to be. Notice what it says. Using contractions, just as you do when you're speaking.

Notice, you're, when you're speaking, a contraction. That's the way you talk. I didn't write, just as you do when you are speaking.

I don't talk that way. Just as you do when you're speaking. Write the way you talk.

Supposing you talk reasonably well. And then it says use loose sentences. Now, I tell you, in a freshman course in English in college today, I don't think they'd like this.

But this is the right way to do it. This is the right way to do it. Use loose sentences.

They used to have to be complete sentences. That's a complete sentence. As a subject and as a predicate.

Not any longer. That has neither subject nor predicate, does it? And yet that's good writing today. Does that shock you? Well, prepare for more shocks.

Prepare for more shocks, because that's what it's all about. Those are good things to remember. I think this is basic.

And you're writing today, write informally. Write the way you talk. Or you should talk.

And it's okay to use loose sentences. It's okay to begin a sentence with and. That sounds funny, doesn't it? I know you weren't taught that way in school.

I certainly wasn't. But that's the way it is today. Use repetition.

I don't know how I put these sentences together. Use repetition. It's considered good style now.

That's a contraction. It's considered good style now. Right? Especially when you want to get a point across.

That's a loose sentence. It doesn't have a subject and a predicate. Dress it up in different words and say it again.

Repetition. Right? In other words, I've taken all that I've said so far and exhibited it just in that one paragraph. It's considered good style now.

Contraction. Especially when you want to get a point across. Loose sentence.

Dress it up in different words and say it again. Repetition. And incidentally, that's even very biblical.

Repetition. The heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament show us His handiwork. Repetition.

Those two things say the same thing. But what a beautiful way they say it. The heavens declare the glory of God.

That is the stellar heavens declare the glory. And the firmament show us His handiwork. In other words, the glory of God and His handiwork, they're parallel.

And this was a form of Hebrew poetry. We write poetry, and we used to, that rhymed. But that was never the case with Hebrew poetry.

They thought it was better to use this type of thing, like a parallelism. It was known. And we can do it to good effect, too.

Dress it up in different words and say it again. Use short sentences and short words, too. Only one word in that sentence with more than one syllable.

Use short sentences and short words, too. Vary the pattern of your sentences. You don't begin every sentence with it or something like that.

Every sentence should really begin in a different way. Otherwise, it becomes sing-songy, and you don't want that. Incidentally, that makes sense.

Use short sentences and short words, too. One of the bestselling books on the New York Times bestseller list recently has been a little paperback, and it's called Don't Sweat the Small Stuff. It's all small stuff.

And the reason I mention that is it's a bestseller. The reason I mention it, practically no chapter is more than one page and a half. Can you believe it? Practically no chapter is more than one page and a half.

Few exceptions. And it is written in the simplest English. You wouldn't believe it, how simple the English is that's used.

We avoid fancy words or words that people are not familiar with to become a bestseller. That tells me something. Keep it short.

Keep it simple so that people can understand. People love it. You know, I read the book.

I can't endorse everything in the book, but an awful lot of it is very good. He emphasizes, show random acts of kindness. And it's very fascinating.

It's just a page and a half. Show random acts of kindness. And he tells something that happened out in California, and I was a subject of it too.

We have these toll gates going over the bridges, you know. You have to stop and pay your toll. And there was a time when it became a fad out there for a person to pay his toll and then pay for the car behind him, and he didn't know the guy behind him at all.

A random act of kindness. Well, I was going there to the Belmont Chapel one Sunday morning, and I went up to the toll booth, and she said, the man in front of you paid for you. I had no idea.

He didn't know who I was, but I had no idea who it was. I don't recommend that unless you can link it with the name of Jesus. I think when you show a random act of kindness, give a tract with it or something.

Otherwise, it's kind of just a waste. It makes people feel good for a few minutes, especially if you're Scottish. Another way to achieve readability is to go heavy on human interest.

People are interested in people, and your writing should have a lot of human interest in it. If you study the Reader's Digest, it's really fascinating when you do study it. Let's say the Supreme Court handed down a great decision that affected sharecroppers in the South.

