Oh, and About That Sermon

Most surveys (think George Barna asking his wife questions when she gets home in the evening) still show that 80-90% of new people at church come because they were invited by a friend.

So our faithful people are the best way to guests and new regulars.

But how many come back the second time, and more, because of the sermon and the worship service? Maybe ask your wife, but we think it is a lot of them. Many, many.

So here we start the church year with a ‘pedia on sermons. Some basics, indeed, about the main point. Then some very
practical little suggestions (that’s the second question). Then some very different views about the series of sermons we do.

For sure, we all three agree that I Peter 4:11 gives us at once our greatest challenge, promise, and goal when we preach.

*Knute, for Jeff and Jim*

**The issue of the main point**

*Jeff Bogue*

1. Let the text define the point. You can preach exegetically or topically without ever surrendering the text. Let the Bible say what it says, don’t add and don’t take away.

2. Start the conversation with the main point. Don’t take ten minutes to get to the point…jump in so that the main point isn’t lost in the weeds of presentation.

3. Illustrate...use creative elements to illustrate the main point, not sub-points or they will become the main point.
   - Story
   - Additional scripture
   - Video
   - Music
   - Etc.
4 Only make one point. By avoiding a “three-point” outline, you stay focused on the main point. State the point several different ways. Draw your conclusions from the main point.

5 Avoid giving a seminar and work at preaching a sermon. Seminars require outlines and points...sermons require scripts and narratives. Stay out of the weeds.

6 Tell the story. People think in terms of stories today...so, tell the story of the passage. Prepare more in terms of presenting a parable than a seminar class.

People should walk away remembering one point and understanding what God is asking them to do with what was presented to them from the text.

**Jim Brown**

1 Discover what the text meant to the people in their day and what it is supposed to mean to us today while considering context, culture, language, and nuances. I love how God was able to deliver us a divine book that could be written for an original purpose yet be just as perfectly suited and written for us today! Every day!

2 From a discovery perspective I spend hours just writing down thoughts on a yellow tablet until I get it down to one simple memorable phrase in the relevant language of our day. Repeat it often during your sermon and afterwards with a #hashtag on social media. Most preachers underutilize social media post-sermon.
3 I look for the verbs and see what kind of action is taking place and repetitive phrases to understand the context, mood, and life situation the author was writing from. I am often surprised by how the verbs give me so much help in finding the BIG IDEA.

4 If it is a narrative I try to become the main character and read the story through his eyes and ask what he might be trying to say about or to that person. I then picture myself trying to say that same thing in my world to my church and to my people when facing a similar situation.

5 I use a variety of translations to best understand the passage. I am amazed at how fresh one translation can be over another.

6 I work hard at creating a big idea that puts us into action, so that we are not left wondering what we should do with it. Obviously application will drive it home but big ideas with a plausible missional response force action!

Knute Larson

1 Guided by God’s Spirit, a text or sentence from the Bible means one thing. It may have many applications, but our calling is to say exactly what God had in mind when He had it written. That after all is what “exposition” means.

2 Listeners do not need just a lot of information from a text or sermon topic—not 10 to 15 things to do or feel or believe. We should have one major goal, supported by the sub points. No need for overload.

3 One good way to view a sermon—the three hearts of preaching: God’s—why does He want us to do, feel or believe this? What was in His heart? Ours—does it capture my heart? Do I get it and want it? Theirs, the listeners—am I helping them to want this for themselves? One main point is behind all this.
4 Listeners can only handle so much information, exclamation, and motivation at one sitting! One time I preached all Ten Commandments in 33 minutes! With a little background about Moses included! I am sure people staggered out, overloaded!

5 Some stories and subjects by Jesus and the writers have been mangled by us when we make every small fact mean something—instead of emphasizing the main purpose.

6 Here comes a hobbyhorse of many of us—all main points should drive us to Christ and His cross. For sure, every day, we need the Savior. That one purpose must always be clear!

7 All of this gives new meaning to the common practice of groups when I was a teenager: read this verse and say what it means to you. It really doesn’t matter what it means to me—it matters what God meant when He had it written. That is the main point.

Helps to connect the “point” to the “people”

Jeff Bogue
1 Know your audience! First and most important rule of communication!

2 Assume people are biblically illiterate. The average person in our culture today either does not know the Bible or has a distorted understanding of it. We should assume they do not know the stories, the background, or the terminology (the law, gentiles, justification, and many more). Assume people were not there last week. Assume there are guests among you.
3 Be yourself. Nothing turns people off faster than someone trying to impress them. They will assume you are not trustworthy...the younger the audience the more true this is. Just be yourself...authenticity is huge in connecting to people. So, if you are funny, be funny. If you are more serious, be creative with more sobriety. Whoever God has created you to be, bring that into the pulpit.

4 Cause the music to teach the rest of the story. Music is a part of the “narrative,” so work hard to have it reinforce or balance the preaching. The music itself needs to do the work. If your worship leader needs to do a lot of talking, they picked the wrong songs 😊.

5 Don’t deliver a message until it changes you. Nothing connects more with others than when it is obvious God has captured your heart.

6 Help people. Unchurched people don’t usually come to church to find God; they come because they have problems. Give them answers by teaching them that the heart of God for them brings up very practical implications.

Jim Brown
1 Be in touch with your world that week. Read the headline news that morning or you could miss a divine moment God has created.

