Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Insight into a Pastor's Heart, Part 2
Scripture: Selected Scriptures
Code: GTY72

We are going to pick up where we left off and progress a little through this discussion of preaching. I started by saying if you are a pastor, you're a preacher above all else. That is what we are, that is what we do. We are men utterly devoted to displaying God's glory by the exposition of God's Word. Dr. Mayhue asked me if I would, rather than expositing a Scripture for the opening series, if I would just sort of share my heart with you a little bit on preaching, and so I started by giving you at least one point in my little outline here, and that is perspective. And the perspective is that preaching is to be both deep and high. It is to be both profound and transcendent. And we talked a little bit about the fact that we have only one tool to accomplish that, one tool that takes us into the depth of divine truth and lifts us to the heights of praise, and that tool is the Scripture. God has revealed and preserved divine truth in a book of which He is the author.

We suggested to you that when in the past the Reformers discovered this, they began then to isolate truth to the book and therein came across the truth of salvation that brought about the Reformation, and so I remind you that the great discovery of the Reformers was not, first of all, the gospel but the great discovery was, first of all, the inerrant and sufficient and complete Scripture. We talked about the external Word, that it is outside of us and that it is not subject to our intuition, to our experience as to its interpretation; it is not a clay toy. We also suggested that the Holy Spirit is known only and accurately through the Scripture, as is the Son of God, Christ Himself. We have that perspective then as a foundation. As a result, we then give our whole lives to the Word of God. We go deep into it and we lift our people high in praise. And I think I mentioned to you, B. B. Warfield said no one had a profounder sense of God, no one had a profounder sense of God's glory, than John Calvin, and that was the key to his theology and the key to his influence. The same was true with many others.

Now, let me go sort of beyond our talk about perspective, the Bible being the whole content of our preaching, to preparation. Because of this perspective, because we understand that we have one tool which we will commit ourselves to all our life long, this is our calling, to feed ourselves on the Word and then feed our people as a way of life, immense diligence is required in preparation. That's really why you're here in seminary and you're finding out how much preparation you're having to do even for your seminary work, to say nothing of the rest of your life.

Since all true preaching must be expository, not every message has to be an expository message, but all true preaching, even topical preaching, must be the product of exposition, the preacher is therefore called to study. He is called to study in preparation to preach. Study is absolutely critical.

Since this is what you will do all your life, the Bible will be the field that you plow, the mine that you will dig, and that you will do until the Lord takes you home, if you remain faithful. So it requires a radical commitment to the Bible, a radical commitment to studying the Bible. And I suggested to you that the meaning of Scripture is the Scripture. God's message is not known unless it is understood.

Now, there are three obstacles, I would say, to preparation. Assuming you have the Bible, you have the available information, three obstacles remain. Obstacle number one is pride. When someone disdains to study the Word of God diligently, they are perhaps evidencing the idea that they really don't need the Bible, that they are clever enough or ingenious enough to come up with something that is perhaps better or maybe equal to what the Bible has to say. When they choose to take a theological truth and cast it in the package of their own reasoning, taking the Bible out of what we call the Bible dress, that is an act of pride. Fails to understand what I said, I think, to close our time the other day, God's sermons are far more powerful than man's. And they are what God has designed for us to preach, and so if we don't do that, someone who is not a biblical preacher, someone who does not study diligently is evidencing pride. That is one of the obstacles to Bible study. You just don't feel that you need it. You don't feel there's anything there that can take you or anybody else beyond where you can already take people.

A second obstacle to Bible study is unbelief. If you don't believe the Bible or if you don't believe the Bible is inerrant or if you don't believe the Bible is accurate or you don't believe the Bible is inspired, then it's understandable that you would not be committed to its exposition.

