

# The Salvation Army Leadership Letter

Issue 9:



## Preaching—A Beginner's Guide (3)

Dear Tim

You asked me to write some Letters on preaching.

The first Letter focused on preparation, the second on delivery, and this final Letter completes the series with comment on several related issues.

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### Assessing Your Messages—A Kiwi Guide

Getting others to assess our sermons or messages is often the shortest route to becoming more effective preachers—and assessment takes many forms. Major Andy Westrupp developed the following helpful assessment while growing a thriving Kiwi church.

The top three lines of side one of the page have space for the Message title, Occasion and Date, and the Bible Passage for the day. Then he has the following eight questions to answer.

1. Did you get the sermon's **big idea**? (with a 'yes' or 'no' box to tick, and on the next line, "If 'Yes' what was it?" with space for you to write down what it was).
2. The **introduction**—Did it hook you in and make you want to listen to the rest of the sermon? (with 'Definitely', 'Yes', 'Marginally' and 'No' being the answers to choose from).
3. Were there **memorable points** in the sermon? (with a 'Yes' or 'No' box to tick).
4. What was the **most memorable** thing from the message? (with a line below for comments).
5. Did the sermon help you to see how the **Bible** could relate to your life? (with a 'Yes' or 'No' box to tick).
6. The **landing**—Did the sermon end in a helpful way? (with a 'Yes' or 'No' box to tick, and a line below for comments).
7. Was there anything **missing** from the sermon? (with a line below for comments).
8. Was there anything that could have been **left out** of the sermon? (with a line below for comments).

Finally, the bottom of side one, and all of side two, is taken up with eight further statements to evaluate (and below each statement is a graduated scale from -3 on the left to +3 on the right, with zero in the middle). Here are the eight statements:



It was inspirational. It was scriptural. I understood it. It was relevant. It challenged me to do something. It was entertaining [enjoyable]. It was convincing. It answered the needs and/or questions it raised in my mind.

Then the assessment ends with *Thanks for your time and effort. Please place this ....*

Getting several competent people in your church to complete this assessment of your Sunday preaching will help you grow rapidly as a preacher. And this assessment may be all you ever need to get a feel for how you're coming through to your people—and how you can preach more effectively.

### **Assessing Your Messages—An Alternative Guide**

However, if you wish to experiment with other assessments, perhaps as a variation on Andy's or to pick up on additional aspects of your preaching performance, you may like to use or adapt Wayne McDill's guide—Wayne being Senior Professor of Preaching at Southeastern Baptist Seminary in the States. Here's his guide with eight areas for you to focus on ('his' apparently including 'her'):

1. **Appearance:** Does the preacher make a good impression? Is anything about his appearance distracting?
2. **Attitude:** Does the preacher's attitude strengthen his sermon or weaken it? Is he likable?
3. **Speech:** Are the preacher's speech and grammar pleasant and correct? Is he easy to understand?
4. **Interest:** Does the preacher keep your interest? Does his subject address your concerns?
5. **Content:** Is the preacher's content biblical and sound? Does his sermon come from the text [if expository]?
6. **Clarity:** What was the main idea of the sermon? Was the sermon easy to follow?
7. **Style:** Is the preacher's delivery effective? How about his voice, gestures, and eye contact?
8. **Total Effect:** Overall is the preacher persuasive and credible? Does his sermon have impact?

This alternative assessment may be useful from time to time - to pick up on additional things like speech and style. Indeed, if I was in pastoral ministry, I'd have a couple of people each Sunday using Andy's assessment, and someone with competence in speech and style using Wayne's assessment so I got the widest possible feel for how I was coming through to my people. And every month I'd look at a video of myself preaching.

But however it's done, encouraging others to assess your preaching regularly, and studying videos of your own preaching, is the fastest way to become a more effective preacher—which is why I've devoted so much space to assessment in this Letter. And remember Rob Harley's comment at the November Willow Creek Conference—that many of us can do a lot better.

Don't let's put assessment off any longer. Let's start this Sunday—for the sake of the Kingdom of God!

## **The 'Drama' Of Voice**

Your voice is God's special gift to you for your preaching ministry—and there are several things to note here which, together, will make a huge difference to your preaching.