They won't say, on January 22nd, the Supreme Court handed down a unanimous decision affecting sharecroppers. They wouldn't say that. They'll start off and tell you.

They'll introduce you to some sharecropper and tell you all about him, tell you the circumstances under which he lived, you know, and then they'll bring it up to the Supreme Court decision and how it affects that man, individual. It's pretty fascinating. It's clever, and you want to read.

Of course, that's what your lead paragraph is all about, is grabbing your reader so that they want to read on. If you don't do that, you've lost it all. Study Reader's Digest.

See how many lead paragraphs introduce you immediately to people, not to the great issue at stake. Study Time Magazine and notice the number of names of people and pronouns, and then Dialogue. Notice how Dialogue captures you.

Don't you like it when you come to a page and you see Dialogue there on the page? You want to get to the Dialogue quick, you know, because that's interesting. I'm just reading a book right now, the Keswick Messages, and when I see a page and that solid type is broken by Dialogue, I'm going to get to that quick. Let's see what's being said.

There's another illustration of... Oh, no. You sanctified imagination. This is tough.

I'm standing up and telling you what I can't do myself. But anyway, if you can do it, it's good. You sanctified imagination in your writing.

Bunyan pictured Christian running away from the tempter with his fingers in his ears. Isn't that expressive? With his fingers in his ears. It says how much more expressive this is than to say, Christian refused to listen to the voice of the tempter.

It's tremendous when you're able to do that. I wish I could. There's another illustration of imagination at work.

There's a story of the blind man with a cup begging for money, and the sign in front of him said, I am blind. And he never did get very many quarters until he changed the sign. It said, it's springtime, and I am blind.

And that just tugs at your heart. Words are fun. Words are fun.

You know, writing is something like the work of an artist. He takes a brush and paints, and he does it with a brush and paint. You can do it just as well with words.

But that's, of course, the thrill of writing. And remember, it's the written word that lasts. Now, Rudolf Flesch emphasizes this very strongly.

He used verbs and nouns rather than adjectives and adverbs. Amateurish writing floods the reader with adjectives. Amateurish writing.

But verbs and nouns change that altogether. Verbs make it happen, while adjectives and adverbs tell what happened. Listen to this sentence.

The dog lunged at me and ripped my pant leg. Verbs, lunged, ripped. I mean, they really paint a picture in your mind, don't they? And adjectives wouldn't do it.

I mean, think of a bunch of adjectives that would say the same thing. In fact, I can't, frankly. Before I came down here, I tried to reword that, and I couldn't.

I just wanted to leave it the way it was. The dog lunged at me and ripped my pant leg. Emphasize verbs and nouns in your writing.

Use verbs in the active voice, not the passive. If you write and you ever send it to an editor, a professional editor, the first thing that that person will do is go through your writing and remove every passive verb. Everyone wants active verbs.

Verbs that speak of action. You all know what a passive verb is. He was hit by the ball.

He was hit. That's passive. The ball smacked him on the side of his jaw.

That's active, right? Use active verbs, and you create this tremendous impression in the minds of your readers. Make your writing crisp, clear, and quick. And I would say simple.

You can't be too simple. I would say in the United States today, and I better not say, I was going to say what grade school you should be writing for. During most of my time, I've thought in terms of ninth grade education.

Not through any longer. Won't do. If you read that book I told you about, don't sweat the small stuff.

Sixth grader could read it and enjoy it. Really. Is that a shock to you? I told you you'd be in for more shock.

Simple. You can't be too simple. Years ago, it may have made us, we came out with that course, What the Bible Teaches, and it's simple.

I think it's been translated into about 100 languages. I don't know. Charlie Fizer's here.

He might be able to tell me. But when it came out, Ernie Tatham wrote me a letter, and he said, Bill, please don't insult your constituency. In other words, it was too simple.

It doesn't matter if it wasn't simple enough. Please don't insult your constituency. No, you can't be too simple.

You can be too deep. And I would say this. If you read much of the way of theology and that, I tell you, it's really something.

