

A Preacher's Manifesto: Ten Commitments that Drive Biblical Preaching

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Introduction

One of my favorite scenes in the Steve Martin version of *The Pink Panther* is:

Inspector Clouseau: *"Who are you?"*

Yuri: *"I am Yuri the trainer."*

Inspector Clouseau: *"And what is it you do here, Yuri, the trainer?"*

Yuri: *"I train."*

Inspector Clouseau: *"So, you are Yuri, the trainer, who trains."*

Clouseau's conversation with me would go like this:

Inspector Clouseau: *"Who are you?"*

Randal: *"I am Randal, the preacher."*

Inspector Clouseau: *"And what is it you do here, Randal, the preacher?"*

Randal: *"I preach."*

Inspector Clouseau: *"So, you are Randal, the preacher, who preaches."*

Clouseau figured it out; congregants figure it out, too. Even though a pastor is much more than a preacher, preaching defines who we are. It doesn't determine who we are—our relationship with Christ does that. But our preaching is important.

Like it or not, within the providence of God, preaching had a lot to do with our successful or unsuccessful candidating experiences in churches. And, many older parishioners still refer to me as "Preacher." Then there's the fact that our Sunday morning preaching has the potential to touch more congregants than any other repeated, pastoral task. And not to mention the significance Scripture places on the preaching of the Word of God.

A Preacher's Manifesto contains ten commitments that should drive biblical preaching in the local church. Most of the ten transfer directly to other preaching venues. However, a few, such as #1, "preaching as a function of soul-watching," apply only to pastors entrusted with the care of souls, especially those who preach on Sundays.

I have written *A Preacher's Manifesto* in hopes that pastors will read the ten commitments every Monday. Not the paragraphs, just the ten topic sentences. If you commit the unpardonable sin of taking Monday's off, then please read the ten tenets every Tuesday. They can help steer your study time.

All ten have, in some way, affected my preaching; some more than others. Many of the ten will resonate with your current practice. You may not buy into all ten. I understand. This is one way, but not the only way, to preach with the blessing of God. I am hoping you will evaluate your preaching in light of these commitments. I pray that some of the ten will challenge your assumptions, cultivate new commitments, and bring about changes for the sake of God's reputation in the Church (Eph. 3:21 "to him be glory in the church...").

And so, we start each week:

Commitment One:

By the grace of God, by faith in the Son, and by the power of the Holy Spirit I will treat preaching as a function of soul-watching.

In a local church, preaching serves the larger goal of pastoral ministry or soul-watching (Heb. 13:17 "Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls..."). Soul-watching explains the broader purpose of preaching in church.

It's true; I am a preacher. But I am more than that when I preach. When I prepare a sermon, I am preparing to teach the Bible. True. But not true enough. I am a theologian for the church. True. But also not true enough. I am preparing a sermon to teach and preach the Bible as part of watching over the souls of my parishioners. When I teach and preach the Bible, I am guarding the souls of my congregants against disbelief and disobedience.

So our preaching should reflect this goal. What we say to congregants and how we say it is largely determined by our understanding of our goal. What are we trying to accomplish? Pastors

desire to faithfully shepherd the flock towards greater faith and greater obedience. Inevitably, preaching will contain strong warnings (see also commitment #10). I'm becoming more and more convinced that God's goal for His Word matches the goal of the soul-watcher. Both the Message and the messenger aim at moving all listeners further and further along the will of God.

Soul-watching explains one aspect of the biblical preacher's authority. Picture the authority of preaching as a rope braided from two strands. One strand is the authority of God's Word. The other strand is the authority of the pastoral office. The act of preaching uses both of these strands.

Depending on how you're wired, it may be easy to unintentionally separate preaching from soul-watching. When that happens, lecturing replaces shepherding. Knowledge, not life-change, becomes our aim. Congregants still learn Bible doctrine, but don't necessarily have their soul supervised.

Commitment Two:

By the grace of God, by faith in the Son, and by the power of the Holy Spirit I will rely on the Holy Spirit to teach me what my study skills alone cannot.

Too often we're guilty of relying solely on our exegetical and theological training. I'm extremely thankful for all the training institutions that have influenced my life and ministry. You probably possess study skills that produce good results week after week. However, we do not want to become independent expositors.

In October of 2013 I had the privilege of attending the annual meeting of the Evangelical Homiletics Society hosted by Talbot Seminary. We met on the campus of Biola University in La Mirada, CA, not far from pastor Jack Hayford's home. Jack is one of the most well known and well-respected Pentecostal pastors in the U.S. EHS attendees had the privilege of hearing Jack teach on the topic of Spirit-led preaching. He gave me a passion for the Holy Spirit's active presence in my study.