### **1. Walking as you speak**

Walking around as you speak (but not excessively!) can add greatly to the impact of your words, rather than standing still behind a pulpit or lectern—and here are some principles to get you started.

Let your movements be intentional so they reinforce your words. Stand in a different spot for different points in your sermon. Move forward to press a point home. Move back to give your hearers thinking space—and sometimes move in silence to allow thinking time. Move down into the congregation to engage them (but watch visibility and lighting, lest you lose contact and impact). And remember, speaking isn't just about what you say but how you say it. So marrying your verbal message with your nonverbal message is essential if you're to become a persuasive speaker.

### **2. Gestures and other actions**

Gestures and other actions, like movement, increase the impact of your words because when you move and gesture, your people are watching 'live' drama as you speak; and who goes to sleep at the theatre? So you communicate with your voice—but you also communicate through your facial expressions, upper body movements, hands and arms, and full body movements. But remember this simple rule of nonverbal communication: the larger the audience or congregation, the larger the movement, and the smaller the congregation, the smaller the movement—you'll look ridiculous waving your arms around if you're preaching to 10-12 people. On the other hand, if you're preaching to several hundred, they won't see small movements of your hands, etc. So adapt your gestures, etc, to the size of the congregation you're speaking to.

### **3. Some further speaking tips**

These additional tips will also enhance your speaking ability.

Develop diaphragmatic breathing when you speak—rather than shallow upper chest breathing or abdominal breathing. When you use a microphone, don't imagine you can speak conversationally as if speaking to someone across the table; rather, use the full range of your voice. When you speak, aim to paint a picture and impart a vision—as if you were saying to your hearers, 'it's like this' or 'like that'. Pay attention also to your articulation (the way you form your syllables & words), almost 'exaggerating' them so they're clearly formed. And take care with your notes so they're easy to follow and don't get in the way when you're speaking—for example, you certainly won't want to wander around waving a sheaf of A4 notes at people when you're speaking!

Finally, remember 'the 4 P's'. We're easiest to listen to when we speak with a well-modulated voice - with variety of pitch, pace, pause, and power. **Pitch** refers to the highness or lowness of your voice. **Pace** refers to the speed of your speaking at a particular moment. **Pause** refers to your use of silence. **Power** refers to the skilled use of the volume, and especially the intensity and impact, of your voice when speaking. If you speak slowly with a deep voice, you convey gravity; rapid and excited speaking imparts urgency; and whispering draws people in. And remember, the golden rule of progress in all speaking is, 'Practice, Practice, Practice.'

We become more persuasive speakers through applying ourselves to our preaching task—first in our preparation, then in our delivery, and as part of our delivery, the skilful use of our voice and body when we speak.

## Long Range Preaching

However, there's more to preaching than preparation, delivery, and the related issues we've considered so far. To lift our preaching to a new level we also need to think through how we go about our preaching over the course of a year. Preaching a series of messages may have a far greater impact than preaching one-off, unrelated messages—with the series being expository (say, on the 'Practical' Christianity of James) or topical (focusing on a number of related issues). And if topical, use surveys to find out the issues your people would like sermons on.

One advantage of preaching a series, especially a topical series, is that you can distribute promotional material beforehand so people can invite their friends—helping you with that preaching momentum that can be a preacher's best friend. Major Andy Westrupp, whose assessment tool we featured earlier, tried to do several series a year, often focusing in his morning seeker sensitive preaching on the great 'How To's' of life, etc, preaching into the worldview of the people attending. And he also preached series of messages to his believers at their evening services.

One morning series, which followed their Vision Sunday, had the following topics:

- A Church where no-one stands alone—Unveiled Faces (authenticity)
- Put down your stones—Acceptance
- The art of reading people—Empathy
- Community is worth fighting for—Conflict
- The secret of a loving heart—Gratitude
- True Friendship—Oneness.

An evening believers series on Daniel had these topics:

- Daniel—Pursuing spiritual excellence
- Daniel—Facing Impossible Challenges
- Daniel—Who's in charge around here?
- Daniel—Watch your worship
- Daniel—The fourth man in the furnace
- Daniel—O Lord it's hard to be humble.

