

# What we want from preaching

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We want an overlap of truth, passion and application



The message must be biblical truth:

The message must be burning in our bones

The message must be believable

This combination moves the hearers towards a response

## Burning in our bones

A difference between teaching and preaching in the NT:

- teach = *didasko* / preach = *kerusso*, meaning 'to herald'
- a teacher may inform you about things that have no place in their heart
- a preacher is a herald of life-changing news

In the 1700s

- *"Sermons everywhere were little better than miserable moral essays, utterly devoid of anything likely to awaken, convert or save souls. [Everyone] seemed agreed... to let the devil along and to do nothing for hearts and souls"* (J.C. Ryle).
- Preaching was "dry, heavy, stiff, dull, cold, tame . . . and destitute of warmth, vivacity, direct appeal, or fire" (Ian Farley)
- Whitfield: as well as being simple, bold and direct, he had tremendous earnestness and feeling

Welsh Revival, echoed in The Chapel a poem by R.S. Thomas – “a preacher caught fire”

*A little aside from the main road,  
becalmed in a last-century greyness,  
there is the chapel, ugly, without the appeal  
to the tourist to stop his car  
and visit it. The traffic goes by,  
and the river goes by, and quick shadows  
of clouds, too, and the chapel settles  
a little deeper into the grass.*

*But here once on an evening like this,  
in the darkness that was about  
his hearers, a preacher caught fire  
and burned steadily before them  
with a strange light, so that they saw  
the splendour of the barren mountains  
about them and sang their amens  
fiercely, narrow but saved  
in a way that men are not now.*

### All of this leads to a response

Meeting with Jesus demands a response. A sermon should be an encounter with Jesus, through his word.

1 Peter 4:11 – “If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God.”

JC Ryle on Whitfield again: ‘*He met men face to face, like one who had a message from God to them, “I have come here to speak to you about your soul.” The result was that many of his hearers used often to think that his sermons were specially meant for themselves.*’

We are looking for transformation, not simply education.

# Seven aims

## Biblical

The Bible is authoritative in all matters of faith and conduct. To preach is to declare God's truth, from His word, to the world. Every sermon should be rooted in the Bible, and deal responsibly with the text. We should always help people understand what the passage meant in its original context, and model to them how to understand and apply Scripture for themselves.

## Practical

Our sermons should provide practical application that helps people mature in their faith, and live differently as a result. Application should be relevant to the listeners' context. We should provide clear ways that people can respond, and also offers of help and support.

## Empowered

We're not just aiming for well-explained and practical sermons. We want to hear God speak to us in and through the sermon. A preacher's preparation should include plenty of prayer, to know what God specifically wants to say through the talk. And the preacher should speak with an expectation that God will be present and active while we preach.

## Accessible

We aim to preach in a way that resonates with both those who are, and are not yet, followers of Jesus. We recognise that believers and seekers inhabit the same world and struggle with the same issues, doubts and fears. We should avoid an us/them mentality and maintain a humble tone, preaching as those who are on our own journey of faith.

We should not assume much knowledge about Scripture or Christianity, and should define theological terms and Christian jargon as we go. When a passage presents a significant challenge to faith, we should take time to address it, thus helping the seeker and also modelling to the believer how to discuss difficult issues with those who do not know Christ. However, some issues are too complex to do justice to in a short section of a talk, so we should avoid raising questions we are unable to answer responsibly.

We should regularly explain the gospel, and give opportunities for seekers to take the next step on their journey of faith, whilst avoiding making people feel pressured. The decision to follow Jesus takes time, and we want to create an environment in which people can explore faith at an appropriate pace. The preacher should offer suggestions for how someone can take the next step towards faith.

## Structured

Our sermons should be well-structured and easy to follow. We should not try to communicate too much in any one sermon, but should give clear and memorable points. We should work hard to keep to time, so as to fit with the other elements of the Sunday Service. And we should make sure we land the sermon well, thinking about how it will flow into worship and response.

## Creative

Creativity can really help people connect with our message. Consider how to illustrate points through the use of film, music, poetry, slides, props or other media. Creativity works best when it is authentic to the preacher's own passions, and is appropriate for the audience to which they are speaking.

## Engaging

Our talks should be engaging. Our manner is relaxed and natural. We value authenticity and avoid anything that feels unnecessarily showy. Where appropriate, we draw on personal experience, demonstrating vulnerability and embodying the message. Humour can create a real sense of connection, but it should always be natural, wholesome and avoid demeaning others. It should draw people in rather than exclude them through in-jokes. And the tone with which we speak should be godly, humble, and hopeful.