Brother John Lennox spoke today about the book by Stephen Hawking. He said it was the, how did he say it? The least read, best-selling book in the world or something. Well, I knew exactly what he meant.

I tried to read it. I couldn't read it. Couldn't read it.

Couldn't make Edmund's tale of it. So what? He's lost his audience. You know what I mean? You want to, especially when we have the Christian message, we want to get it across, don't we? Well, this is the way to get it across.

Use only one adjective at a time, not two together. That goes back to what we said. Don't concentrate on adjectives.

You can use them. Don't use two at a time. You're depending too much on adjectives and not enough on verbs and nouns.

Avoid repeating significant words in the same sentence or paragraph. Don't overuse pet words. You'll find people do that.

They get a pet word and it just comes in and out in all of their writing. It gets tiresome after a while. You want to do that.

Incidentally, if you're really serious about it and you want a good book on synonyms, there's a book called Rodale's Synonym Finder. Rodale. R-O-D-A-L-E.

And Synonym Finder. And I think it's the best. It's used by professional writers.

And surprisingly enough, it's done in paperback now. I think when it was in hardback, it was about \$39 or \$40 or something like that. Today, you can buy it at Walden's or Dolphin's for \$12 or \$14.

I want to say it's a good investment. If you do any writing at all and don't have Rodale's Synonym Finder, I would certainly recommend that you get it. Good book.

Avoid flowery words. This is interesting. Don't use very.

I submitted a... I sent a manuscript to... In fact, it's a manuscript that's now published as My Heart, My Life, My All. Sent it to a professional editor. Won't tell you what she charged me.

But she removed every time I used the word very. It's not considered good writing. It doesn't create an accurate image in your mind.

It's kind of general. Leaves you floating in the air. I mean, stop to think of it.

That's true, you know. There's other ways of saying I feel very sick. There are better ways of saying it.

Don't use very, rather, little, pretty, rather important, a little better, or pretty sure. It'd be better to say I'm as sure as and then get something to fill in there. It'd be better to say it that way.

Flowery word. Another word you want to be careful of is the word unique. I hear people saying all the time it's most unique.

Well, actually, you can't compare unique. It can't be less or more. If it's unique, it's unique.

And there's no adjective that goes with it. And yet you'll hear that all the time. You'll hear adjectives modifying the word unique.

If it's unique, it's the only one of its kind. It can't be more unique. It can't be less unique.

It can't be most unique. Be sure that your vocabulary is current, lively, fresh, and that it is plenty of variety. And one way to do this is to read widely, of course.

A.P. Gibbs used to say, he who does not read will not be read. Well, I know what he meant. He who does not read will not be read.

And one way to develop a good vocabulary, an active vocabulary, is to do a lot of reading. Contemporary reading. Incidentally, I take help wherever I can get it.

It is Reader's Digest or Time Magazine. I don't like Time Magazine, but those fellows aren't paid for doing sloppy work. And it's interesting to develop new words for your vocabulary.

I never, I was saying the other day, I never heard the word proactive when I was young. Proactive? Well, if you can use it, use it. But that's the way people are thinking today.

What does it mean anyway? Anybody tell me. Watch out for gobbledygook, hackneyed expressions and cliches. Gobbledygook.

If you want gobbledygook, you get government publication. See, some of you know. Some of you know.

It's terrific, really. It's almost as if they're paid to say it in the least clear way by using extravagant vocabulary. Almost that way.

Gobbledygook, hackneyed expression. Watch out for hackneyed cliches. If you could say it better, as cold as ice, it would be better to say it in a different way.

But I'm telling you the things that are very difficult. Very difficult to think of novel ways of saying it. Eliminate unnecessary words, sentences, even paragraphs.

Male peacock. All peacocks are male. Otherwise, it would be a peahen, right? Nod your head.

What else would you nod? You wouldn't nod your hand. Right, there it is again. Right as you should talk.

Make your writing less formal, less stilted. Make it current. Make it contemporary.