Planning your preaching in advance, especially when you involve others in the planning, will add greatly to the impact of your preaching on your congregation. So prepare well, work on your delivery, and plan to preach strategically to maximise your mission impact on the people you preach to. Preaching with purpose will take your preaching to a new level.

## Useful Websites For Preaching Resources

But to assist you further, I've noted several websites with preaching resources you can download—so you can create high impacting messages. The websites are:

[www.preaching.com](http://www.preaching.com) the Preaching magazine site—with some free resources.

[www.pastors.com](http://www.pastors.com) Saddleback/Rick Warren site for leadership resources, with downloadable sermons at US\$4 each.

[www.willowcreek.com](http://www.willowcreek.com) the Willowcreek church site for leadership resources. Downloadable sermons, with discount for Willowcreek Association members. Log onto site, go to members only, then log on as an international member using your church or user name and membership number, then access connection point. There are lots of ideas for sermons, leadership, church programmes, technology, etc.

[www.biblegateway.com](http://www.biblegateway.com) an online Bible useful for searching for verses.

[www.textweek.com](http://www.textweek.com) a site for finding resources for Bible texts such as commentaries.

[www.movieministry.com](http://www.movieministry.com) a site for finding video clips for sermon illustrations.

Preparing messages has never been easier than now because so many resources are accessible to us.

## Preaching—And Postmodernism

If you've been in ministry for several decades, you'll know there's been a shift in the way people see faith and life—as they've moved from the black and white world of modernism to the greyer world of postmodernism.

In the old modernist world many, perhaps most, believed there is such a thing as objective truth to guide us through life. In today's postmodern world many, perhaps most, believe there isn't any objective and absolute truth to guide us—truth is subjective, meaning we create our own truth because there are many truths. So knowledge is only good or bad according to its result. But how then does this change affect our preaching?

Some have chosen to ignore the change altogether. Others have 'gone overboard' and said that church and preaching, as we've known them, are finished. Neither approach is wise—for these reasons.

If you've been following the unfolding story of the NZ Church, you'll have noticed that some who have been most vocal for change win the fewest converts, and some who stick to their biblical preaching (whether expository or topical) win most. Indeed, a friend who leads one of our largest churches is a classic example of this. He majors on expository preaching with some topical preaching. But every Sunday he gets 10-20 decisions for Christ—with 35 on one Sunday earlier in the year.



So it comes to this. To be most effective today, we need to preach into the worldview of the people we're preaching to (as Andy did in his church)—wrestling with the issues they struggle with so that over time they come to faith in Jesus as the way, the truth, and the life. Far from being a spent force, preaching was never more needed than now. But for more information on the challenge of Postmodernism, see World Vision Letter 172, which is now available on this Salvation Army website.

## **How Now Shall We Preach?**

Tim, I've been glad to write these three Letters to help you on your preaching journey—and especially because I know ministry puts you under enormous pressure to attend to the urgent rather than the important. But it's the important, not the urgent, that will grow your church.

So give yourself to your preaching ministry like you've never done before. Plan your week so you have adequate time for preparation, work at your delivery, and get competent people to give you feedback on your preaching. Don't let anything keep you from excelling at this holy calling.

And as I complete this series, like Paul, 'I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and kingdom: preach the word, be urgent in season and out of season, convince, rebuke, and exhort, be unfailing in patience and in teaching' (2 Ti 4.1-2 RSV). If you do this, like Paul, you'll complete your ministry with joy, and at the end, receive the crown of righteousness the Lord has laid up for you (4.7-8). Then, if not before, you'll know that all your hard work has been worthwhile.

Goodbye!

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## **For You and Your Leaders**

1. Discuss a preaching assessment plan with your leaders—deciding what form the assessment will take, who will be involved in it, and how it will be done on a weekly basis.
2. Read the section on the 'The "Drama" Of Voice' again, and pick out several things (like 'movement' or 'the 4 P's') you will now work on to lift your preaching to the next level—and start developing and monitoring them straight away.
3. Diary an hour or two for sometime in the next fortnight when you will search the websites I've mentioned, note anything that may be useful for future sermon preparation, and choose one thing you will use in a message over the next few weeks.