There is a third, I think, obstacle to diligent study and that is laziness. You are either proud, unbelieving, or lazy if you fail to diligently study the Word of God. And that's where Luther said the exegete should treat a passage no different than Moses did the rock in the desert, which he smote with his rod until the water gushed out. I can tell you personally that the Bible doesn't always yield up its treasures easily, does it? It's hard work. Luther said, "Languages are the scabbard that contains the sword of the Spirit." He knew that. It was that diligent study of the original languages that yielded to Luther the truth, the truth about Scripture and the truth within Scripture about salvation. Back to Piper's book on sovereign joy, *The Legacy of Sovereign Joy*, Piper says, "Where languages are not prized and pursued, care in biblical observations and biblical thinking and concern for the truth decreases." Why? He says, "Because languages are the tools to think biblically." And he's right. I mean, you have to get back to the languages.

Now, it is not necessary that everyone who ever interprets the Bible know the languages, but if you don't know the languages, you better have access to somebody's information who does know the languages. Better that you should know the languages so you know whether somebody who says they know the languages actually knows the languages. Luther said, "If the languages had not made more positive as to the true meaning of the Word, I might have still remained a chained monk. The Pope, the Sophists, and their anti-Christian empire would have remained unshaken."

What was he saying? He was saying the key to the Reformation was what? Hebrew and Greek. I mean, just so you know, he didn't just fall off a wagon one day, get hit in the head, and come up with justification by grace through faith alone. His "95 Theses" came out of exegesis. The breakthrough of the Reformation can be credited to the power of original languages. And I told you, Luther spent his time doing that, and Calvin, when he had a three-year exile from Geneva, went to Basel and spent three years mastering Hebrew.

R.L. Dabney, in his book *Evangelical Eloquence*, said: "The Great Reformation was emphatically a revival of exposition." The history of the church has turned on an accurate understanding of Scripture. And the people who were able to be the human instruments for those great turnings were people who diligently applied themselves to the study of Scripture. This translates into reading. I have been at this for a long time and I think I read more now than I ever did. It's an insatiable thing with me. I get thirsty for books before I get thirsty for water. My doctor keeps telling me I need to drink more water. But I get reading books and I forget about drinking water. This is what loads you up with the important information necessary for accurate interpretation. Along that line, too, reading insatiably the Scripture first and then interpreting the original and then looking to books which explain the meaning and enrich and enhance your understanding of history and theology.

And I have also learned to read selectively. Now, this morning I had on my desk – this is a typical day. I come in this morning about 8:00 and stacked on my desk are a dozen books. One of them, I will take home because it has a chapter in there about how I killed an elk. It's kind of a crazy little book written by some guy who hunts. But I'll take it home because it's got my name in it and got my little story of killing an elk. The rest of the books, with one exception, I disseminated in all directions. Some in the wastebasket, some to Dr. Mayhue, one on Tom Landry to somebody I know who likes football, and so forth and so forth down through the books. In each case that I get a book, I get an accompanying note with the book, "Please read this and make some comment," you know, so they can use it to promote the book. And I probably was above average today, I kept one book by Iain Murray, the rest I scattered. I have to choose what I'm going to read very selectively.

The publishers at Word sent me this book, this Christian novel that has recently been written. I don't know what the final name of it was. This was a pre-publication copy. It was a sort of John Grisham type novel. I've only read one of those that a friend gave me and asked if I would read it, called *The Testament*, something I wouldn't normally read about a guy who left his money to a lady missionary in Brazil and it's purely recreational, and I read it and I thought, "You know, that took a lot of time and it didn't really do anything for me." I confess the guy can write and it's entertaining but I really don't need to be entertained a lot. I have a very, very minimum need to be entertained. Really, I need very little entertainment. About five minutes of "So you want to be a millionaire" is about all I need.

And then recently Word sent me another novel, and it was really a very, very complex plot written by a guy who was very, very clever and they said, “Please read this, it’s important that you read this, we want you to evaluate this.” And again I came out of that saying, “I will never do that again” because it was another waste of time for me. Plus, if you read those novels, the only value they have, for me, is vocabulary, so I tend to read a little more slowly because I do gain some enhancement of my vocabulary by reading. That is one thing reading will do for you, it will enrich your vocabulary. So I’m sort of reading it more carefully because I’m trying to find some redeeming virtue and enhance my vocabulary, whereas normally when there are other things that can enrich me, I read very fast, I read very rapidly, I’m not looking for individual words, I’m just going right down the middle of the page and I’m capturing the thought of the paragraph, and as I capture the thought of the paragraph, I stop where I want to stop and read the details.

