

I have heard some talented preachers in my life. I think Andy Stanley is one of the most talented communicators around, T.D. Jakes can inspire like no one else and Anne Graham Lotz, the sister and daughter of two very famous Grahams (one named Billy), is a better preacher than both of them. A next generation of men and women, great preachers, are now offering the gospel in innovative and effective ways all over the world. God gave them all an extra dose of talent that most of us preachers don't have. There was a time some suggested the days of preaching were over, but we are discovering that is not true. Preaching can make or break our ministry, but it is still the most effective way of sharing the good news.

We have to or had to learn to **preach effectively without much talent**. No matter how hard I try, I won't ever be able to preach the same way Andy, T.D. or Anne does. I talk too fast and occasionally stutter just a touch, but I can be effective. Adam Weber wasn't a very talented preacher but amazingly effective. He says this about his own preaching, "I planted a church called Embrace in South Dakota 10 years ago that now averages over 4,000 in worship. Each week he says, ***"I let the overflow of my journey with Jesus spill out over everyone else!"***

Effective preaching is personal, pastoral, biblical, prayerful, invitational and is felt as much as heard! This kind of preaching doesn't take talent. This kind of preaching may take work. It may take a lot of prayer. It may take risk. It may require transparency. It may even require clarity and to expect change, but it doesn't take a lot of talent.

I hear many sermons that come across in a specific way, a style often learned in seminary or learned by trying to mimic someone else. But a finely-crafted sermon is presented and held up like an art object to be admired. The sermon has been finely tuned, polished, written and rewritten until each transition is perfect. The intro is engaging and the ending ties it all together. This way of preaching hopes that people will leave saying, "What a great sermon!" But this does not mean that they were touched, changed, challenged or experienced God. It is also a style that typically takes a great deal of talent to pull off effectively and a high-level of talent most of us preachers just don't have.

I had to eventually accept I was not going to be as charismatic as Rick Warren, as good a communicator as Andy Stanley, as strategic and organized as Bill Hybels or as smart and energetic as Adam Hamilton. But I still led and preached at the 15th largest attended

Methodist church in America. One that grew to that size in the 21 years I was there.

Here are a few things I learned and practiced as an effective preacher who did not have that much talent:

I preached to people not at them; people want to be talked to. I don't mean the style, I mean what we communicate. People want to know we are all humans in this story together. They want to be understood, loved, encouraged, empathized with, yet still challenged and changed by the message.

It's about change – that people can change, that life can change, that the world can change and that the situation they might be in can change. This is inherently the core of the gospel. This is the good news that people come to church to hear, even if they don't know it.

It's personal – there is nothing subjective about real preaching. It should be the most serious and deep idea that people connect to each week. It should invade their personal space as the preacher gets personal about themselves and the hearer. It is here where connections are made.

It's about God – and I don't mean just an objective sermon about the nature of God. Effective preaching should include a means to experience God, to feel God's love and to be able to love God back. As a building block for this relationship, there must be an invitation to enter a relationship with Jesus Christ and all that means.

It's about you – every sermon should help people build a relationship with the preacher, to know you better and to help them know that you know them. Honest, transparent, open, real life, real-time stories all help people connect with you, the preacher.

It's about each other – the church is made up of people. The people will come and they will gather among all the other people. Shouldn't our messages build these relationships, the mission and vision all the people are invited to share and the common life people live? Who is in the congregation? Who are the guests? Who is involved in the service? Somehow messages need to help people connect with God, with the preacher and with each other.

Inviting them into the narrative – the gospel is a narrative, a story lived out by and in the transforming power of Jesus Christ. A story that is affirmed and supported by the disciple-making work of the church. What is the story? How does the hearer become not just a hearer of the story but part of the ongoing, living out that story?

It's about the Bible — people always want to hear what the Bible is saying to them. Preaching the history, geography and the main contexts that wrap around the book can be important, but most people have only a small amount of interest in Bible hermeneutics. But they do want to hear that the Bible speaks to them directly. What is God saying to me? Is the Bible that voice? Does the Bible speak to my need, my sin, my grief, my emptiness, my hopes, my dreams, my heart? If we do this even marginally well, it is often a winner.

Preaching to felt needs — the best ears to hear a sermon are the felt needs of the hearer. It is relatively easy to connect with people here. If the preacher targets the needs they have — the need for grace, forgiveness, hope, comfort, help, financial, spiritual, physical, etc. — they will hear. What is the good news? The good news has and is an answer for them all. The pastor/preacher who understands this can and will always connect in his or her preaching in a successful way.

Relationships — marriage, family, friendships, workplace, neighborhood, community and church. People want to improve, expand and develop these in specific ways. When we speak to real life, the living hear what we are saying and often respond. Everything in life that matters comes from a relationship.

Making a difference — lost people want to do good, be better and make a difference in the world. When the preacher affirms this innate desire with the ways they can make a difference, the ways they can partner with Christ and the kingdom, this opens the door for the change preachers and churches want to make in the world. When people understand the ways they can partner in the kingdom, then they are most often moved and challenged.

Offer them Christ — most people come to church to connect with God. The offering of Christ is the very thing God put in place to make this connection available —from Christmas to Easter, to the promise of His return, the gift of salvation and love offered in Christ and the amazing teaching of Jesus that is the promise of the best life possible. All of these reasons draw most people to come to church, even if they don't know it. When we preach this, we offer the chance of a life-miracle for all who hear. People hope that God is, that life can change, that heaven is real, that love and grace are tangible and available, not as an idea, but in the reality of God at work in Christ.