I'm sure I knew this before, but after hearing Jack I was convinced that a grammatical-historical-literary-rhetorical-theological method (add more if you like) is inadequate. Throughout our workweek we need to buttress our study skills with the Holy Spirit's active presence. We need to believe and depend on Him to teach us what we cannot know through our study methods (cf. John 16:13-14 "...he will guide you into all the truth..."). I want to invite Him to contribute what good study habits cannot. I want to maintain an attitude of worshipful dependence all week long.

Commitment Three:

By the grace of God, by faith in the Son, and by the power of the Holy Spirit I will feed God's people a steady diet of through-the-Book preaching.

Not an exclusive diet, but a steady one. This commitment helps me create my future preaching schedule. It also helps me resist the gravitational pull toward topical preaching. I believe topical preaching has its place. I do not believe it is the best diet for a local church meal after meal.

I struggle when topical preaching is adopted primarily for the sake of relevance. In other words, the topics are perceived to be more relevant and, therefore, will gain a better hearing than preaching through a book of the Bible.

One downside of continual, topical preaching is that the faith-family hears disconnected doctrine. Rarely is any teaching set in its theological context; the topics don't mean something in the canonical Story of creation, de-creation, re-creation, and new creation.

But, my purpose is not to debunk topical preaching; it's to lobby for feeding God's people a steady diet of through-the-Book studies. A commitment to feed God's people a steady diet of through-the-Book preaching requires faith in the relevance of all Scripture. With such faith, I will not automatically scrap certain sections of Scripture in the unpreachable bin. The amount of preachable material suddenly expands.

One result of making this pledge is that it keeps you from too quickly giving up on a preaching portion. Inevitably, while preaching through books of the Bible, you'll encounter Texts that aren't too promising. More than once in the past twenty years I've wished the next-in-line preaching portion in Hezekiah wasn't there. Great sermons require great Texts and not all preachers and parishioners consider every Text a great Text. That's one of the main problems with preaching through books of the Bible.

I can't imagine a topical preacher choosing a Text that doesn't inspire confidence. No, usually, preachers select topics because of their perceived relevance and potential for impact. But, when you preach through a book of the Bible, there will be times when you don't feel good about a preaching portion's potential.

It might be too difficult to handle adequately. One of my favorite assignments for students is developing a sermon on Exodus 4:24-26 "At a lodging place on the way the Lord met him and sought to put him to death. Then Zipporah took a flint and cut off her son's foreskin and touched Moses' feet with it and said, 'Surely you are a bridegroom of blood to me!' So he let him alone. It was then that she said, 'A bridegroom of blood,' because of the circumcision." How would you like that to be your assigned Text for Sunday morning?

Related to the problem of not understanding the meaning of a passage is not understanding its relevance. Sometimes you can't figure out how the meaning functions for the Church. I fight the temptation to skip over those kinds of preaching portions and trust God to honor His Word. I know He'll do more with it than my limited skills can produce.

If you adopt this commitment, prepare yourself for extremely hard work in the study. I recommend that you periodically interrupt a steady diet of preaching through books of the Bible with short, sermon series consisting of topical exposition. During lengthy book studies, remain conscious of pace (not moving too fast or too slow), space (not too long or too short), and place (Where are your listeners in their spiritual journey and what do they need at this stage of corporate, Christian life?). Be sensitive to what fits your faith-family.

Commitment Four:

By the grace of God, by faith in the Son, and by the power of the Holy Spirit I will not allow a selected topic to override the meaning of the biblical Text.

When I choose to preach a topical sermon, I still want to be biblical. That means more than simply finding my topic in the Bible and reading a verse or verses containing that topic.

My friend, Wayne Shaw (formerly of Lincoln Seminary in IL), summarizes two approaches to preaching: hermeneutics and homineutics. Hermeneutics occurs when sound hermeneutical method drives my homiletics, my preaching. Hermeneutics first, homiletics second. I discover the meaning of a preaching portion and that meaning is the thrust of the sermon. Homineutics is when my homiletics, my preaching, drives my study of Scripture, my hermeneutics. Homiletics first, hermeneutics second. I choose a topic for my sermon and that topic is the focus of the sermon. I use Scripture as an illustration or relegate it to passing references and skimpy analysis.

We preachers often practice homineutics on special days, such as Mother's Day or Father's Day. We have a relevant topic in mind. We know we need Scripture too. If we're not careful, the topic takes the forefront and the Bible, the backseat.