That is not undignified. There was a version of the Bible that came out recently called The Message, I think, by Peterson. I don't like it.

He went too far in making it contemporary. I wouldn't recommend it. Now that I've said it, forget it.

Guard against identical word endings. And it gives that illustration. The president was contemplating resign.

Two words together ending in ing. Not good. Not good.

Avoid that sort of thing. Don't end a sentence with a preposition. Well, some of these rules are rules with exceptions.

You know that, don't you? Somebody said to Winston Churchill, you should never end a sentence with a preposition. He said, that is the type of nonsense up with which I will not quit. By making a joke of it, he got his point across.

Now he said, that is the type of errant nonsense up with which I will not quit. And here's another illustration. Sometimes a student's field of study influences outlook in surprising ways.

A friend of mine was having problems with her boyfriend who was an English major. An English major. After much discussion one evening, she finally confronted him.

Does this mean we're breaking up? Said he, I'd hate to think we were ending this relationship with a preposition. Now there's a case where it's perfectly good to end a sentence with a preposition. Nothing the matter with that.

Does this mean that we're breaking up? That's okay. Nothing the matter with that. And you know, that's true about a lot of the rules of English.

As I said before, what would go on in an English composition course in college, they'd be much more strict than people are today. Be sure that your subject and verb are matched. Each is responsible.

Not each are responsible. Each is singular. So it is.

None is exempt. And yet I've got to say, once again, there are exceptions nowadays. People aren't, they're not strict about this.

Don't overuse I, you know. We don't want to be talking about ourselves. And it makes things too obvious.

Watch out for dangling modifiers. Looking out the window, the moon rose over the trees. Watch out for the modifier, dangling modifier.

How would you change that? While I was looking out the window, the moon rose over the trees. Got the right modifier there. Watch antecedents of pronouns.

Jesus became my Lord while speeding along a Philadelphia freeway. Well, you know, you know what it means. You know what it means.

Not good writing. Not good writing. Don't split the subject of a sentence from the verb or the verb from its object.

The document was filed by the employee who had been working on it in the wrong drawer. What was he doing in the wrong drawer? How would you say it? Well, you wouldn't say the document was filed because that's using a passive verb. Saying, the employee filed the document in the wrong drawer.

Something like that. Check all your facts for accuracy. That's really important.

Much to my embarrassment, I wrote once, you know, and mine was tired. And I had Daniel in the fiery furnace. And the book was out for three or four years before someone came to me and talked to me about it and said, you better get him out of the fiery furnace and get him in the den of lions.

I mean, doesn't that sound good, Daniel in the fiery furnace? Isn't that okay? No, it's not okay. Check your facts for accuracy. You'll be very embarrassed if you don't.

Don't ground your readers in punctuation. The purpose of punctuation is to enable the reader to go along smoothly, get the subject fairly well as he's going along, make the narrative flow smoothly. Here's something you won't like, some of you.

In a series, put a comma after each member. Tom, comma, Dick, comma, and Harry. It's not what you were taught, is it? You were taught that the and takes place with a comma there after Dick.

They don't say that anymore. The rule of grammar today is put a comma after each member. Tom, comma, Dick, comma, and Harry.

And if you don't do it and you send that to an editor, they'll do it for you. They'll charge you for it. Use underlining for emphasis, not capital letters.

That's considered rather corny using, let me say this, using capital letters or a lot of exclamation marks or any mechanical means to get your idea across is considered poor taste today. You want to do it with words, not with mechanical means. I hope that's clear.

I've seen writing like that where they use capital letters and practically everything. You don't have to do it. Do it with words.

Serge, yeah, in underlining, use underlining for emphasis, not capital letters. In printing, the underlined words come out as italics. That is, when you print a document, well, of course, if you've got a computer, that's not a problem.

But in the old days, if you were typing and you didn't have italics characters on the typewriter, if you underlined it, when it went to the printer, it came back as italics, you know. Well, it's not a problem today. Use a computer and you can do it in italics, the word in italics.

Time to change. It says, to indicate a missing word, that's known as ellipsis, use three periods. That is, if I wanted to leave out a portion of a verse in the middle of the verse, I'd put three letters in.

