

Dedicated to  
Frank Jamerson

# *Letters to Young Preachers*

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# *Letters to Young Preachers*

## *Introduction*

*Mark Roberts & Warren Berkley*

**W**e live in a society and world that worships youth. Everywhere we look we see advertisements telling us we need to use this product to look younger. The media relentlessly hires only the young and good looking. People pine for their lost youth. All of us know someone who has tried something that utterly fails, like a comb-over or worse, a toupe, to look younger and defeat the inevitable advance of age. We love youth.

Unless we are trying to do something difficult or hard.

No Fortune 500 company's board would excitedly announce they were hiring a 21-year-old "whiz kid" straight out of college to run their corporation. Instead, they parade out a man or woman with a lot of grey in their hair, touting their years of experience, reliability, and wisdom that come from age. Likewise, professional sports franchises don't turn the coaching reins over to a youngster. Instead, a veteran with age who has lived through the turmoil and problems winning and losing at the highest levels can present is tapped to coach the team to a championship. One major league baseball team, the Florida Marlins, even won a World Championship with Jack McKeon steering the team at age 80! When a candidate runs for president he doesn't ask a youth who was just elected to the local town council to come on board as his campaign manager. Again, age, wisdom, and experience are called upon. When we need to do something difficult, whether that is changing the alternator in our car or trying to help a teenager who is rebellious to God, we seek the advice and counsel of those who are older than we are. We don't seek out what a

young person says or has to offer simply because they lack the experience that would give them the perspective necessary to offer valuable counsel. So again, when we genuinely need to know, when we are attempting something hard, we want to know what those who are older and more experienced have to say.

The Bible teaches this is the correct approach to life. Repeatedly the Scriptures urge us to listen to those who are older and who simply know about what to do because they have experienced more than we have. Solomon says, "And now, O sons, listen to me, and do not depart from the words of my mouth" (Proverbs 5:7). He goes on to say, "Listen to advice and accept instruction, that you may gain wisdom in the future" (Proverbs 19:20). Some of Paul's most famous words are instructions to two young preachers, Timothy and Titus, to listen to what he teaches them and act accordingly (1 Timothy 2:1; 2 Timothy 1:13; 4:1-2; Titus 2:1). The Bible even shows the folly of young men who will not listen to aged counselors but instead choose to listen to their peers, to their own destruction (see 1 Kings 12:6-14).

Preaching is hard. In our world today there is very little that is easy about it. The local preacher is called upon to wear a variety of different hats, master many skills (some of which are almost contradictory to each other), live nearly perfectly (without being prideful), never offend anyone (while preaching boldly), study a lot (without becoming academic or neglecting visiting), and have a great family life (while still spending a tremendous amount of time with the brethren). It is not easy. Preaching has never been easy but it is surely becoming more difficult than ever, with the demands of technology, the increasing wickedness of the world, and more and more churches expecting more and more of their preacher.

Want a little help? What price would you pay for the venerable and wise counsel of outstanding gospel preachers who have gone before you? If you could sit down for an hour with veteran men who would talk straightforwardly with you about the work of a preacher, the nuts-and-

bolts of how to do it better, and give you solid, scriptural advice about your work, how much would you be willing to pay for that hour?

Of course it would seem impossible to get that kind of advice at any price. Who has time to fly all over the country and talk to older preachers? Would those older preachers have time for you if you knocked at their study door?

That is why we put together this book. We asked some of the best and finest preachers of our time to write a letter to a young preacher. Their assignment was to simply think of a young man sitting across their desk and what they would tell him to assist him in being effective in the kingdom. Then they were to write that down. The results were far beyond anything we could have imagined. The wisdom collected here for the reader is powerful, scriptural, and practical. That is an unbeatable combination!

Along with those letters you will also find chapters on the preacher's work written by men who excel in those areas, and can help you do the same. From how to use technology to personal evangelism to personal purity some of the most vital matters in the work of a preacher are covered.

This is, of course, not the first book on preachers and preaching. Many books on preaching deal primarily with the technique of sermon construction and delivery. We are delighted those resources have found a place in the publishing market, and we hope some of these are in your library or on your digital reader. We have read many of those books and we train young preachers in these critical subjects and urge them to read those books. However, in recent years we have observed a growing need for (1) admonitions relating to the character of the preacher and, (2) counsel from older preachers made widely available to the next generation. In *Behind The Preacher's Door*, the first need is addressed. In *Letters To Young Preachers*, we are addressing the second need.