One way to tell if you're committing homineutics is to review the structure of your sermon. Does the structure come from the logical flow or argument of the Text? If not, it's highly likely that the topic is overriding the meaning of the selected preaching portion. The portion of Scripture containing your topic is meant to mean something and do something different from what your sermon is doing.

Commitment Five:

By the grace of God, by faith in the Son, and by the power of the Holy Spirit I will always preach the Gospel.

Not as an evangelistic add-on. Not in a way that is disconnected from the meaning of our preaching portion. On page 91 in his book, *Simply Christian*, Wright writes, "Christianity is about something that *happened*. Something that *happened to Jesus of Nazareth*. Something that happened *through* Jesus of Nazareth." I am a Christian preacher, preaching to Christians and non-Christian listeners about Christianity (see #9 for another angle on preaching to the non-Christians overhearing worship). That means preaching about Jesus, what happened to Him and through Him.

Take Jesus out and nothing happened; nothing happens. But, if you're preaching on Psalm 22, it's not enough, to point out that Jesus quoted part of it when He was dying on the cross. That information alone will not help explain the meaning of Psalm 22 for the Church. My congregants need to hear that, because Christ died on the cross for my sins, I do not experience Psalm 22 like David did, like Jesus did ("My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"). Preaching the Gospel explains how Psalm 22 functions for the Church. The Gospel explains how any Old or New Testament preaching portion functions for the Church. The Gospel explains how God-in-

Christ-through-the-Spirit brought His saving grace to me so I could respond in faith and obedience to any preaching portion.

If nothing else, this commitment keeps me from creating good moralists. It keeps me from reducing Christianity to a new kind of morality. That happens whenever I teach the ethics of Christianity apart from what happened to and through Jesus. Think about all the “Five ways to...” sermons. A few weeks ago while on vacation, I heard a “five ways to manage your anger” sermon. There was no mention of how the Gospel creates this self-controlled person; no mention that God-in-Christ-through the Spirit produces the desire and capacity to experience anger without sin. Of course, in Ephesians the Apostle Paul commands his readers to be angry-without-sinning (4:26a) after having taught his readers what Christ has done for them (chapters 1-3).

Commitment Six:

By the grace of God, by faith in the Son, and by the power of the Holy Spirit I will respond to God’s Word in my study.

I will respond to God’s Word in my study before asking congregants to do so during the sermon. That could happen early or late in the week. It means never preaching without worshiping. I must be able to live the Christian life as well as, if not better than, I’m able to explain it. Character—how good I live—is greater than competency—how good I preach.

You know what happens when there is a disconnect between what you do and what you say, right? Actions speak louder than words. If our practice doesn’t match our preaching, parishioners will believe our practice, not our preaching. That means they won’t believe God’s Word even if we’re interpreting and applying it accurately.

Then, there’s the matter of leadership. I can’t lead parishioners to spiritual maturity if I’m not on the Way myself (cf. Acts 9:2; 19:9, 23; 24:14, 22 for the use of the Way to describe Christianity); I can’t lead them to places I’ve never gone.

Responding in my study also helps prevent the famous, dry well syndrome many pastors experience. Despite spending so much time in God’s Word, many pastors struggle with low or no affections for God. When that happens, it’s a sign that the pastor hasn’t been responding to God’s Word during sermon preparation.

Responding as an act of worship in the study helps keep preaching real. Or, from the negative side, this pledge keeps us from hypocrisy, from putting on a good, passionate, preaching performance. One of the dangers of pastoral ministry is looking good on Sunday, after having lived poorly all week. Only those closest to us know the truth. The more parishioners who don’t know us, the more we can fool.

Preaching puts tremendous pressure on the preacher to be spiritually ready for each Sunday sermon. The goal, of course, is to be consistently living the Christian life in the power of the Holy Spirit. If I am living by faith each day, Sunday’s no problem. Catch me on a carnal Saturday night and I’ve got some spiritual catching up to do.

This commitment also puts an end to preparing sermons “for them.” No, these sermons are for us. We hear God’s Word in the selected preaching portion before they do. God speaks to *us*

before He speaks to *them*. Spiritually healthy preachers respond to God during sermon preparation and delivery.

This pledge also prevents us from preaching *at* them. We still urge them on as Scripture does (command, exhort, encourage, rebuke; all that). But there is a difference between preaching *at* them and responding *with* them. Although I am their shepherd, I am also a fellow sheep who must follow the Chief Shepherd.

Commitment Seven:

By the grace of God, by faith in the Son, and by the power of the Holy Spirit I will love my listeners as much as, if not more than, I love preaching.

I'm especially mindful of this commitment on Sunday morning before the worship service begins. But in a normal workweek, I've had enough interaction with the faith-family to be mindful of the pledge all week long.