If it was at the end of the verse where I took something out, I'd put four in, three for the ellipsis and one the period at the end of the sentence. It's mechanical, but I'm just telling you that this is the way. If you want to send a clean copy to a publisher, this is the way you want to do it.

Use words that paint a picture. Resemblances, metaphors, his heart was steel. Simile, his heart was like steel.

Wherever you have like or as, then it's a simile. Onomatopoeia, where your word sounds like what you're trying to say. Buzz, hiss.

Onomatopoeic words. And alliteration. I like to go very easy on alliteration.

If alliteration is natural, good. If it's forced, forget it. Forget it.

That would apply not only to writing, but to sermons as well. It can become very dreary. This morning, I'm not taking credit for this.

I didn't invent it, but sanctification. Preconversion, positional, practical, perfect. I mean, people will live with that, you know.

That fits perfectly, you know, by using that word beginning with P. It fits perfectly, but when you have to really force it, it's really not considered very good. Here's the right case. You know whom you are going to see.

Not who you are going to see, but whom. You're going to see whom. Oh boy, I'm really in a thicket here, because I know in the United States today, they gave it to him and I, you know.

Do you hear that all the time? All the time. Why? Well, because they don't teach it. They don't teach in school anymore the object of a preposition or the object of a transitive verb.

I mean, it's not taught anymore. And so people could go by the sound. Well, you can't go by the sound, can you? You can't go by the sound.

It doesn't sound right to people who know. When pronouns are the object of transitive verbs or prepositions, be sure they're in the objective case. Here it is.

But that might not mean a lot to you. It doesn't to a lot of people. Some of our students would look at me with wonder when I'd say that.

After verbs of being, they should be in this objective case. Exceptions. Who's that at the door? Well, the right answer is I, but you can say it's me, and nobody will think you're terrible.

In fact, I would recommend you say it's me. I mean, you don't have to be a grammatical litterist all the time. Perfection.

But be sure to use the right word. Petal versus pedal. What's pedal? The first pedal means? Pardon? Self.

It means self. Second pedal? Yes. On a bicycle, you pedal a bicycle.

What's the difference between affect and effect? That's a little more difficult. What? Down here, back there. We haven't sorted it out yet.

To affect something is to bring it about. Isn't that right? To bring it about. You affect it.

But how a thing affects you is the first use of the word. How it bears influence on you. It's good to use the right word.

Avoid tautology. The hearing would not be heard for at least an hour. What's wrong with that? Yes, hearing and heard.

I mean, come on, use a different word there. Reword it. Take familiar sayings and reword them.

I say this is really difficult. Take a familiar word and saying and reword it. But it can be done, and I see it being done all the time.

Use quotation marks fairly. To put quotes around the word burnout weakens it, except in irony or where there's a second meaning. Once again, go easy on these mechanical things and just do it in your writing.

Do it in your words if you possibly can. And I've already said number 30. Don't let your conclusion peter out.

So easy to do that. You're tired. You've brought the world's great masterpiece into being, and so you just peter out at the end, and you've lost your case.

31 is very difficult. You know, when you've written something, it's your baby, and it's very hard for you personally to find fault with it. Isn't that right? You don't like to think that's anywhere.

My experience is that secretaries do a lot of typing. They don't like to read what they've typed. They check it forever.

So what do you do? You get somebody else to do it. If you can get somebody else to read your work, it's very good. Here I'd like to inject something.

Please, please do not send manuscripts to me to be edited. I paid to have mine edited, and I really couldn't do it. I receive them almost every week, and it's really embarrassing to have to send them back and say, sorry, friends, I just don't have the time to do it.

So a word to the wise is sufficient. But if you can't, that's the value of taking a course in a college or in a school on English, on writing. The value is if the teacher will critique your work for you.

That's the greatest thing. If he or she will critique your work for you. But in the meantime, you should really red pencil it.

What does that mean? It means go over it carefully. Read it carefully. Is this what I wanted to say? Is it grammatically correct? Is my punctuation all right? I say it's hard to do.