You will find here that our writers address the dangers, but do not neglect the joys of the work. They draw from Scripture first, but as applied through their experience. Their love for the Lord and His servants is the tone and attitude of every word. This book can help you, and it will help every evangelist who takes it seriously and makes definitive changes in their work based on what is advocated here. It is our prayer that this book will take you deeper into the Word, and closer to the Father who loves us, and thus help you to better connect people with that Word and that wonderful Father.

### **Acknowledgments**

Everything we undertake involves the participation of our wives and families. Dena and Paula are the real force behind everything we do, and without them our efforts would never amount to very much at all. Erin Sullivan has become our “go-to” proofreader with suggestions and copy-editing that enables us to get to good final drafts. Carl McMurray and his staff at Spiritbuilding bring the parts of this book all together and apply professional marketing that is critical to getting this book in your hands. Our special thanks to the writers for their early interests in the project, their deadline sensitivity and most of all, the wisdom and thought they brought to the work. Above all, thanks to God for His Son and the message we need to take to the people.



# *Dear Young Preacher*

## *From Sewell Hall*

*But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by a human court. In fact, I do not even judge myself ... He who judges me is the Lord” (1 Corinthians 4:3-4).*

I am thankful for you. I see a large number of young men who appear to me to be preaching for love of the Lord and love of souls, and I trust that you are one of them. I do not write this because I feel particularly wise. Instead, I am aware of some of the mistakes I have made, and I have observed the mistakes of others and the consequences that followed. I do not want you to make the same mistakes, and that is the reason for this letter.

### **Some Things You Must Do**

“Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you” (1 Timothy 4:16). Only in this one matter are you to think of yourself first. It is not likely that you will raise “those who hear you” to a higher spiritual level than you attain. Jesus is your example and He “began both to do and teach” (Acts 1:1). “Walking in truth” must come before “speaking the truth.” It is hypocrisy to preach a higher standard than you are, at least, trying diligently to attain. “Keep yourself pure” (1 Timothy 5:22).

Taking heed to your doctrine (teaching) is also essential. Style is important, but much more important is the content of your preaching. Be sure to obtain it from diligent and daily study of the Scripture—not from “church of Christ tradition,” other preachers, religious papers, uninspired books, college professors, commentaries, or the Internet.

These may help you understand and cross-reference Scripture, but Scripture is your only dependable source of truth. Truth never changes and it must never be silenced or compromised to achieve political correctness or audience acceptance. Your responsibility is to change sinners—not accommodate them, and God’s truth is your weapon for changing them (2 Corinthians 10:5).

Make sure you keep the proper emphasis in your preaching. Salvation is in Christ, not in being associated with a particular group of people, regardless of what may be on the sign in front of their meeting place. Those who are in Christ will seek fellowship with others who are in Christ, but it is the relationship with Christ that saves. Salvation is “by grace through faith,” not by simply doing the right things. Just as faith without works is dead (James 2:26), even so works without faith is dead (Hebrews 11:6).

Study diligently each lesson you intend to present. God expects you to make the most of every opportunity to teach His Word. He deserves your careful preparation and so does your audience. In addition, spend time in study and prayer for your own personal edification. We expect others to do this, why not preachers?

If you are not married now, be very careful whom you marry. Your companion will make a major difference in your effectiveness as a gospel preacher. If she is a dedicated Christian and a good example of godly womanhood, if she is hospitable, if she can be content with a modest or even sub-standard lifestyle, if she is willing to go with you wherever you feel that the Lord would have you go, she will be a blessing. If not, she will be a hindrance.

Be sure to show gratitude for financial support that brethren give you and for every kindness they show you. Do not be constantly asking for more. Every preacher would do well to duplicate Paul’s attitude demonstrated in his response to the gifts of the Philippians. While revealing contentment in his circumstances, he expressed genuine

appreciation for what their gifts represented and rejoiced in the fruit that would abound to their account (Philippians 4:10-18).

If a congregation where you are preaching feels they need a change, leave without causing a problem. If you have a right to initiate a change in your relationship with a church, they have the same right. If a major doctrinal issue is involved, this might make a difference; but if it is simply a personal matter, you will do yourself, your family, and the church a favor by leaving without murmuring. The unity of a church is more important than your personal pride or your family's convenience. By showing a proper attitude you can avoid embittering your family against the church.

### **Some Things You Must Not Do**

Do not preach for money or for prestige or favor of men. It is not wrong to be supported (1 Corinthians 9:6-14), and if you stand for what is right, good people will usually encourage and honor you. But if your goals are carnal in nature, you will be constantly tempted both to compromise the truth and to choose selfishly your field of labor. Determine to preach in the place where you believe that God would have you preach. Preaching for large congregations is not wrong, but this is not something to be sought; it is rather a door to be entered if it appears to offer the greatest opportunity for service. At the same time, some preachers need to be serving where Christ has not been named (Romans 15:20). You may sometime have to support yourself with secular work in order to preach where you are needed, but if this should prove to be necessary, you will be following in the footsteps of some of God's greatest evangelists. Just as Paul had a backup source of income, there are young men now who are taking training in secular fields that will allow them to follow the example of Paul.