For the most part, I love preaching and teaching God's Word. It's hard. It's stressful. The responsibility is frightening, but I love it. I don't want to fall into the trap of loving preaching without also loving those dear parishioners who listen to my preaching. I've known a few pastors who loved to study and preach more than they loved people. I've taught more than a few students who loved studying and preaching more than people. I don't want to find myself in that place.

Because preaching is a part of shepherding (see commitment #1), the relational component is critical. We're not guest preachers who share no connection with our listeners. People skills are as important as exegetical skills. You may have heard the leadership maxim (probably from John Maxwell): people don't care how much you know until they know how much you care. When pastors love their people before, during, and after the sermon, they enhance their preaching.

I know from experience that it's hard to love every parishioner. Let's face it: you hardly know some of them. You may not know some at all. It's probably not all your fault. And then there are those in the faith-family that are difficult to love. After preaching on the instruction to love one another, one of my friends said, "It's easier to love me if you don't know me too well." Isn't that the truth? Then, we've got to love those congregants that can make our lives miserable. If you've pastored for a while, you know what I mean.

Imagine God saving us without loving us. Imagine Jesus dying for us without loving us. Imagine the Spirit indwelling us without loving us. No, that's not the way God performs; that's not the way we preach.

Commitment Eight:

By the grace of God, by faith in the Son, and by the power of the Spirit I will not worry about how my listeners respond to my preaching.

Oh, I desperately want them to respond with the obedience of faith (see Romans 1:5; 16:26). But there is very little, if anything at all, I can do about it. I believe in ears-to-hear theology (see Mark 4:9, 23 “And he said, ‘He who has ears to hear, let him hear.’”). Some congregants have ears to hear and some don’t. As far as I can tell, that involves God’s sovereignty and their choices.

Now, I certainly don’t want to be the cause of their ears-that-can’t-hear. I don’t want to have sinned against them so that they determine not to listen to the sermon. I don’t want to commit cloudy communication. Remember the famous saying, “A mist in the pulpit creates fog in the pew”? But, besides those two scenarios, whether the faith-family responds to my preaching is not on me.

It is extremely difficult not to worry about how our preaching will be received. It’s hard to be successful (in a God-honoring way) if nobody ever responds. It’s crucial to God’s enterprise that sermons be heard, really heard to the point of affecting life-change. Catch me in my carnality and I want people to like my preaching and me. My former professor at Dallas Theological Seminary, Dr. Howard Hendricks, used to tell us: “Treat after-service compliments at the door like perfume. Smell it, but don’t drink it.”

But, it’s not up to me who shows up on Sunday morning, who listens, and who nods off. Goodness, they fell asleep on Paul. Acts 20:9 reads, “...Eutychus...sank into a deep sleep as Paul talked still longer...” What was temporarily fatal for young Eut’ is so encouraging to me!

Blogger and author, Jeff Goins, wrote, “As we care less about our audience’s affections [how they feel about our writing], more people will be affected by our writing” (see Jeff’s, *Writer’s Manifesto*). I couldn’t help but wonder if this is also true for preaching, that we’re more effective when we stop focusing on how our listeners will respond. Surely it’s true that if I focus on what God thinks about my preaching, He will determine the level of success by creating a certain amount of ears that can hear.

Commitment Nine:

By the grace of God, by faith in the Son, and by the power of the Spirit I will urge Believers and unbelievers to believe the Gospel.

This commitment helps develop the application and conclusion of sermons. I do not ask congregants to do anything before urging them to believe the Gospel (see commitment #5). Preaching Christ should inevitably lead to what I call, faith-first application. Here’s a template I often follow. I learned this from years of listening to Timothy Keller’s preaching at Redeemer Presbyterian in New York City.

The preaching portion describes what Christians are to be or do.

Our sinful condition means that, without faith, we are unable to be or do that (whatever *that* is).

The Text directly or indirectly points us to Christ who was or did that.

By faith in Christ and in the power of His Spirit, we can be or do that.

Notice that we eventually get to the “that.” But not before we urge faith in Christ. It’s faith first and then the obedience of faith follows (see commitment #8 and Romans 1:5; 16:26). Many preachers will want to follow this up with some practical ways in which *that* can be done.

Faith-first application contains a bonus: the same call to Believers to believe the Gospel allows non-Christians to do the same. When we call Believers to believe for their sanctification, we also give non-Christians an opportunity to believe for their justification. We’re preaching to both insiders and outsiders with one, insider-directed application.

