

The Preacher's Seminar

Detailed Outline

I. The Preaching Seminar

A. The preacher for the next Sunday shares his thoughts and his sermon with a group of men on a weekday before he preaches.

B. How did this start?

We had two meetings on Sunday mornings: a worship meeting around the Lord's Table, and a sermon meeting. It was during the sermon that we had our Sunday school. The Sunday school lesson was based on the same text as the sermon. In order to prepare the teachers (and also to provide them with teaching they would otherwise miss) we met in the middle of the week to talk about the text for the coming Sunday.

C. How does it work?

1. The group gets a preview of what is coming in the next Sunday.
 - a) We also get to review the sermon from the previous Sunday.
 - b) We have about 6–8 men who gather over breakfast.
 - c) We discuss the sermon and go over study questions.
2. Various perspectives are given.
 - a) Besides the one preaching, the group may be composed of those recognized as gifted teachers, those in training for ministry (a.k.a. seminary students), or elders—all are serious students of Scripture.
 - b) These men will share stories from their own lives or things they have learned themselves that are relevant to the topic and may be a help to the speaker.
3. Many times I have changed my plans for my sermon because of comments made or feedback received during this seminar.

II. Biblical Basis

A. Elder responsibility for teaching content

1. Elders are responsible not only to teach but for the content that is taught also.
2. When we have a review process, it gives us a chance to correct anything that needs to be corrected or address any issues that need to be addressed.
3. I would much rather have someone in that intimate group make me aware of any mistakes or problems than after I've given the message in front of the whole congregation.

4. This is especially important if you have guest speakers, men who are just learning to preach, or seminary students—anyone without much of a track record of preaching.

B. The importance of plurality in leadership

When you bring a diversity of gifts, ministries, perspectives, and even culture, all of those come to bear on the message. Sometimes it is through the eyes of another person that we come to a better understanding of the passage.

C. The principle of interactivity (1 Cor. 14)

The passage doesn't speak about one person speaking all the time and him becoming the focal point for all the teaching. Rather, when a prophet speaks, "let the others pass judgment" (1 Cor. 14:29 NASB). I see a give-and-take interactivity that happens in preaching that I think can be very well-done in the context of this preaching seminar.

D. My view of spiritual gifts

1. There are people who say, "This person has the gift of giving, so he should do the bulk of the giving," or, "This person has the gift of teaching, so he should do most of the teaching."
2. My view of the goal of teaching (indeed, any gift) is not to perform a function in place of others, but to perform a function to the benefit and growth of others (in this area of ministry).
 - a) Thus, a person with the gift of giving does not give so that others do not; ideally, he gives in such a way that the other members of the body become better givers.
 - b) I believe that this is true of the gift of teaching, too. Teachers not only convey content to others, they teach them how to learn and how to better communicate what they learn. A good teacher produces teachers.
3. My goal in teaching is for people to come away saying, "I should have seen that in the text," instead of "I don't know he got that point from the text." Preaching shouldn't be a mystery that only those with lots of training come to the truth.
4. The element of helping others develop their gift of teaching is important and a very good reason to have this preaching seminar.

III. Unanticipated Benefits from the Preaching Seminar

A. A higher quality sermon on Sunday

1. Wrinkles are worked out in advance of the preaching of the sermon, so the end result is improved.
2. My father attended one of our sermon seminars and one the way home he said something to this effect: "If our pastor gave me just 5 minutes to evaluate his sermon, I could help him become a better preacher."

B. Those who participate in the seminar are more likely to participate publicly around the Lord's Table, and the quality of their participation also improves.

Knowing and interacting with the subject matter of the sermon often produces content which can be shared around the Lord's Table. And helping me (or another preacher) become a better communicator helps my "preaching partners" to discover and assimilate better communication skills.

C. It helps produce more and better preachers.

1. Since we are near a prominent seminary, we have had a good number of seminary students who join our fellowship. Many of these young men are preparing for teaching and preaching ministries.
2. I dare say that participation on our preaching seminars has contributed significantly to their development as preachers and teachers. They may also discover that they don't have the gift of teaching!
3. We've had several men who have participated in our seminars who were not seminary trained, but nevertheless developed into excellent communicators of God's Word. To them our seminar served as an alternative to seminary training.

D. The preaching seminar is beneficial in that it tends to humble the preacher.

1. Sometimes we as preachers like to just sit back, and people tell us that we gave a great message. Too many preachers have (and give) the impression that they are God's spokesmen.
2. It is very helpful to have feedback or input beforehand on how we could improve. The seminar (like the preacher's wife) can put apparent success into perspective.

E. The seminar also helps to clarify and confirm spiritual gifting.

The gifts of the participants become more evident in this setting of sharing, critiquing, and encouragement.

F. Our seminar has often been the occasion for sharing and prayer.

1. In the course of sharing breakfast, someone may share a need or a problem with the others, who may then offer counsel or encouragement. But there will often be prayer for special needs as well.
2. I've been at some meetings where we paused more than once to pray about something important. I've also been at a meeting (at least one that I remember) where a person sitting nearby observes that we are praying and asks for prayer for themselves, or someone they know.

IV. Conclusion

At our church, we've found the preaching seminar well worth doing, and I recommend it as something you might want to try in your own church.