



## MasterClass: Preaching In A Whatever World

Welcome to this “Preaching In A Whatever World” MasterClass.

I've actually written a book called “Preaching in a Whatever World”, you can get that on Amazon, but I want to take you through some main points in this preaching MasterClass that will improve your preaching and also cut through the noise that we all have in our world and in our life to get that message through, the message that Jesus wants to give to the congregation that you are preaching on any particular given Sunday or maybe Saturday night whenever your services run.

So let's launch into this very practical look at preaching in a whatever world.

### Get a captivating title

One of the first things I do encourage preachers to do is get a captivating title.

Always have a title and the title may be something that you actually message while you are preparing the message along, it may be something that you have promoted for weeks maybe under a series title, but work on a title.

I think the challenge with the title is do we go for something that is short and sweet and kind of gets people interested and curious and looks a bit kind of trendy and groovy with a nice image or do you go with something that really has a call to action in it.

Say the subject is forgiveness, you might just want to go with “Forgive” and a kind of bold splash image with that or you might want to go with something that is a bit more leaning towards a call to action “How you can forgive the worst possible hurt”.

So one kind of really oh I've had a bad hurt, how do I forgive that person or forgive is more general. Longer titles tend to call people more towards an action already in the title, shorter titles don't do that as well.

I will put the link into this particular website. I use this website it is called “Coschedule Headline Analyzer”. I use this website all the time for my blog post titles and I think it's not a bad website to use for sermon titles because it analyses what will get people hooked in and connected to your message.

But always have a captivating title.

## What is your big idea?

If you look at my sermon notes, at the top I'll have my title, the date, where I preached it and then the very next line will just have two words "Big Idea" and a dash and I write the big idea of what I'm trying to achieve. In one sentence what am I trying to achieve with this sermon?

Here's a few thoughts to help you kind of frame that big idea. What is a big idea and what should it look like and where are the focal points and how many words should I have in it.

So here's a little phrase that I use to help me think through my big idea, which sometimes I can have right at the very beginning of writing a sermon and sometimes it's something that I work on during the sermon and sometimes it's towards the end of putting a sermon together that I really get this down in concrete and set in a way that I am happy with it.

So this is the question I ask, what do I want them to know, to feel and do?

### What do I want them to know?

Again, preaching on forgiveness, forgiving people when they've been hurt, I want you to know that you've been forgiven and God wants you to forgive on the basis of Christ's forgiveness of you.

I want them to know that and those Bible verses that tell us that.

### What do I want them to feel?

I want them to feel emotion, I want them to feel a sense of their pain they've had in their hurt. I don't mind bringing that hurt back up if it'll help them come to the point of Lord I need to relinquish this hurt to you, I need to let it go.

I want them to feel an empathy for the person who has hurt them so they'll begin to move emotionally into the forgiveness phase, even if it's only very little in the emotional but big in the decision phase of that decision to forgive someone.

### What do I want them to do?

I want them to forgive someone.

So I'll write that into the big idea and it might be a bit long when I first write it but I'm always looking to cull it down, simplify it and that big idea then begins to make the framework of my message.

The key thing to also ask about “what do I want them to do” is come Monday morning what will they do with what I've told them. If I can't answer that question, I don't think the sermon is ready to preach.

If I can say you know gee Monday morning they don't know exactly what I want them to do, I've got to work harder on this message because Monday morning I want them to get up and live this sermon out.

Rick Warren says, “He doesn't preach to inform but to transform” and a sermon is designed to change people not just inform them with knowledge so answering that part of that question is so crucial. What do you want them to do on Monday morning?

## Who's listening?

Another thing to preaching in a water world is “who's listening”?

A good way to do this is write on post-it notes different stage of life people in your church. The pensioner, the business person, the young mum, the teenager, the divorced person, the widow, the person who's into sports and running and doing all that sort of stuff and activity, the person who is lazy, the person who is busy and driven, I mean a whole range of people.

Write their names on post-it notes and put them around. If you prepare on a computer put them around the screen and every now and then run your sermon past those individuals. Run it past the businessperson, the running activity person, the driven person and the lazy person, the teenager, the pensioner, the 90 year old, run it past them and think how does this apply to them, to their world.

