

The Gift of Preaching--Advice to a Young Preacher

by John Newton

Preaching is a gift from God that requires humility, diligence, and trust in His sufficiency and ability.

Scripture: Exodus 4:11, Proverbs 4:23, Isaiah 40:31, Matthew 10:19, 2 Timothy 4:2

Topics: "Effective Preaching", "Spiritual Guidance"

Description

John Newton advises a preacher on the importance of gradually transitioning from reading sermons to speaking from the heart, relying wholly on the Lord for guidance and inspiration. He encourages the preacher to diligently seek God's help and unction in preaching, emphasizing that preaching is a gift from above that grows with exercise. Newton urges the preacher to be plain and familiar in language to reach even the most ignorant souls, reminding him to be vigilant in guarding his heart and seeking God's strength through prayer.

Transcript

July 25, 1772.

Dear Sir,

I am glad to hear you are accommodated at D-- where I hope your best endeavours will not be wanting to make yourself agreeable, by a humble, inoffensive, and circumspect behaviour.

I greatly approve of your speaking from one of the lessons in the afternoon: you will find it a great help to bring you gradually to that habit and readiness of expression which you desire; and you will, perhaps, find it make more impression upon your hearers, than what you read to them from the pulpit. However, I would not discourage or dissuade you from reading your sermons for a time. The chief inconvenience respecting yourself is that which you mention. A written sermon is something to lean upon; but it is best for a preacher to lean wholly upon the Lord. But set off gradually; the Lord will not despise the day of small things: pray heartily, that your spirit may be right with Him, and then all the rest will be well. And keep on writing: if you compose one sermon, and should find your heart enlarged to preach another, still your labour in writing will not be lost. If your conscience bears you witness, that you desire to serve the Lord, His promise (now He has brought you into the ministry) of a sufficiency and ability for the work, belongs to you as much as to another.

Your borrowing help from others may arise from a diffidence of yourself, which is not blameable, but it may arise, in part, likewise from a diffidence of the Lord, which is hurtful. I wish you may get encouragement from that word, Exodus iv. 11, 12. It was a great encouragement to me. While I would press you to diligence in every rational means for the improvement of your stock in knowledge, and your ability of utterance, I would have you remember, that preaching is a gift. It cannot be learned by industry and imitation only, as a man may learn to make a chair or a table: it comes from above; and if you patiently wait upon God, He will bestow this gift upon you, and increase it in you. It will grow by exercise. "To him that hath shall be given, and he shall have more abundantly." And be chiefly solicitous to obtain an unction upon what you do say. Perhaps those sermons in which you feel yourself most deficient, may be made most useful to others. I hope you will endeavour likewise to be plain and familiar in your language and manner, though not low or vulgar, so as to suit yourself as much as possible to the apprehensions of the most ignorant people. There are in all congregations some persons exceedingly ignorant: yet they have precious souls, and the Lord often calls such. I pray the Lord to make you wise to win souls. I hope He will.

You cannot be too jealous of your own heart; but let no such instances as Mr -- discourage you. Cry to Him who is able to hold you up, that you may be safe, and you shall not cry in vain. It is indeed an alarming thought, that a man may pray and preach, be useful and acceptable for a time, and yet be nothing. But still the foundation of God standeth sure.

I have a good hope, that I shall never have cause to repent the part I have taken in your concerns. While you keep in the path of duty, you will find it the path of safety. Be punctual in waiting upon God in secret. This is the life of everything, the only way, and the sure way, of maintaining and renewing your strength.

I am, &c.

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