So you need – if you’re going to be studying all your life and if you’re going to be focusing on interpreting the Word of God – and, you know, in some ways it’s more difficult today than it was in Luther’s day or Calvin’s day or the day of the Puritans, although they were filling it up pretty fast, and that is because there’s so much more material today. You just have to be very, very selective and you have to read very rapidly. Learn to read rapidly. Learn to read what you want to read, what you need to read, not necessarily everything that’s on the page.

Then I – after I have read the Scripture, which I do continually and in preparation for a message, reading it continually and then getting back into the original and dealing with that, and then reading as widely, as high and deep as I can on the themes and subjects, whether it’s in commentaries or related sections of theology or whatever it might be to enhance all of that, the work goes from all of that reading and absorbing to writing. And I’m a real believer that you need to write whatever you’re going to preach. You need to write it out. More than just an outline, you need to write it out because writing it out is a clarifying process. If you’re using a computer, you need to type it out or to put it into your computer. That process helps you to see the reality of the flow of thought. And so for me, it’s a first draft, second draft, third draft before I get it where I want it. Now, I do that every week of my life and have for years and years and years for at least two messages and often more than that.

This is a lifetime of hard work, but the product that is yielded in that hard work brings glory to God and salvation and sanctification to people. And I – again I was going back – you’re getting the fruit of my recent reading – going back in to Calvin and reading a little bit about Calvin’s productivity. He wrote Tracts, he wrote the Institutes. The commentaries are obviously many. Calvin wrote all of these things at the same time he was giving lectures. As a pattern, he preached ten sermons every two weeks, five a week. All of it Scripture exposition. All of it based upon his knowledge of the original languages. Everything he did was exposition of the Bible. Luther, between 1510 and 1546, preached 3,000 sermons, frequently preaching many days a week and frequently preaching many times a day. And for these men, there’s no rest from studying, producing, and preaching.

Now, Calvin's original Institutes, I think he was about 23 when they came out and there were five different editions of the Institutes, which he continually refined and refined and refined and refined and refined and refined at the same time he was producing new material. At the same time, they were also engaged in debate. They were engaged in having to confront opposition, confront error, and dialogue with people who were in those errors.

It is amazing to think about. At the same time, they were dealing with all their personal issues of life. Wives, children, the death of children. I think it was Luther's wife who gave him six children. Some died, and he preached to all of them on Sunday afternoon when he catechized them. In 1520, Luther wrote 133 works. In 1522, 130; in 1523, 183 – that's one every other day.

So all they did was deal with the Scripture and preach and teach and write. And it took a tremendous amount of work. I'm not expecting all of you to do that. Some of you may approximate that. But I'm just saying it's that kind of work on which the history of the church turns. And I go back to where I started with this point today, what keeps people from working hard in ministry is, one, pride. That is a serious thing, isn't it? To assume that the Scripture doesn't have that much to offer you in your sermons. That could one excuse for not studying hard. The second one would be you really don't believe the Word of God. The third one is what? Laziness.

Now, let me get a third point in here. Perspective, preparation, and I know I'm sort of meandering a little bit, but I – this is one of the things you do when you have a lot to say, you sort of edit as you go in your head – I want to talk about pace. I want to talk about pace. I'm often questioned as to why it takes me so long to go through a book. And I always remember the – I can't remember his name, but I remember reading about a preacher in New England who was a sort of American Puritan who pastored a church, I think it was for over 20 years, and he came there and started in Isaiah and 20 some years later he died in Isaiah 8. Now, this is true. I'm not saying that that really is a suitable pace. It seems to me a bit slow. That would be sort of like Barnhouse's work on Romans, which is Romans and everything else in the Bible you need to know. It's a tangential approach, you know, any word introduces a whole paradigm of biblical truth and off you go. Martyn Lloyd-Jones can be a bit that way, can't he? I mean I don't think it's absolutely necessary to take the Sermon on the Mount and develop it into a thousand pages.