When you do that you also realise how difficult it is preaching. We need the Holy Spirit in our preaching and I think this little activity, amongst all the other activities I'm going to give you, this activity should provoke us to prayer and waiting on God for our message because we realise what a hard task it is to reach a teenager and a 90 year old at the same time with the same message.

## Launch strong

Always use the first few minutes of your sermon to go strong.

It may be a strong reading of Scripture, some sermons I will just pause after I've done some introductory remarks, generally as a guest speaker I like to thank the Pastor and appreciate them, then if I'm going to go straight to reading Scripture I like to pause, let it get a bit quiet, gather the room, get attention.

"In the beginning was the word and the Word was with God and the Word was God". You launch into the passage with a sense of authority, decorum, a sense of nobility, a sense of gathering your heart and your mind and your soul and you can launch strong with Scripture.

You can also launch strong with story, maybe a personal story or an illustration. Generally if I'm launching with a story I'll launch with something that people can relate to, that they go oh yeah I know that, so there is a connection there in that first few minutes.

Never waste your time rambling, waffling, searching through your notes, launch strong, so people are with you because their attention span is high at the beginning, tends to drop off and gets high again at the end as they anticipate there is an end coming, hopefully! That this will not be like the mercy of God and the sermon will endure forever. It will have a finish point.

## Always tell stories

People love stories. Use real life stories, Bible stories. It's not your personal story don't tell it as your personal story. I cannot believe preachers do that but I've heard that they do that! Never tell someone else's story as your own. Tell it as someone else's story, let people know it's not yours. Tell a real life story and act out a Bible story.

I think Eugene Peterson has great advice for us as preachers here. He says that if you are going to use a Bible story read it, read it, meditate it, let it become something that really gets into your soul. He calls it "be at home in the story".

So I don't think you can tell a Bible story unless you've read it out loud a number of times in your own time and got the feel of it, read it in different translations especially New Living or Message translations that paraphrase and add a bit of a different rhythm and feel to it.

Look for the language in the story. Language is a revealer of where characters in the story are. Look for the problem in the story. Every story has a problem that is going to get resolved, every story works like that.

Look for the moments of tension, of suspense. We get so familiar with Bible stories that we have lost the tension in them, so relive them, rethink them, get them happening as a movie in your mind.

A little tip on this never ever read a story out unless you are reading a Bible passage. If you're telling a story about something that happened to you, never read it off a piece of paper, just tell the images that are in you. If it's a story from another situation, make sure you create the images in your mind and like a telling of a movie reach out with those images, with those pictures and tell it and you will create pictures within people's heads.

I hate it, I really hate it when pastors and preachers read stories out. Let me tell you a story and they read it out. Now I'm not talking about a Bible story but a personal story and I go no don't do that! Get it in your mind as pictures and then tell it.

## Build your credibility

Never lie in a message.

Use some hyperbole. Jesus used hyperbole - if your right hand offends you, cut it off. If your right eye offends you, pluck it out. I mean that's exaggeration to prove a point. Nothing wrong with that. That is an element of speech that you can use to be dramatic and to highlight a point. But don't lie. Be upfront.

When you're going to quote something out of a magazine or out of a blog post it doesn't hurt to even print it and say, "Hey, I was reading in this blog post on Christianity Today". If you've got the magazine or the blog post wave it around and people then know that you are willing to quote a source.

Never be afraid to source your material, even a deep and meaningful thought that you have got from another preacher. Don't be afraid to say I heard Jack Hayford preaching this, Steven Furtick preaching this, I heard John Piper preaching this, I heard NT Wright preaching talking about this and this is what they said.

It adds credibility to your credibility when you lean on a credible source. That's a good proverb I should write that down somewhere!

In other words, build your credibility by not lying, quoting your sources and obviously can I say practice what you preach. Model what you proclaim in that whole area.

## Basic structure

Let's talk about structures of sermons, especially if you're a new preacher. Structure really helps you to put together a sermon that I know will work. There are certain structures that will always work if you fill them with good stories, with good Bible content and with that big idea of what I want I want them to know feel and do.

Structures will help you make and preach and deliver a brilliant sermon.

Let's talk about a basic structure that I've used over the years many times. There are a few different elements to it.

### Launch / State, Illustrate, CTA / Bring it home

Launch - that is I launch strong with a Bible reading or a story or something that grabs attention and pulls people into the message.