2 Dress to your audience.

3 Be attentive to distractions and kill the elephant in the room.

4 We can never have enough grace.

5 Not a time to show off your expertise of the five Greek words you know. 😊 Speak English and not “Christianeze”!
Don’t make assumptions that everyone knows the Bible like you do.

Passion is a must...

Believe what you are preaching. It will show!

Don’t ask for more then what you are willing to give yourself.

Use some humor; don’t be so serious.

Know your audience before you preach to them.

Shake it up. Doesn’t always need to be three points (not everyone is Grace Brethren 😊).

Watch your audience and see if they are responding.

Not “you” and “them”—use the word “we.” “We should....”

Laugh, cry, smile, and let them into your heart.

Don’t always paint yourself as having it all together.

**Knute Larson**

1  Smile! Even more! Just because Mark Driscoll does not, does not mean we should not! Obviously we should add at a warm or humorous moment, but a sincere smile even helps with strong challenging thoughts!

2  Vary! Your volume, speed of delivery, and movement! Any loudness or softness, or cadence, or position can become monotonous. Watch a video of yourself and see how this goes!
3 Illustrate! Open “windows,” tell stories (they don’t have to be long and tedious), explain by a parallel verse or personal story. Attention span is helped this way.

4 Clarify! What is the need for this sermon? Why are you preaching this text? Some like to raise a tension with their introduction—as in the old “boy, book, boy.” It can’t be just because it’s the next verse or chapter.

5 Be warm! Say, “Here’s what we need,” not, “Here's what you should do”! Stand as a fellow struggler, who also needs the grace of our Lord. Don't talk down or point fingers!

6 Love! Before and after the service, mix and mingle (only don’t use clichés like that one!). Show them you care to be with them. Some big stars may not do this, but we are pastors and shepherds.

7 Quit on time. And always before they are done listening!

How to plan a series

Jeff Bogue
Start by asking, “What are the pressing spiritual questions of the day?” What are people facing and struggling with? What is the public discord...not politics, but the spiritual root driving the conversations?

3-4 months out:
- Lay out passages that deal with these questions.
- Begin to form a “story” or “narrative”...often looks like a series title.
  - The series, “Half of Me is Invisible,” is a story about the unseen realities that deeply effect our tangible realities. This is actually just a series about the
realities of heaven, hell, judgment, and the Holy Spirit...but that is a lousy title! 😊
- Begin to brainstorm creative elements.

**1-2 months out:**
- Nail down creative elements: video, music, illustrations.
- Make adjustments to your plan.

**Week of:**
- Finalize all creative elements.
- Formulate actual preaching notes you are going to use.
- **Personally digest what you are about to teach.**

**Day of:**
- Review notes
- Review service
- Take private time in prayer and quiet.
- Go “work the lobby” and let her fly! 😊

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**Jim Brown**

1. Consider the season of year and prepare a timely series that best fits the season or the events of our world, even our sports world.

2. Keep a good balance between God’s wrath and God’s Grace. We can only handle so much wrath at a time. And we never get tired of grace.

3. Jot notes as you go along the way and always be open to how God might be leading. You must be willing to go somewhere else if God says to. Too many preachers are not sensitive to the needs of their people and the events of the world they live in. If you have a series on giving and a recession hits, then punt and face the issues at hand.

4. Add missional opportunities while in the midst of it by preparing outreach blitzes church-wide to live it out. Create shirts with the
series logo on them.

5 Get your creative people involved. Pray for creativity, from the bulletin to the stage. Keep in mind that there are many kinds of learners in your audience, and the majority of them are visual. So create visual illustrations to hammer home the truths. Many of us do not pray for creativity. Get the right people around the table to get the job done. Too often the wrong people are around the table.

6 Make sure the series are not too long. I cringe when I hear people are in the same series for one year. If you are tired of being in a series then they are too. Sports seasons don’t even last that long, and if they did we would soon get bored unless we were watching the Redskins and Orioles! 😊

7 Announce the series ahead of time and use social media to invite others. Post teasers on social media to create interest and raise curiosity and encourage people to share the links. Make sermons available online so they can be shared and so people can watch the messages they miss.

**Knute Larson**

1 Go through a book in the Bible. Do not miss the good of following the context to get the fullest meaning.

2 Tie with the Christmas and Easter seasons at least, and reference other holidays. Reference also giant tragedies or world or local events. We must tie to real life—this is a judgment call to know how often.

3 Get input from staff and lead volunteers and media. Almost all that is going on, for good or for bad, was going on in Bible days for sure. “Know well the condition of your flock.”
4 Check what others have done. We all copy each other a little. There are some great books and recorded sermons studying topics in the Bible, and put together in a systematic way.

5 A conservative concern-caution here: be sure to expose carefully what the Bible really says on the topic. So many topical preachers introduce their topic with a verse and then dive in to swim around for 30 minutes with their own nice thoughts.

6 Know that your people have the same needs you have. That should help. What you need, they do too.

7 Number 1 repeated. 😊

Pastorpedia is produced monthly by three experienced pastors: Jeff Bogue, of Grace Church, in several locations in the Bath-Norton-Medina areas of Ohio; Jim Brown, of Grace Community Church in Goshen, Indiana, a church known for its strong growth, family and men's ministries, and community response teams; and Knute Larson, a coach of pastors, who previously led The Chapel in Akron for 26 years. Pastorpedia is brought to you by CE National. Visit cenational.org/pastorpedia for more issues and to read the bios of our contributors.