Certainly there's nothing wrong with doing that, but I do think pace – I think it is something just to say this: It's better to go slow than fast. Slower is better than faster. Why? Because deeper is better than shallower, because thorough is better than superficial. And listen to this: The goal is never homiletical. That is never the goal of the sermon. Homiletics is a very insignificant player in sermon preparation. It is merely a frame to put the picture in, it's not the picture. And yet there are people whose great satisfaction in their preaching is found in their homiletics. That is never the goal. The goal is to understand the text, and deeper is better than shallower and thorough is better than

superficial and slower is better than faster.

I heard a radio preacher yesterday as I was driving in – no, it was actually in the afternoon, I was driving over to see the doctor – and he was saying, “We want to take the bird’s-eye view of this text.” Well, there’s a place for a bird’s-eye view, that’s the idea that you’re simply looking at an overview of the text, and he said, you know, “These eight verses mean this and these eight verses mean this and these seven verses mean this and these five verses mean this.” That is not an ending point, however, that is a starting point, right? That is merely a recognition of context. But that could not be a suitable way to exposit a text.

I visited a church – never forget it. I visited a church and the preacher was going through Matthew. And the sermon that I heard was Matthew 24 to 28. I never forgot it. And it lasted about 40 minutes. If you’re teaching an outline course or a survey course or you’re introducing a book by giving a bird’s-eye view overview, that may be a way to start. But that is not a way to teach the Bible. You have to go slow because you have to go deep. You want to be thorough. I say to myself all the time, “Maybe I could speed this up so I can finish the New Testament before I’m dead,” but I actually think the way I’m going and I – the doctor told me yesterday as far as he knows I’m not dying and far as I know, I can’t feel a thing, so I feel okay. The pace I’m going now, interestingly enough, at the pace I’m going now, probably another six years, seven years in Luke, that’ll take me to 68, and then I can do Mark in seven and I can be done at 75 and go to heaven and I will have done the whole New Testament.

Some guy asked me recently, “When you finish that, are you going to do the Old Testament?” I said, “Sure.” Be 190 when I’m done. No, but, you know, it’s sort of an interesting thing. Providentially, should I survive, it will sort of get me where I need to be age-wise and finish what I had hoped to be able to do in my lifetime. That, maybe all I can say about that is maybe that God has that in His providential plan. But my goal in preaching is never to fit anything into a time schedule. Sometimes preachers will say to me, “Do you plan your year?” How do you plan your preaching year? I say, “I don’t plan my preaching year; I plan for next Sunday.” Because I really don’t know until I get into the text how much I’m going to be able to cover. If I took a book and broke it down, if I arbitrarily took a book like Philippians or whatever and said, “Okay, I’m going to break this down into X number of sermons and preach those sermons over this many weeks” and cast that in concrete, then I have imposed that overview on the text, right? I have imposed that. I really don’t want to do that, and it’s very often the case that I find in the preaching of a sermon itself that I am exposed to things that I hadn’t prepared or planned to say, and it changes what I’m going to say the following week.

So I never pre-plan the timing of my messages, the number of messages, or the weeks in which I will complete a book. I go with what I feel the text is yielding to me, and I actually don’t know what it’s yielding to me until I get into it. But I’m never under the sovereignty of the homiletics. I’m never under the tyranny of the outline. And I believe it is far better to go slow than it is to go fast. We don’t need the quick look; we need the deep understanding. Pace is very important.

In Acts 20, the apostle Paul says that he kept back nothing, he held nothing back. And John Calvin preached steadily through book after book of the Bible, he never wavered from this approach to preaching for 25 years there in Geneva, with the exception of a few high festivals and special occasions. One writer says, “On Sunday, he took always the New Testament, except for a few Psalms on Sunday afternoons. During the week, it was always the Old Testament. The records show fewer than half a dozen exceptions for the sake of the Christian year.” Listen to this: “He almost entirely ignored Christmas and Easter.” A man after my own heart, you know? They can chop up the church calendar with all these things and get you out of the flow of exposition, Mother’s Day, Father’s Day, Grandparents’ Day, whatever day, this day, that day, and, you know, some guys just bounce around from pole to pole on that. He almost entirely ignored Christmas and Easter in the selection of his text.