Then during the middle of the sermon, and it's possible to only do this once or it's possible to do a repeat of this, I am going to state a truth, I am going to illustrate the truth and I am going to CTA (Call to Action) the truth.

So I am going to state the truth about forgiveness, I am going to illustrate the power of forgiveness, of when you forgive and then I am going to call you to action, I am going to ask you to forgive and, so that State, Illustrate, CTA - SIC for short.

You can do that just once in a sermon or you can do it multiple times.

I've got a message I love preaching about boxing believers out of Romans and I use three different people in that Romans 16, a brilliant passage that Paul writes of labourers for Christ. I state what I see in a person there, I illustrate it with a story and I challenge people to be like that person.

I do it three times in the message, so you can do it once, twice, three times. I wouldn't do it any more than three personally, I think that is enough call to actions for people.

Then I have a section in my notes "bring it home". Finish the thing off, round it up, what are you going to do at the end. If you are a novice preacher or a new preacher always write down your finish. Finish strong like you launch strong. Always bring your message to a conclusion. Don't leave it hovering. Land the plane.

You have launched the plane make sure you land the plane. Don't pretend to land or do a false land (ie this really is my last point, no wait this is my last point). Land that plane, land it down. People will enjoy the fact that you have landed and it's not the mercy of God that endures forever.

## Andy Stanley – Me / We / God / You / We

Andy Stanley has a great structure in his book *Communicating For A Change*. A book I certainly recommend for you to read if you want to amplify and improve your preaching.

His structure has a five-step movement to it. Me / We / God / You / We. This structure works I think particularly well for personal areas. I use this structure for a message on forgiveness where I preach out of Matthew 18, the story of the cruel servant who was forgiven much by the king but would not forgive a debt owed to them and they were thrown into jail.

It is a great story about forgiveness and I start the story off with Me, of a betrayal that happened to me in my life, a betrayal that deeply hurt me and how I had to process that and the beauty of this structure is that within 60 to 120 seconds you can get a lot of tension in the room by telling a very revealing story of your experience, especially around something like betrayal and forgiveness.

Then I go "We" - maybe you've been betrayed, have you ever been let down by someone, disappointed. Have you been hurt?

So I've started with 1. Me, my hurt 2. I've gone with We - you have been hurt and in their mind people are going yeah absolutely I've been hurt and let down, disappointed even betrayed by people like you and so the tension increases because of "My" what I've been through and then people are going oh man I'm feeling this now, help me.

And then we go "God", so we turn to the Bible and I jump into Matthew 18 and do the parable of the unforgiving guy there and go through that and then I go "You" which is a call to action. It's the what do I want you to do? I want you this morning to forgive that person who has hurt you, betrayed you, disappointed you, let you down.

Whether it's small or large, whatever it is, I'm calling you to forgive today and start that decision process and I unpack that, how to do that and how your emotions fit in with that and then you finish off with a "We".

Imagine if all of us were living in a place of no resentment, no bitterness, all forgiveness. Can you imagine the love in this church, can you imagine the level of love going up as we are walking around without grudges, so we are not nursing grudges, we are not bitter. So it's a kind of inspiring, let's all do this together.

It's a great structure. I think it only works in certain topics, that's just me personally. I find it works very well on heart type topics that you have a great story to tell to launch it with. But a really good structure for sermons.

## Commit to study

Be a person who is given to study and I started this out when I was a young man, single and I've still got one of my original notebooks from Bible study that I would just do in my bedroom when I was a single guy and I'd have the Bible and my Strong's Concordance, a big fat book, and my notes and I'd be reading the Bible and writing notes and studying the Scriptures.

And today, obviously I've got a large digital library. I've been in Logos Bible Software for about 30 years, I have hundreds of books in that. I had a free book every month from Logos, thank you Logos for that free book and they often throw in a couple of books that are a really inexpensive price and I've built a huge library over the years and I use that.

Commit yourself to being a student, a meditator on the word. Meditate on the Scriptures through the week. If you're preaching on a difficult passage or something that you really want to get into your spirit, then use your devotional time through the week to meditate on it, especially if you are bi-vocational.

You haven't got a lot of time to spend meditating and studying during the week, so do that during your devotional time.

Now Pastors just a warning here, don't turn your devotion time entirely into a sermon prep time. I think that's an unhealthy habit. Learn to have a devotional time that is separate to your study in the scriptures but don't be afraid also to weave into meditating, mulling over the scriptures.

