

The Importance of the Pastor's Preaching

Danger Ahead: Timely Cautions

By Nicole Whitacre

The beautifully illustrated children's version of Pilgrim's Progress is aptly named "Dangerous Journey." And so is the Christian life. "Through many dangers, toils, and snares, I have already come" wrote John Newton, looking back on his life. Sometimes these dangers come in the form of active threats, persecution, and trial. But dangers also come disguised as easier, more effective, or more exciting paths; in the end, though, they are anything but.

In John Bunyan's original Pilgrim's Progress, Christian and Hopeful are brought by the shepherds to the mountain called "Caution" where they are shown men wandering aimlessly in a meadow. When Christian asked the shepherds the meaning of this sight he was told, "Because the right way was rough in that place, they chose to go out of it into that meadow, and there were taken by Giant Despair."

That is often how it goes, isn't it? "Because the right way was rough in that place" and the meadow seemed so close and lush, we wander. So as Christian women today, what dangers should we be on the lookout for? Where are we tempted to wander from the straight and narrow way of God's Word?

Up next here at girl talk, we want to do a short series addressing some potential "dangers"—not those of persecution or trial, but of the more subtle kind. Specifically ways in which we may be tempted, through the "rough places" of cultural pressures and our wayward hearts to neglect the clear teaching of Scripture.

We present these cautions to our own souls first, and only then offer them to you as fellow travelers. Even as we have discussed them amongst ourselves I have found myself convicted afresh, sobered by how easily I drift.

Now I know, "Timely Cautions" may not seem like a very cheery subject, but avoiding danger is about finding the path of life, a path that shines brighter and brighter until full day (Pr. 4:18).

Caution: Don't Neglect Your Pastor's Preaching

By Carolyn Mahaney

Our first caution may surprise or confuse you; it may seem irrelevant or uninteresting. But it isn't a paid political announcement. No pastors asked us to drum up support for their weekly sermons.

We put out this caution flag because we believe that the greatest need for Christian women today (and in every day and age) is to be women of the Word.

That is why, since starting *girltalk*, we've stressed the importance of faithfully reading God's Word and applying it to our lives. The Five O'Clock Club exists for this reason—to encourage women to do whatever it takes to make time daily to read God's Word and pray (Deut. 8:3b).

That is also why we frequently recommend content from the Sunday sermon at our church. Not because it's Monday and we have nothing new to say, but because we want to show that our blog has a context: Everything we write is grounded in, guided by, and flows out of the preaching ministry of our local church pastors.

You see, we believe that God is a speaking God (Gen. 1, Is. 55:10-11), that He has spoken to us through His Word, the Bible (Ps. 19, 2 Tim. 3:16-17), and that God has called and gifted certain men to preach and lead the church through the proclamation of that Word (Acts 6:4, 1 Tim. 1:13).

Do we want to hear God?

“God’s standard way of securing and maintaining His person-to-person communication with us, His human creatures, is through the agency of persons whom He sends to us as His messengers...Such were the prophets and apostles, and such supremely was Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son...That is the succession in which preachers today are called to stand.” ~J.I. Packer

Preachers are messengers from God. Not infallible, but called. Called to deliver God's Word to God's people. So if we are to be women of the Word, we must be devoted to our pastor's teaching (Acts 2:42, Rom 10:14-17).

Through the proclamation of God's Word, we hear God speaking to us. We are convicted of sin and called to worship. We are instructed and encouraged. Together, we behold the cross.

Since the preaching of God's Word is so profound, we need to ask ourselves: *Are we in danger of neglecting our pastor's preaching?*

Sunday Morning Reality

by Nicole Whitacre

It was raining buckets Sunday morning, and I woke up late because one of my children had kept me up during the night.

As I reheated my coffee—which had already brewed, stayed warm, and shut off before I woke up—I stared at my kitchen counters which were covered with grocery bags full of non-perishables I had yet to put away from last night's grocery run.

After a swig or two of Sumatra, I managed to find a pair of not-too wrinkled pants for my oldest son that he had prematurely thrown in the laundry hamper, and miraculously dug up four hair bands from the bottom of the pretties box because my girls wanted matching pig-tails (they are sisters, after all).

Of course, I couldn't find anything for me to wear. And did I mention it was raining buckets?

I raced around, getting everyone ready for church, and the mess seemed to grow around me: cereal bowls unwashed, clothes on the floor, barrettes spilled everywhere. I knew it would take all afternoon to straighten up.

The thought passed through my head *that what I really need, more than anything right now, is a quiet morning at home.*

But on its heels came another, truer thought: *No, what I really need, more than anything right now, is to hear preaching from God's Word.*

“Yes, I hear the sermon; but who is speaking? The minister? No indeed! You do not hear the minister. True, the voice is his; but my God is speaking the Word which he preaches or speaks. Therefore, I should honor the Word of God that I may become a good pupil of the Word.” ~Martin Luther

This, this is what I really need, more than anything.

I need to hear God speak to me.

And this conviction changes everything. For when I believe that God is speaking to me, each and every Sunday, through His Word, delivered by my pastor, then there is no moment of the week I look forward to more.