Incidentally, the spell check on your computer is a marvelous thing, isn't it? I never knew how to spell accommodate until my computer kept spitting it up. Two C's, two M's, right? I like to do it with one M, but not anymore. And incidentally, if you do have a spell check, use it.

Don't depend on your own knowledge of it. Keep it simple. I can't emphasize that too much.

Keep it simple. Listen to John Owen. Repeated acts of the consent of the will unto sin may beget a disposition and inclinableness of the will unto a proneness and readiness to consent unto sin upon easy solicitation.

And all it means is the more we sin, the more we're inclined to sin. That's all it says. Some of the Puritan writings were really marvelous, but honestly, you have to wade through them.

Wade through them. There's a way... How can I say this without getting in trouble? The truth has to be rewritten almost for every generation. You know what I mean when I say that? It has to be rewritten.

Now, I know that Martin Lloyd-Jones, he was a pastor of Westminster Chapel in London. He was a great man of God, really a great man of God. But honestly, I find it laborious to read him today, I really do.

It's not that what he's saying isn't good. It's just that you have to wade through so much to get to it. And I do believe that.

I believe, you know, as far as dear Mr. Darby comes from, I throw up my hands in despair when I come to Darby. And Kelly, and I got used to Kelly, but with great difficulty. Macintosh was easier to read.

I think he was a schoolteacher, am I not right? C.H. Macintosh. You know, I think the great ministry that Harry Ironside has, when he took the writings of those men and he brought them into the language of the day in which he lived. He really did.

And although he's gone, home to be with the Lord, and has been for many years, I think he died in the 1950s. His books still sell well. People like Ironside.

Why do they like Ironside? Because they can understand. Because they can understand it. And every once in a while, he just serves it up with a little sprig of parsley.

You know, that is, with a nice little illustration that'll let the light in on the subject. He'll do that. How many of you read Ironside? Have ever read Ironside? Yes.

Good. Holiness, the False and the Truth. Marvelous.

You know. Apostolio. Press publishes one, Unless You Repent.

Tremendous. A tremendous book on repentance. Ironside.

I worked for Ironside's bookstore after the Second World War. He was the president of a bookstore out in Oakland, although he himself was in Chicago. And there was a Jewish salesman from the Oxford Bible Company that used to come and sell us Bibles.

And every time he'd come, we'd say, you know, why don't you go and hear Dr. Ironside when you're in Chicago? You go to Chicago. Go hear him. Because he was Jewish, and he didn't particularly want to go hear any Christian preacher.

But one time he was in Chicago, and he didn't have anything to do. And so he decided that he would go and listen to him. Of course, the place was filled with 4,038 seats, I think, in Moody Church.

And when he preached, they were all full. And when Mr. Gordon, that was his name, when Mr. Gordon left the chapel, he said to himself, hmm, nothing great about that. I understood every word he said.

That was the greatness of it. He missed the point, didn't he? The greatness of it was that he understood every word that Ironside said. I think that's marvelous.

I really do. There's just a pressure on genderless writing. You know, this is good.

This is good. Once again, if you send it to a professional editor, they're very sensitive. Even Christians are very sensitive about this subject today, about gender.

Using he and man all the time in your writing. Well, we're not in favor of genderless writing, but I think if we can accommodate, to some extent it's a good thing to do it. If you can use person instead of man, you know, or he and she, I think it's a good thing to do.

Not by violating any scripture, but I would recommend that. And if you don't do it, your editor will do it. But they don't always get away with it.

With me, I sent that book to, alone in majesty, to Thomas Nelson. When it came back, it was obviously by an ardent feminist. It had been edited.

I said, sorry, I sent it back. I said, sorry, I didn't write that book. They said, well, we want you to be pleased.

So they published it the way I wrote it. Okay, words are great. Words are really great.

We're going to have time for questions, incidentally, if you have questions. Words are great. You can really paint wonderful pictures with them.