I certainly don’t want non-Christian listeners to think they can accomplish the will of God—apply Scripture—apart from faith in Christ. I don’t want them to get the notion that God is pleased with their attempts to please Him apart from faith (see Hebrews 11:6 “And without faith it is impossible to please him...”). The same goes for the saints.

Commitment Ten:

By the grace of God, by faith in the Son, and by the power of the Spirit I will preach as though my spiritual life and the spiritual lives of my parishioners depend on it.

I am currently writing my second full-length book, *Preacher As Soul-Watcher* (see commitment #1). Along with Hebrews 13:17, 1 Timothy 4:16 has had an enormous impact on my preaching. God speaks to Timothy and us through Paul: “Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers.” Somehow our preaching and teaching contributes to *our* salvation *and* the salvation of our listeners. The spiritual lives of our parishioners and our own spiritual lives depend somewhat, somehow on our preaching and teaching.

I can’t afford to think that the teaching time is similar to what happens in a seminary classroom or adult Bible fellowship. That statement is not intended to make light of the professor’s ministry or lay-ministry. It’s just that something even more important is going on in church. During the sermon, my soul is in process of being saved; during the sermon, the souls of my listeners are in process of being saved.

Such significance requires a certain sense of urgency. Preaching requires immediate attention and action. The fact that there’s so much at stake must show in my preparation. I can’t afford to short-change or cheat my sermon preparation time. The teaching time on Sunday is too important to let that happen.

The magnitude of preaching must also show in my delivery. My interaction with the congregants should reflect the critical nature of the event. Even when I smile at them, laugh with them, and enjoy the interaction, I can’t lose sight of what’s happening. Lightening the mood with humor, for instance, must not lessen the gravity of preaching. Preaching is serious business.

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My wife, Michele, has been a faithful reader of my material from the moment I started writing. She has always encouraged me in these extra projects. She is the most Spirit-sensitive person I know. She is extremely intelligent, has a bloodhound's nose for sniffing out anything unclear, and is an excellent proofreader.

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I owe a huge debt to my pastoral mentors, Dr. Jeffrey Watson and Rev. Robert McNutt. Virtually none of this material, or any of my ministries would exist apart from their input in my life. Both men modeled excellent leadership and effective shepherding.

A providential string of events led to the writing of *A Preacher's Manifesto*. In 1985 Michele's best friend from college, Angela Thomas, decided to attend Dallas Theological Seminary. Michele decided that she would move to Dallas with Angela. A year earlier I had enrolled at DTS and began volunteering on Sundays in what was called the Inner-City Bible Ministry (now Kids For Christ). Michele also began serving in that ministry on a weeknight. I first saw Michele during an ICBM training session one Saturday, soon got up enough courage to ask her out on a date, and then months later asked her to marry me (I'm giving you the mini e-book version). We married in the summer of 1987. Over the years Michele and Angela kept in touch. A few years ago while Michele and I were visiting Angela and her family, Angela told me about Michael Hyatt's blog. I started reading it and learned much about writing. Michael introduced me to blogger and now, writer, Jeff Goins. I read Jeff's, *Writer's Manifesto*, and thought, "Preachers could benefit from such a thing. I should attempt to write one." Here it is.

About the Author



A Preacher's Manifesto flows out of Randal's dual ministry of pastor and professor. Since December 1, 2003 he has been Senior Pastor of Calvary Bible Church in Mount Joy, PA. Prior to that, he spent twelve years shepherding the flock of the People's Church in Somerville, NB, Canada.

Randal has the privilege of teaching at two, fine, ministry training schools. He teaches Advanced Homiletics at three locations in Lancaster Bible College's graduate school. Besides its main campus in Lancaster, PA, LBC also operates in Philadelphia (CUTS) and Greenbelt, MD (Capital Bible Seminary). Randal also teaches Doctor of Ministry students with Dr. Jeffrey Arthurs in two tracks of study at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, Preaching the Literary Forms of the Bible and From Study to Pulpit. He is the author of the forthcoming book, *Preaching With Greater Accuracy* (Kregel, 2014).

Randal earned a Th.M. degree from Dallas Theological Seminary, a Doctor of Ministry degree in preaching from Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, and has enjoyed numerous Ph.D. classes in OT hermeneutics from Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia. He enjoys research in OT hermeneutics, weightlifting and fitness, ice cream (which explains the need for fitness), playing the cello, bowties, and hunting with a longbow. Randal and his wife, Michele, reside in Mount Joy, PA.

If you are interested in reading brief information about hermeneutics and homiletics, please peruse Randal's blog:

<http://peltononpreaching.com/>

The posts--usually around 300 words—contain insights he's learning from his own preaching ministry and research.

You can connect with Randal through email (randy@cbcmi.com).