My pastor's sermon is no longer an inconvenient interruption to my self-focused and hectic life; it is not one of a smorgasbord of equally good options whereby I can receive God's Word; it is not boring or irrelevant or, at best mildly entertaining.

No, for one hour or so each week we gather to hear God speak to us through his Word. There is nothing we need more, nothing we should anticipate more.

God is speaking!

How quickly I lose sight of the wonder of this truth.

But my eagerness to hear God's Word preached on Sunday is a measure of my hunger for God's Word. If I am passionate about the Bible, I will be passionate about hearing God's Word preached. If I am a "good pupil" of the Word then I will want to sit under gospel-centered, biblically faithful preaching more than I want to get some rest, clean my house, go shopping.

In other words, I can't be passionate about the Word of God and indifferent to the preaching of God's Word at the same time.

To love God's Word is to love to hear God's Word preached.

And this is what I need, more than anything.

Sunday School

By Nicole Whitacre

Did you know that in Scripture, God speaks directly to us as women about how to listen to our pastor's sermon? 1 Timothy 2:11 says: "*Let a woman learn quietly with all submissiveness.*"

Now I know this is a lighting rod of a verse here. It is an often misunderstood and misapplied passage of Scripture and there is no way to adequately address the controversial points of interpretation in this brief post.*

But as the Literary Study Bible suggests, it is “useful to identify the underlying principles and attitudes that Paul commends (especially studiousness and submission).” What two qualities should characterize our attitude toward the Sunday morning sermon? *Studiousness and submission.*

In all the debate about what “quietly” means, what is often overlooked is the imperative in this verse for women to “learn.” We are to come to church as *learners*. We are students, and we should be eager to learn from God’s Word through the gift of preaching.

First this command addresses those of us who may admit we don’t have a strong appetite for the study of theology. Maybe you think of yourself as more creative and artsy, not a big reader or academically inclined. But while it is true that God has given us all different gifts, interests, and personalities, when it comes to God’s Word we should all be should all be *learners*, we should all be *studious*.

We should all be graduate students on Sunday morning. Our mindset should be that of the enthusiastic student—on the edge of our seat, absorbing all that God would have to say to us, poised to listen, digest, and then apply what we hear throughout the week. And if a love for doctrine does not come naturally to us, lets ask God to produce in our hearts what only he can: a Spirit-born love for the preaching of God’s Word.

But this command cuts both ways. It also has something to say to the naturally studious among us. Maybe you have extensive Bible knowledge or have even been to seminary. Or maybe you have grown up in an excellent church and have sat under the teaching of a more experienced pastor than the one who is currently preaching. Maybe you have led Bible studies or are considered to be a gifted teacher of other women.

For all of us, Paul’s insistence that we come to church to “learn” may help correct a temptation to spiritual pride that “puffs up” (1 Cor. 8:1). It reminds us that we are all to sit under the preaching of God’s Word, not first as “teachers” but as “learners.” We are to bring our hearts in submission to the Word of God and this is a good and intentionally humbling exercise for us, which is exactly how God has ordained it to be.

This is not to say, of course, that we check our discernment at the door or that we never humbly offer a suggestion or critique to our pastor. But it does mean that we come to hear the faithful preaching of God’s Word as *humble learners*, eager to sit under the authority and instruction of God’s Word.

“In all the other contexts in which we teach and admonish one another and speak the word of Christ to one another (Col. 3:16), we are much more likely to

submit and not evade by endless discussion, if we have as our top meeting priority (alongside prayer) sitting together under the preached word.”
~Christopher Ash

So let's ask ourselves: Do we come to Sunday morning service eager to *learn* from God's Word through our pastor's preaching?

God Himself is eager to teach us through His Word. What an exciting classroom!

“All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.” 2 Tim. 3:16-17

*For those interested in a thorough treatment of this passage, I highly commend *Women in the Church: A Fresh Analysis of 1 Timothy 2:9-15*, ed. Kostenberger, Schreiner, Baldwin.

How to Get the Most Out of Preaching

By Nicole Whitacre

I was running errands with my kids yesterday, and playing our favorite in-the-car game: Ask Mommy 100 Questions Before We Get Home. In between the usual “What's for dinner?” and “What does that sign say?” my son Jude threw out a new one:

Why is the Bible so important?

To which I was very happy to explain that the Bible is *the* most important thing, because it is the very Word of God.

I believe this with my whole heart and I dearly want my children to believe it too. But the thought struck me—do I always *live* like it is true?

For if the Bible is the Word of God and the most important thing in my life, then the preaching of that Word should be the most important event of my week. And if the preaching event is the most important event in my week, then it should shape the priorities in my week. Right?

But to my shame I often plan my week around my to-do list or my children's activities. Or I find myself looking forward to a family gathering or coffee with a

friend more than the preaching of God's Word. Although I faithfully attend church on Sunday, I sometimes show up tired or distracted.

And then I don't draw the spiritual benefits God has ordained from the preaching of His Word.