To give you some idea of the scope of his pulpit in the sense of how he preached in terms of pace, he began a series on Acts on August 25, 1549, and ended it in March of 1554. After Acts, he went to the epistle to Thessalonians where he preached 46 sermons. In Corinthians, he preached 186; the pastoral epistles, 86; Galatians 43; Ephesians 48, and he did that between – he did that up until, I should say, I don’t know exactly when he started that, but he finished in 1549 – 1559, I’m sorry. Then in the spring of that year, he began the harmony of the gospels and he never finished it. Five years later, he died. Died in May of 1564. On the weekdays during that season, he preached 159 sermons on Job, 200 on Deuteronomy, 353 sermons on Isaiah, 123 on Genesis, and so on and so on. What I’m saying to you gentlemen is this is the kind of diligence, the kind of study, the kind of production upon which the history of the church turns.

Someone said one of the clearest illustrations of this commitment to preaching expositionally was a self-conscious choice on Calvin’s part that on Easter day 1538, after preaching, he left the pulpit of St. Peter’s, banished by the city council, returned in September of 1541, three years later, and that’s when he picked up the exposition of the very next verse. Why was he so committed to this? Three reasons are suggested for this by John Piper. He says three reasons are suggested as to why he was so committed to what Piper calls sequential expository preaching. One, Calvin believed that the Word of God is a lamp that had been taken away from the churches. He said in his own personal testimony, “Thy Word, which ought to have shown on all Thy people like a lamp, was taken away or at least suppressed as to us. And now, O Lord, what remains to a wretch like me but earnestly to supplicate Thee, not to judge according to my desserts, that fearful abandonment of Thy Word from which in Thy wondrous goodness Thou has at least delivered me,” end quote. Calvin decided that the continuous exposition of books of the Bible was the best way to overcome what he called the fearful abandonment of God’s Word.

This is that kind of time, isn’t it? When there is a fearful abandonment of God’s Word. And the sad truth is, men who have been trained to do Bible exposition are joining those who have abandoned the

Bible. And what needs to happen today is the very opposite. The continuous exposition of books of the Bible was the best way to overcome that.

Secondly, Parker, writing about Calvin, says that Calvin had a second reason why he did sequential expository preaching. Calvin had a horror of those who preached their own ideas in the pulpit. Why do you think he developed that? Well, he developed that because he was so profoundly involved in the Scripture. He said – quote: “When we enter the pulpit, it is not so that we may bring our own dreams and fancies with us,” end quote. He believed that by expounding the Scriptures as a whole, he would be forced to deal with all that God wanted to say, not just what he wanted to say. And sequential exposition through the Bible guarantees that you will say everything that God wants said.

Thirdly, third reason for sequential expository preaching on Calvin’s part, is this: Calvin saw the majesty of God in the Word of God. He really believed that the Word of God was the word of God and that in it the glory of God was revealed. In sermon number 61 on Deuteronomy, he challenged pastors of his day and ours. He wrote, “Let the pastors boldly dare all things by the Word of God. Let them constrain all the power, glory, and excellence of the world to give place to and obey the divine majesty of this Word. Let them enjoin everyone by it from the highest to the lowest. Let them edify the body of Christ. Let them devastate Satan’s reign. Let them pastor the sheep, kill the wolves, instruct and exhort the rebellious. Let them bind and loose thunder and lightning, if necessary, but let them do it all according to the Word of God.”

A fourth “P” in my outline now: personal – personal. I’m just trying to help you to see how I view this preaching. To me, this whole opportunity to study, the perspective is there, the preparation is there, the pace is there, but coming down through that, this is a very personal thing for me. I’ve said this through the years, I say it again: I never study the Bible to make a sermon. Never. I never approach the Scripture to make a sermon. The sermon is the last thing that I do. I study, not to make a sermon; I study to know the Word of God and the God of the Word. I seek the truth for my own soul. I study for my own soul. I go deep because that’s where I want to go so that I can be exalted in worshiping the Lord.