I want to read you what I consider, just a paragraph of what I consider great writing. During a trial at which I was an attorney, an eminent psychologist was called to testify. The psychologist was a lady.

A severe, no-nonsense professional, she sat down in a witness chair, unaware that its rear legs were set precariously on the back of the raised platform. Will you state your name, asked the district attorney. Tilting back in her chair, she opened her mouth to answer, but instead catapulted head over heels backward and landed in a stack of exhibits and recording equipment.

We watched in stunned silence as she extricated herself, rearranged her disheveled hair and dress, and was reseated on the witness stand. The glare she directed at onlookers dared anyone to as much as smirk. While Dr. continued, the district attorney, without changing expression, we could start with an easier question.

Is that good writing? What's good about it? You have a picture. You see this dignified psychologist sitting down in the chair, tilting back. You know, just tell what her name is.

And those are great words he used. He used, whoever wrote it, catapulted head over heels, landed in a stack of exhibits and recording equipment. We watched in stunned silence.

Isn't that good? Stunned silence as she extricated herself. I like it. I can see the whole thing happening, you know.

And then he, without even smiling, said, well, perhaps we could ask a simpler question. The first question was, what is your name? So it shows you what you can do with words, doesn't it? And you notice the emphasis on verbs there too. Verbs, you see it happening with the verbs.

Good to have a good vocabulary like that. I have a friend out west, and oftentimes when we get together for supper, we talk about words. We talk, you say, oh, things to talk about.

Yeah, it's interesting. Words and the meanings of words. And it helps you, you know, in your writing.

Okay, does anybody have any questions that you'd like to ask? I'd be glad to. And I'll repeat them down here so that everybody can hear them. Oh, I know.

I remember writing a book on Ephesians and sending it, and I had it rather, not really grossly so, but I had it rather informal, and at that time they sent it back, and they said, no, no, not for exposition. But since then they've published an awful lot of exposition that was rather informal. Not mine, but others, you know.

So I think you just have to measure the water that you're in. It certainly doesn't have to be filtered. I started to say something, and I forgot to say it.

When you read these theological poems, and it's hard to understand, I always think, I wonder if the man that wrote it understood. You know, I wonder if some of that intricate phraseology isn't hiding up. He comes to a difficult verse, and he just submerges you in a sea of rhetoric.

Well, I just wonder if he knew how to do it. If you understand it, say it simply, huh? Say it simply. Let me understand it, Brother Nicholson.

Okay, now Mr. Nicholson is recommending a book he has in his library, a little book, it's called Instead of Very. Instead of using the word very. And maybe a companion book to the Roger C. Soros, huh? Very good.

Anybody else, any other questions? Yes, way at the back, loud so that the rest can hear. Reading, only reading. Yeah.

When you read, you won't believe this, but when you read, you are subconsciously appraising the style of the writer, aren't you? You might be, you might really like it. I'm going to mention names, and I'm not recommending the books. Any of you ever hear of Max Lucado, L-U-C-A-D-O? As far as I know, he belongs to Church of Christ down in Texas, which I don't know whether he believes in baptismal regeneration.

Well, I want to tell you, a fellow has a real style for writing. He really has a style for writing. And people like his books.

And, of course, that baptismal regeneration, if he does believe it, it doesn't come out in his book. And there are a lot of books that are coming out like that, that are written so cleverly, so cleverly, people really enjoy them. Okay, anybody else? No, I'm not speaking about, when you have to capitalize, you want to capitalize.

I'm speaking of writing a whole sentence that you want to emphasize, and you write it all in capital letters. That's what that's speaking about. It's not speaking about capitalizing the names of deity.

Not at all. No, no. But it's, in order to emphasize what you want to say, you take, and you take either a whole sentence or part of a sentence and capitalize every letter.

Don't do it. That's what that's saying. Okay? Yeah, it's pretty shoddy.

It's not considered good style. It's not considered good style. Way in the bag.

When you want to emphasize, this is, when you want to emphasize words, you use italics. And to me, that strikes me funny, because italics seem to be weaker than bold type. You know what I mean? Italics, it's syn-type.