So here are a few practical habits or disciplines, that when I am faithful to apply them, help me to keep the most important event of my week most important.

Prepare

I need to prepare my heart and my schedule. The Puritans taught me this years ago. They would begin to prepare their hearts on Saturday evening in anticipation of the Sunday morning service. We can prepare our hearts by reading the passage our pastor will be preaching from, spending time in prayer to quiet our hearts, confess sin, and pray for illumination. We can prepare practically (unlike I did a few weeks ago!) by getting food and clothing planned and set out to make for a peaceful morning. We can avoid scheduling multiple events late into the evening that leave us rushed and tired Sunday morning.

Listen

While the fellowship that occurs before and after a Sunday meeting is a visible sign of the health of our relationships with the people of God, preaching should be our first listening priority. This may mean we avoid the temptation to check our smartphone or let our mind wander during the service. That we ask God for grace to focus solely on what the preacher is saying. I know for Mom's with infants or small, clingy children it can be difficult if not impossible to listen to the Sunday sermon. Take heart—this season will soon be over and if you are caring for a fussy child you are doing what God has called you to do. But be alert to ways you too can make listening a priority. Maybe you can adjust your infant's feeding schedule or bring toys/snacks for your child. If you are in a separate room with a video feed, make listening to the sermon (and not chatting with friends) the most important goal of the hour. And thanks to modern technology, you can benefit from listening to your pastor's sermon some other time during the week.

Apply

Several godly "older" women I know make it a priority to review the Sunday morning sermons in their Monday morning quiet time. This is a habit I've been sporadic at but always benefit from when I do. One of my favorite practices is choose a good commentary to help me study the book of the Bible our pastors our preaching from in my quiet times. And finally, don't take lightly the conviction or encouragement to change that comes to you during the preaching of God's Word.

Act on it! This is the Holy Spirit speaking to you through His Word and He is eager to help you apply.

One more thought—It is sobering for me to remember that my children are watching. I want to do more than just *tell* Jude that the Bible is the most important thing to me. I want to live it.

Now this list is by no means exhaustive, but I have stuffed a bunch of ideas in one post. I don't mean that to be overwhelming—especially to moms with young kids. Starting with myself, I want to spur us all on to a greater love of God's Word. Let's start small but let's start. Let's make the preaching of God's Word the most important part of our week.

A Testimony: Grateful for My Pastor's Sermon

By Nicole Whitacre

So how did you benefit from your pastor's sermon yesterday? One girltalk reader wrote in to tell us how:

I'm a 20 year old student at the University of Arkansas. I attend and serve in faithfully a wonderful, Christ-centered church, so when you began the latest series on preaching, I must confess that I paid little attention. I thought, "Oh, I don't really need this. This is for those other people that look for excuses not to go to church or are always critical of their pastors' sermons. That's not me." So I lightly skimmed the articles, closed the webpages, and went on with my life.

Then, this morning, it all came flooding in. When I sat down [for the sermon], my pastor continued our series on Zephaniah. I almost immediately tuned out. All my homework, life questions, and even convictions of my own sin swarmed and clung to me like so many wasps of hell, with only one purpose—distract me from the sermon.

Praise be to God, it only took Him a matter of moments to bring that realization home, and I thought of the little I had gathered from your blog on the importance of preaching. I flung the thoughts and worries off as best I could and trained all my focus on what my pastor was saying. It was not easy, but I forced myself, at the exclusion of all else, to take in his message from The Word.

Not surprisingly, I came away joyful and refreshed. I was renewed in my fervor to find my satisfaction in Christ alone and to live with a bright, eternal mindset rather than my grimy, earthbound one. Our Lord was faithful, and the sermon

was precisely what I needed to hear (what I REALLY needed, not what I thought I needed).

So thank you for writing about preaching. I intend to go back and read those posts all the more carefully, and come to the house of God with prayerful humility in the future.

Worthy of Honor

By Nicole Whitacre

Before we move on in our little [“Timely Cautions”](#) series, we want to encourage you to encourage your pastor.

We presented this as our first topic because we believe nothing—no program or institution or book or blog—is more important for the recovery and effectiveness of the gospel in our generation than the local church, and that effectiveness is directly linked to the faithful preaching of God’s Word by local church pastors.

These days, we are blessed to have so many opportunities to receive sound teaching. But if our biblical priorities are in order, then our local church pastor’s gospel-centered preaching should uniquely shape our growth and understanding of God’s Word.

That’s why we want to encourage you to drop your pastor a note. Tell him *specifically* how a sermon has transformed your thinking, created fresh affection for the Savior, helped you to grow in godliness. Encourage your pastor and you will serve your entire church. And you will be refreshed as you recall the gracious work of the Holy Spirit through the preaching of God’s Word.

So don’t wait. Send him a message right now!

Our prayer and hope is that this generation of women will be known as women who were devoted to the preaching of God’s Word—to listening and applying the Bible. And that by the grace of God we would pass that legacy on to the next generation. May it be said of us that we did not neglect our pastor’s teaching.

“Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in teaching and preaching.” 1 Timothy 5:17¹

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