It’s always been this way and I don’t really know why, why people are motivated the way they’re motivated. I don’t know why I am motivated the way I am. I remember as a very young boy, I was in junior high, and I had this kind of aching down inside of me to understand the Bible. My father preached the Bible faithfully, but that was seemingly not enough for me. I just had this aching inside for something that I thought was there I hadn’t yet known. I was about in junior high. I was a typical junior high guy, I was in trouble like everybody else, but God had planted something in my heart. And somebody gave me a book called *The Imitation of Christ* by Thomas à Kempis, which is really a mystical book. But I began to read it – imagine a junior high kid getting a hold of that – I started reading it, and it took me to depths of contemplation about God that I had really never ever seen.

And then somebody gave me a book by E. M. Bounds. You know that book on prayer. And that talks about people wearing holes in wooden floors with their knees and that kind of thing and hungering for God. And I'm this kid reading these mystical things and wondering what kind of depth of understanding of God these people had. I have come to know that not all that was going on in these mystical approaches was necessarily valid but that was what captivated me.

That nagging need to know the Scripture took me into college. First thing I did was I took a Greek minor. All I could get in college was a Greek minor, but I took a minor in Greek because I figured if I'm going to learn the New Testament, I'm going to have to know the original language. So as a freshman, I took ten units; as a sophomore, I took six; and I finished up with 24 or 26 units in my college. The last – third and fourth year of Greek, I was the only student in the class. I was tutored third- and fourth-year Greek because I still had this – and it wasn't that I wanted to know Greek, it wasn't that I wanted to memorize all that stuff, it wasn't that I wanted to go over all those cards, and everything in the whole language is hopelessly irregular. None of us particularly enjoy that. But it was that I knew that that was the key to unlock what I needed to know and what I wanted to know. My heart was hungry to know.

And then I went off to seminary and I got a hold of a book called *The Existence and Attributes of God* by Stephen Charnock, and I got submerged in that at the beginning of my seminary and I still haven't been able to come up. That thing goes on and on and on. I mean, you can drown in that. There was just something inside of me. At the same time, I had all the normal issues of life and, you know, very involved in all kinds of activities and carrying on. But down inside was this somewhat strong appetite to know things. And then I came across some psychological study when I was in seminary that said that the drive to know was stronger than the sex drive or the drive to eat, according to some psychological test. Well, some people might question that. I'm not sure that I'm in a position to say that, but it does indicate that it's a strong, strong desire, and I think the Holy Spirit had cranked it up a few notches in my case.

And so when I got into the – when I graduated from seminary, I was – see, I graduated from college when I was 21, I guess, graduated from seminary at 24, so I was too young to be any good to anybody. So no church would want me. I didn't want to particularly be a youth pastor because I wanted to exposit the Scripture. In those days, a youth pastor – well I'm just telling you, in those days a youth pastor, they handed you a volleyball, you know, and said, "You're the youth pastor, plan a beach party." The paradigm of a youth pastor was not anything like we've established here, and so I said, "I just want to preach, I just want to preach, I just want to exposit the Word." But nobody wanted me. So I wound up going on the road. I began to speak all over everywhere to young people's groups, but I was frustrated because they always wanted to hear the same stuff, and you get those ten "sugar stick" sermons and you can give them in your sleep. And I was very unsatisfied. At one point I began to ask the Lord, "Please, get me in a place where I can learn the Word, I need to be

studying the Word all the time." A church contacted me and then decided I was too young, and then Grace contacted me, and, of course, they had two pastors who died and they wanted a young one and so that was my primary qualification.

Really, it was the truth. They had two widows on their hands and that gets expensive. So they said, you know, "We want a healthy young guy," and so forth. So I came here, and I was so excited because I was going to be able to study every day because I had this appetite. I've never lost that. To me, still what drives me is not the sermon but what drives me is the revelation, the discovery. In fact – now I'm going to tell you the real secrets. Preaching is not my greatest joy; it's work. And in all honesty, many Sunday mornings when I get up, if I had my choice, I'd just as soon not preach. I'd rather go hear somebody else. I'd like to come and just sit and worship the Lord and hear somebody preach. It's work, and sometimes I'm tired, sometimes I don't feel well, sometimes I have a stomachache, and it's not easy to go to someplace like Belarus and teach the entire New Testament nine hours a day for six days in a row. That part of it is work. What is never work to me is the discovery. That's the joy, that's the exhilaration. And I always study to discover, and that's why my information is better than my homiletics. I confess – I confess. My content is better than my homiletics.