Our Pastor, Jason Schroeder, for months this year has been in the book of Ephesians and you can tell he is just mulling in it, he is meditating in it, he is thinking in it, he is musing upon it, he is just mulling around with it and that's not a bad thing to be doing.



But commit yourself to being a student of the Bible. Buy books. Digital libraries are good because they're easy, they're portable, and their access is brilliant. So invest in a digital library is my advice rather than a huge range of books as you'll never have the same access to a range of paper books that you will to a digital library.

But invest in study books every single year.

## Rehearse your message

Now this is the time to be prayerfully considering what you're delivering, so a couple of things around this.

### Learn to wait on the Lord

Learn to wait on the Lord for your message. So part of your rehearsal of your message is not only practicing the delivery of the message but also praying through the elements of the message believing God that when you come to a call-to-action and people will respond. That your stories will create images in people's minds, that people will be moved, they'll be feeling various things as you preach as you as you minister the Bible to them. The scriptures go into their heart and they're moved by God.

Wait on God for that anointing, that touch of the Holy Spirit to fill you and overflow. I feel like in this master class I get preaching every now and again rather than teaching, maybe it is because I am talking about preaching that I kind of get a bit excited about it.

But rehearse your message and use your rehearsal time as a prayer time. Allow the message to sink into you, let it kind of mull into your mind, settle into your mind.

Write little notes in your Bible. I have notes in my Bible in the margin to help me remember different points. I have notes as well, I get my notes generally down to one A4 page, even though I have it in digital form, that is an old habit there, the old one A4 page.

But I like to have it clearly and concisely there. I like to have it written in my Bible and I like to have it fully in my heart, not memorised but I just like to know where I'm going through the message.

The great thing about rehearsing is you find parts of the message that you go that's lumpy, that doesn't connect, that doesn't flow and you can then rework and rewrite that part of the message.

So rehearsal is a really good thing to do and you'll feel like when you're preaching the message it's not the first time you've preached it. You've actually preached it already at home, in the office, somewhere you've already kind of worked it through, so by the time you get up to preach it is your third or fourth time into it.

## Less is more

Please spare us long boring messages. Please have mercy on us!!

I think an offering talk or a communion talk one verse, one story, one point. Not ten verses, three points, two stories. Cull it, edit it, prune it down, less is more. God is a great gardener, he prunes. Prune your messages.

If you are a novice preacher don't preach any more than 30 minutes. In fact go for 25 to 20. Preach less, people will enjoy it more and it will focus you down to trying to do one or two things maximum in a message. If people go away challenged about one thing and deciding to do one thing because of your sermon, that's a great result.

Don't feel like I've got to get people to do four things. They won't remember to do four things, they won't commit to do four things, or they won't follow through to do four things. But if you can get people to do one thing. Most of my sermons are aimed at doing one thing, sometimes two, occasionally three but a really good sermon of mine is when it's just "what are you going to do with this" and I want a decision from you now, I want a commitment from you now that you are going to do this.

## Listen to the podcast

If other people have to listen to you listen to yourself. I do this occasionally. I will listen to a message and I can't say I really enjoy listening to myself. It's not bad if it's a good message, I'm kind of happy but not if it didn't go well.

Listen to the podcast and learn. If it is videoed, watch the video. Watch your mannerisms and you will find that helpful, it will be good feedback.

Also actually getting people to give you feedback. There's a really good way to do this and it's a really good habit to get into. What I used to do is I gave my PA a bundle of forms and I told her to give them to this list of people, so I chose people that loved me and I put on the form, three things you really thought I did well in the sermon, one or two things I could improve and I'd get her to collect them up from people and collate them and put them into a list for me.

I didn't want to know who was saying what because I didn't want nasty thoughts about people who critique my message to hard but I did want feedback and the things that were done well, that they enjoyed, that ministered to them and what I could do improve.

That sort of feedback is very helpful to do. It's very simple and easy to do. Get a bundle of people who love you to do it. Get someone to collate them and give them back to you while you also listen to the podcast for feedback.

OK, there you go Preaching In A Whatever World. If you've got any questions about preaching put them in the comments below. If you've got any thoughts of what you've done to improve your preaching I'd love to hear that as well.

God bless you for joining me in this Preaching in a Whatever World MasterClass.