Bold type is what it says it is. Bold type, it stands up. So the emphasis is, use your italics.

And once again, it's easy to do that on your computer, if you're using a word processor. Now, I would say watch out for any effort to to depend too much on mechanical means in your writing. That's kind of frowned upon.

Anybody else? Any other questions? Yes, Mike. That's a very hard question. People think, well, all the books have been written.

There's nothing more to write about. Forget it. There's an awful lot more that can be done.

You run into certain problems. First of all, serious Bible study books are not very much in demand today, I'm very sorry to tell you. And the average publisher isn't interested in them.

I don't want to shock you with tender feelings, but the idea today in publishing is, get a good title, have it on the shelf for six months, get the cream off it, and forget it. We don't want to hold inventory in our stores or in our publishing houses. We can't afford to hold inventory, sometimes inventory is packed, and they don't want that.

They want hot sellers, things that will move quickly. Yeah, we don't like that. We like more serious stuff.

You know what I mean? We like serious writing that's helping people in their Christian life. My own brother, I'm not saying he's walking with the Lord, he said to me, your work is too serious. But that's where we are today.

That's where we are today. Well, well. There's a publishing house in Minneapolis.

Somebody's going to have to help me with it. They published some good books at one time. Bethany Press.

Anybody ever hear of Bethany Press? They published a book by Leonard Ravenhill. They've been a tremendous blessing to me. I really like Leonard Ravenhill's writing, but they've largely gone over to Christian fiction.

That's where they are. Christian fiction is popular today, and it's selling today. If you look at the CBD book catalog, you'll see that.

They like it. Yes. The question is, is there any particular consideration for female authors today? I don't think the sex of a person has anything to do with it.

I really don't. That is in the publishing business today, I think. You say, what about commentary? I don't know.

I don't know. A book by, I think it's a woman, Ephesians, by a woman. Her name is Lackson or something, S-O-N.

It's gone from me. Good book. Good book.

Five minutes after this class, I'll remember. Anybody else? Any other questions? All your questions answered. How many here have done any writing? How many here have sent anything to a publisher? Do you? Yeah? That's good.

Well, it's heartbreaking, and I know it is heartbreaking. Generally speaking, I feel that if you write, and you have to publish it yourself, that's negative, you know, unless it's good enough for somebody else to publish it, you've got to be very careful. Anyway, we're not good tests of our own writing.

A person is not a good test, a good one to test his own writing. He's not. It's what other people think of it that really matters.

Yes, questions? Yeah. The question is, how do you know? How do you know what to write? Well, first of all, let me say this. I can't just sit down and decide to write something.

When I get an idea, and maybe Brother Nicholson, I don't know how you do it either. I'll give you a chance to talk about it. When I get an idea, I have a file folder, and I just write it.

I scribble it and put it in a file folder. And maybe I'm reading a book, and I get a good quote that will go for that. I'll make a copy of it and put it in a file folder and see if the file folder grows.

You know what I mean? See if the Lord is in it. And if it is, in addition to that, I have a file of quotations and poetry and all the rest that I've accumulated since I was 30. And when it comes time to write, if I feel the Lord is giving help, I can pull out those envelopes.

When it came time to write true discipleship, I think I had two or three envelopes of good material, resource material, I call it, on discipleship. And people like those quotes. Did you know that? They like those quotes in a book.

And it breaks up your page of type, too. Anything that breaks up your page of type is desirable. It really is.

So I would say, well, you just kind of sit down and write. Wait until you get help from the Lord. And that file will grow and grow and grow.

And even as you're writing, other things will come along, you know. Any of you carry three-by-five cards? You write things down when they come to your mind? You don't have to have these to be a spiritual Christian, but it sure helps. I'm going to ask my friend Mike Fitzhugh if he'll just close in prayer.

Our Heavenly Father, we have asked, we thank you that you can, human writers, to communicate the truth of the greatest book ever written. We just praise you for your word. We would desire to communicate you receive all the glory.

Amen. If any of you have any questions you'd like to come up afterwards and ask, feel free.

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