I was doing a pastors' seminar in Montreal. I went up there for – oh, about nine trips up there. They started a seminary. It's a French seminary, *Séminaire Biblique de Quebec*. Quebec, French, is the only place in western civilization where there is a first-generation church. Okay? The Catholics dominated Quebec. In the 1960s and early '70s, the Catholic Church was putting Protestant missionaries in prison, so the church in Quebec now is a first-generation church. Well, what happened was churches were starting to explode, and they didn't have any mature people to be pastors, so they threw a seminary together, and they got the brightest young men who had felt called to preach, and they made them pastors over these little congregations. Churches were starting like 25 a week, or 25 every few weeks, and just boom, boom, boom – everywhere, as the French people began to respond to the truth.

Anyway, so they wanted to pull these guys out of their churches because they didn't have any training, so they pulled them out for a week here and week there and a week here and a week there and a week here and a week there, and some of us would go up. Don Carson – who, by the way, speaks fluent French because he's a Québécois, he was born there – and myself and others would go up and get these guys and we'd have this – these guys who were baby Christians, maybe been saved four or five years, they were the pastor and they wanted to just suck in all the stuff.

I remember I did a week on expository preaching. I told them how to do it, you know, just really the way to do it. And then we had a Q&A on the final day and the first question, this guy gets up and he says – in French – simultaneous translation with electronic, you know, ear thing – so he says to me, he says, "Pastor MacArthur," he says, "we have heard what you have said and we have listened to

your tapes because we can speak some English and we want to know why you don't preach the way you have told us?" So I said – "Well, yeah, I know, that is a problem." You know, I know how to organize. I just also can't get past the – I can't get past the dynamic of preaching and I will not be confined by homiletics. So what starts out as something well organized, skillfully crafted, turns into a meandering series. But that's because I am always the servant of the content, never of the outline. So I said, "You know, look, I will tell you that content is king and homiletics is the servant, that's all." And that's because I study to know the truth.

Well, just another thought, and you can follow it up yourself. There's another "P" in the list: power – power. You never want to go into the Scripture without – before you go there, go to the throne. "Open my eyes that I might behold wondrous things from Thy law." Where is that found? Psalm 119. "Open my eyes that I might behold wondrous things from Thy law." That's your prayer, men. That's your prayer. Or you could pray verse 27. You know what that one says? "Make me understand Your precepts." Or verse 34, "Give me understanding that I may observe Your law." And there's several more, verse 35, 36, 37. And who is the agent that you're calling upon? The Holy Spirit, who illuminates.

More, I could say, but I'll leave it at that. This has been a constant lifelong persistence for me. That's another "P" you can put in the list: persistence. Nothing's ever been able to change it. And what I mean by that, you know, everything, it seems, through my ministry – I've lived long enough now to know everything comes against the place of the Word of God in the church. Everything. Everything that is bad for the church ultimately has to pull the Word down, right? Got to be replaced by charismania or psychology or contemporary culture or whatever it is, but it all wants to pull down the Scripture. But you just have to be absolutely relentless against your own weakness. I don't know if you've ever read this, Calvin suffered tremendously with physical problems, migraines. Spitting blood and gout he had, and he also had kidney stones which gave him, he said – this is an interesting old paragraph from Calvin: "They gave me exquisite pain. At length, not without the most painful strainings, I was delivered and my degree of suffering was somewhat mitigated, but such was the size of the kidney stones that they lacerated me, and the hemorrhage could only be arrested by an injection of milk through a syringe." He really suffered and yet he was so relentless and so persistent.

There's another "P" and then I'll let you work on this one: persecution. I certainly can't stand with some of those men in the past, but I'll tell you this: If you preach the Word faithfully, you're going to get a negative reaction. You're going to get some hostility. But the apostle Paul said to Timothy, "Suffer hardship along with me as a good soldier of Jesus Christ." Right?

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