Do not jeopardize your influence by unguarded association with women. Beware especially of privately counseling those with marital problems. Even in efforts to convert one who is lost, it is best to have

another person present. One preacher we knew insisted on a glass window in his office door at the church building, and another who was married had a rule never to ride in a car alone with a woman to whom he was not related. Such rules may seem extreme in our increasingly casual society, but those two preachers were never suspected of immorality. Some who have succumbed to temptation would have avoided sin if they had observed such rules. "Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall" (1 Corinthians 10:12). Even if you keep yourself pure, you need to be able to prove your innocence if false charges are made. We must "have regard for what is honorable, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men" (2 Corinthians 8:21).

"Do not be carried about with various and strange doctrines" (Hebrews 13:9). Independent thinking does not require you to adopt some strange doctrine or scheme of interpretation. One is just as dependent on what he has been taught if he automatically rejects it as if he automatically accepts it. "Test all things; hold fast what is good" (1 Thessalonians 5:21). If in your independent study you feel that you have discovered some new truth, "test" it first with knowledgeable brethren who may help you see any fallacy there may be in your thinking. Only when your discovery is thoroughly tested and essential to "the faith" should it be preached. On the other hand, if you find that what you have been taught is true, thank God and "contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 3).

Avoid expressing strong opinions on political and social issues. When you "contend earnestly for the faith," you will alienate enough people without generating additional contention over matters of spiritual indifference. Jesus did not join in protest against the atrocities of Pilate (Luke 13:1-3), nor did Paul pen one word in criticism of the notoriously corrupt Roman government. Rather he wrote, "I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some" (1 Corinthians 9:22).

Do not abuse the freedom you have in the use of your time. “See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil” (Ephesians 5:15-16). Too many preachers have done foolish things because they had time for which they were not accountable to anyone. Availability of the Internet can encourage a waste of time in arguing about “foolish and unlearned questions” (2 Timothy 2:23) or in pursuing “foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition” (1 Timothy 6:9). If you have nothing pressing you otherwise, get out and find someone to teach.

Do not take too seriously the kind things people say regarding your preaching. Just as it is considered polite to commend a hostess for the meal she has provided, many feel it is common courtesy to say, “Enjoyed your sermon.” Realize that the praise that goes beyond this is often from people given by nature to flattery. “But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by a human court. In fact, I do not even judge myself ... He who judges me is the Lord” (1 Corinthians 4:3-4).

### **Strive For Balance**

Balance is one of the most difficult qualities to maintain. All of us tend to give priority to things we enjoy doing over things we need to do. We must strive for balance in the following areas.

**Between study and personal contacts:** No one wants a doctor who never studies his medical books, but neither would we want one who only studies and seldom treats or operates on a patient. Preachers need to study, but they also need to know the people to whom they preach. Visitation increases one’s influence and personalizes one’s preaching, especially when it is visiting those who are sick, bereaved, or burdened in some special way. Without visitation, preaching tends to become academic and scholarly rather than practical.

**Between preaching “publicly and from house to house”:** Paul did both (Acts 20:20). I can remember a time when non-Christians would come to hear public preaching and search “the Scriptures daily to find

out whether these things were so" (Acts 17:11). Large numbers were converted by such preaching. Public preaching has not lost its power, but it has lost its audience of unbelievers. Preaching is still powerful for Christians but, as a rule, if unbelievers are to be reached, they must be taught on a personal level in some venue other than a church building. It is a preacher's responsibility to find ways of contacting such people to bring them to the Lord.

**Between preaching on practice and attitudes:** When religiously mistaken people attended our meetings, they had usually been well taught on such things as attitudes, morality, and the authority of Jesus and Scripture. So we preached often on baptism, rightly dividing the word, the errors of denominationalism, instrumental music, etc. One of my most admired young preachers recently wrote, "Realistically, these issues are not the ones we tend to struggle with anyway. How many of you will be tempted to play an instrument when you assemble this Sunday? How many of you will have to resist bringing hamburgers and coke to the Lord's Supper table? I would guess none." He may be correct in saying that "these issues are not the ones we tend to struggle with," now. But what about the future if we do not teach on such things?

