

You Gotta Be You

The late Pastor Warren Wiersbe once said of preachers, "The experiences we preachers go through are not accidents; they are appointments." He confirmed what I have experienced as a preacher for over thirty-two years. It is amazing how many times the week's circumstances, events, and lessons personally fell into place as practical illustrations for the Bible passage I was addressing.

People connect with stories. Applying what I learned through the week has often connected me with the audience. The longer I have served in one place, the more meaningful the illustrations have become. I have often wondered why things work the way they do. My sermons have taken shape at the last moment. Early on, I assumed I was not very good at preparing. But over time, I realized it would take all six days after my last sermon to prepare for the next one.

I embrace the process now. God uses my personality, experiences, and difficulties to connect with my audience. Philips Brooks said it best: "Preaching is the communicating of divine truth through human personality. The divine truth never changes; the human personality constantly changes, and this is what makes the message new and unique." This truth has helped me think about preaching in an entirely different way. I enjoy hearing others preach. It is not necessarily just about the content but also the delivery.

The best preachers are themselves in the pulpit. They have embraced who God has made them to be. Once a person realizes that God has put them in front of the right group of people at the right time, he can speak freely. There is a never-ending quest for men to follow men. I have seen people who attempt to talk like someone else. They use other guys' stuff; some even attempt to mimic another's tone, rate, and expressions.

There is much more to preaching than exegesis, hermeneutics, and scholarship. Those things are essential, no doubt! But preaching is also about God preparing you. There is a big difference between a recipe and a meal. Every household has books filled with recipes. The best cooks don't get caught up in recipes because they are more concerned about the chief end of delivering a meal. Similarly, I recommend that all those who prepare sermons prioritize evaluating the meals they deliver rather than following the recipes.

Martin Luther once said three things make a preacher: prayer, meditation, and temptation. If he is correct, it will take attentiveness during the week of preparation to identify what God is teaching you about the text you will deliver on Sunday. There are no accidents. Even the apostles spoke about what they had seen and heard (Acts 4:20, 22:15).

Discovering who you are is critical to becoming an effective preacher. I am an introvert. Most people are surprised to discover this. I need time to recharge, and usually, I do it alone. I need time to sort my thoughts and revive my spirit.

I can also become very distracted, so working on a sermon in a single sitting is nearly impossible. I need a whole week to produce a finished sermon. I've also learned I work best in the late hours of the day. (I am writing this at 12:32 a.m.). These discoveries have helped me. I now lean into them instead of attempting to change because someone else does it differently.

2 Corinthians 10:12-13 says, "For we are not bold to class or compare ourselves with some of those who commend themselves; but when they measure themselves by themselves and themselves with themselves, they are without understanding. But we will not boast beyond our measure, but within the measure of the sphere which God appointed to us as a measure, to reach even as far as you."

Comparing yourself with others is dead in the street. It will feed your insecurities and cripple you from being able to use your personality, experiences, and circumstances while preaching the word of God. Don't do it!

We have to strike a balance. Some might think this is a permission slip for cutting corners. I strongly believe the preacher is to interact, study, and meditate on the biblical passage(s). Do all the behind-the-scenes hard work, but do not forget to be yourself. We must never forget to bring our personalities, shortcomings, stories, experiences, and challenges to our people. You gotta be you.