

Preach the Word

Discussion Starters

Vol. 15 No. 6
July/August 2012



Proclaim Grace! Concluding issue

Use any or all of the following questions for personal reflection or group study. Feel free to pick and choose which applications interest you most; even if you only complete one or two you'll benefit.

Overcoming Pulpit Discouragement (p. 1)

Reflect on the occasions in your ministry when you have slumped into a discouragement about preaching like Luther did (p. 1).

- What—in your hearers, in yourself, or in your content—caused this discouragement?
- Compare your season of discouragement to a prophet, apostle, or other man of God in the Scriptures called to preach. What are some similarities?

Of the following three reasons offered for Luther springing out of his slump (p. 1), which has had the greatest impact on your encouragement to preach?

1. God loved the people still
2. Only the word of both judgment and grace could help them
3. Only God is to determine when the proclamation of the gospel is to cease

“Thank You, Pastor! And May I Also Add...?” (p. 2, 3)

One WELS mission counselor states on p. 2 that when he talks to lay people about their pastor's preaching, they insist, **“We want good sermons! Pastor, we want you to have the time. If we are burning you out doing too much else, we want you to tell us.”**

- How many hours per week do you typically spend on sermon preparation (track this for two or three weeks to test your best guess)?
- How does your typical time spent in preparation compare to the ideal amount of time you'd like to prepare?
- What squeezes preaching preparation out of your schedule?
- Brainstorm some ideas that could help you hold sermon preparation as more sacred ground.

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- Share the answers above with your lay leaders, creating a conversation about your sermon preparation and possible improvements.

The comment on p. 3 about sermon application emphasizes *“the ability to apply the Word to our everyday lives! Please tell these men this is **important!** I know we must not focus on ourselves to the exclusion of the glory of God, his kingdom, and his saving work on the cross, **but**, we need you to meet us **here**, in the midst of our everyday lives. In my struggle to walk the walk of faith, to love, to have hope, and to work hard in the service of my Lord, I need tools like wisdom and discernment, sound teaching, and honest counsel on relationships. This helps **me** spread the gospel to those around me.”* One preacher said, “Christ hasn’t called me just to preach—he’s called me to preach *to people*.” **From what sources might a preacher draw his most relevant applications that meet people in the midst of their everyday lives?** List three or four benefits of equipping your hearers with real-life applications.

Project

Ask a small group of your hearers to compare your preaching to the lists of 7 strengths and weaknesses printed on pages 2 and 3. Engage them over a period of time. Begin with a meeting where you present the lists and discuss what each means, offering explanation where necessary. Present yourself as being open to their feedback, interested in improving your preaching as a result of their evaluation. Because a shepherd’s sheep often hesitate to voice criticism, frame the assignment in this way: **1) Provide a number of examples of sermon excerpts or tendencies that practice any of the listed strengths or avoid any of the listed weaknesses, and 2) Select what you see as the one listed strength that could use the most improvement, and the one listed weakness that should receive first attention.** Then...listen. Share project outcomes with other preachers perhaps involved in the same project.

Endlessly a Student and Perpetually Humble (p. 4)

Which statement in the article on p. 4, “Endlessly a Student and Perpetually Humble,” most inspires you as a preacher? What about it do you find meaningful?

Project

Note the list on p. 4 of “Tools for the Pursuit of Better Preaching.” Make a commitment to personally explore each item on the list, perhaps one per week/month for 8 weeks/months. Another option: assign each item on the list to a brother in your circuit, conference, or study group and ask him to present a review of the item.