When I was his age, I would never have dreamed that "churches of Christ" might someday be using instrumental music, building gymnasiums, allowing women to preach, and having the Lord's Supper on Saturday night, but these things are now being practiced by some. And by whom? By those who assumed everyone knew the truth on such matters and ceased teaching on them. Meanwhile a generation grew up that did not know the truth, and new converts were attracted by appeals other than the unique and scriptural practices of the Lord's church. Consequently they did not know the error of these unscriptural things and began to practice them. Preaching on loving one another and worship from the heart is indeed timely, and we may have neglected such teaching in the past. But, "These you ought to have done, without leaving

the others undone” (Matthew 23:23). We might be surprised to know how many in our audience see no wrong in instrumental music and other innovations. If we do not teach repeatedly on these things, a generation will arise that will accept them.

**Between the Old and New Testaments:** We assume that Christians know the New Testament and so we may spend a disproportionate amount of time in the Old Testament in order to maintain freshness. We may also feel our own weakness in the Old Testament and choose to teach from it in order to learn more about it ourselves. Study of the Old Testament is valuable, but while “the law was given through Moses, grace and truth came through Jesus Christ” (John 1:17). “God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son” (Hebrews 1:1-2). The purpose of the Old Testament is “to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith” (Galatians 3:24). It should be studied to help us understand the New, but people need to major in the gospels, Acts, and the epistles before getting deeply involved in the intricacies of Old Testament law and prophecy.

**Between rational and emotional:** We live in an age in which feeling dominates. People love emotional highs: scary movies, tear jerking stories, exciting roller-coasters, violent sports, throbbing music—anything that stirs the emotions. We are not too keen on things that make us think. The gospel is rational; it appeals to the intellect. When the gospel is explained and understood it will produce emotional responses: sorrow for sin, gratitude for grace, hope of heaven, etc., and these are important to faithfulness. Many, however, want to skip the rational and get to the emotional. Preachers are tempted to accommodate such desires and to spend more time telling stories than citing Scripture. Emotion that is produced by any other means than teaching is emotionalism. Those converted by emotionalism with little knowledge of the truth “have no root, who believe for a while and in time of temptation fall away” (Luke

8:13). A careful exposition of doctrine as contained in the gospels and in the epistles will not have the popular appeal that many preachers seek to generate, but it is the only foundation for strong faith.

**Between rebuking and exhorting:** To preach the word, one must “Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching” (2 Timothy 4:2). Some preachers seem to know only one part of this—rebuking and condemning. Others exhort effectively but are “too nice” to condemn sin. Balanced preaching does both. Actually, rebuke will have little value unless it is balanced with exhortation and encouragement. Note Paul’s expressions of love and confidence in addressing the church in Corinth before getting to the rebukes that he had in mind (1 Corinthians 1:4-9). There is good in almost every individual and congregation, and due note should be taken of it if we are to rebuke what is wrong. And such rebuke is essential from time to time.

**Between information and application:** A popular speech book published some years ago suggested a series of questions a speaker should imagine the audience asking. For example, when he has presented considerable information, he should imagine their saying, “So what?” I must confess that I have listened to several sermons that ended, leaving me asking, “So what?” While the first part of such epistles as Romans, Galatians, Ephesians, and Colossians is given over to instruction in doctrine, the latter part is answering the question, “So what?” If we cannot think of practical applications of a message we present, we should find some other message. People need something to take home with them that will make a difference.

**Between time for family and time for the work of an evangelist:** Preachers have made mistakes in both directions. One preacher neglects his family to the point that his wife and children feel that he cares for everyone else but them. Another takes advantage of the fact that he does not have to punch a clock and spends far more time with his family than the average father can spend. If the church is not to fund education,



neither should it employ a preacher to give full time to homeschooling. Some time so spent is not wrong, but it must not dominate his schedule. A family man may not be able to “warn everyone night and day” to the extent that Paul did (Acts 20:31), but if he is being fully supported by a congregation, he should be giving as much time to gospel work as other men give to their secular responsibilities. After all, whatever they do for the Lord is in addition to the 40 hours they spend on the job. Why should a preacher not spend more than 40 hours in gospel work? One thing that can make his absences from the family beneficial to them is to keep them aware that any sacrifice they have to make is for the Lord.

### **Conclusion**

Writing these things reminds me of how far short I have come of being what I wanted to be as an evangelist. Whatever I have done right is due to the good example and instruction of my father and mother, the encouragement and guidance of godly men and women, and my own feeble efforts to learn and follow the instructions of Scripture. God’s Word is your infallible guide and to whatever extent you find my thoughts and suggestions in harmony with it “commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also” (2 Timothy 2:2). This is God’s plan for the continued preaching of truth, even after you and I have gone to our reward.