

My Preaching Experiences

In my senior year of high school, I was required to give an oral report in English class. I spoke for about three minutes, and I was terrified. In college, I was a teaching assistant in a science lab, and I was again nearly incapacitated with fear. After I began attending a church, I was practically forced to join a speech club, and I was a miserable speaker, in both senses of the word. When I went to my church's college, I was again forced to join a speech club and to take a class in speech. I experienced the same anxiety, and again gave speeches that no one would want to listen to, except that they had been forced to join the same club and class.

Then I experienced a breakthrough. I was assigned a difficult topic. I wanted to choose the right words ahead of time, and I didn't want to break the momentum of my speech as I struggled to remember the words. So I wrote the entire speech word for word, and practiced it numerous times so that I would not be afraid of stumbling, or of forgetting an entire section of the speech. It was not the greatest speech in the world, but it was certainly the best that I had ever done. Most importantly, it gave me confidence that I *could* deliver an effective speech, if I prepared in a way that was right for me.

I survived my speech class and club, and also took an undergraduate homiletics class. I completed the lessons in a graduate speech club, although every speech was accompanied by anxiety. In church, most of my early speaking opportunities came when I travelled to other cities. I gave six short messages in 1994, and six in 1995, including my first sermon. The next year saw an increase, as I gave 12 messages, most of them in the format of a class. There were 14 messages in 1997, including three sermons in other cities. Most of these messages were classes – more teaching than preaching – but they did help me become more used to speaking in front of an audience, and I gradually became a little more comfortable.

In 1998 I gave two sermons and 15 other messages. In 1999 I spoke 15 times, including my first two sermons in NewLife church, pastored by Mr. Benny Dixon. That was another significant moment in my speaking experience, although I did not know it at the time. I had been a guest speaker in NewLife, but it was not long before it became my new church home, and Mr. Dixon asked me to speak more often. His method of “equipping the saints” is to assign ministry duties, and we learn from our experiences.

I gave 15 messages in NewLife in 2000, 9 in 2001, 10 in 2002, 5 in 2003, 7 in 2004, 7 in 2005, 6 in 2006, 10 in 2007, 6 in 2008, 13 in 2009, 24 in 2010, 14 in 2011, 14 in 2012. As I went through my records and added the numbers, I was surprised. I have given more than 250 messages, including 31 Bible studies, 40 chapel messages, 20 classes, 10 communion messages, 3 devotionals, 2 funerals, 100 sermons, 8 sermonettes, 20 split sermons, and 10 workshops. This has been in 29 cities and seven nations.

I am not including documentation to prove all these speaking occasions – I have asked Mr. Dixon to verify the messages that I have given in NewLife church, which is more than half of my total, and that in itself will be a sufficient basis for my application.

Along the way I have read several books about preaching, including:

- Craig Blomberg, *Preaching the Parables: From Responsible Interpretation to Powerful Proclamation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2004).
- Fred B. Craddock, *Preaching* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1985). I especially liked this book – see my book review in Appendix E.
- Haddon W. Robinson, *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages* (2nd ed.; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001).
- Stephen Seamands: *Give Them Christ: Preaching His Incarnation, Crucifixion, Resurrection, Ascension and Return* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2012).

I have also listened to several series of audio recordings:

- Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching* (St. Louis, MO: Covenant Theology Seminary, no date. Audio available at iTunes or at <http://www.covenantseminary.edu/resources/#!/courses-christ-centered-preaching>

- *Expository Preaching Conference* (Ft. Worth, TX: Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2009). Available at http://www.swbts.edu/events/conference_audio.cfm?loc=conferences/ExpoPreachWorkshop_09
- Joseph Stowell, *Ockenga Lectures on Preaching*, South Hamilton, MA: Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, 1998.

Through these books and audio messages, as well as numerous speaking experiences, I have learned much about the art of preaching. For that, see my essay on “The Principles and Practices of Preaching.”