

Five “Ministry Killers”

(This article will launch my address at the President’s Breakfast during the 2007 AEGA World Conference)

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INTRODUCTION: Real “truth” is acquired, not by what one may teach you, but through a four-fold process of assimilating personal information, observation, experience, and self-discovery. If this article helps you in some way to examine what you think, and monitor what you do and say, I will have accomplished my goal.

Through the years various methods and teachings have risen up within the “Spirit-filled” ranks. Many have destroyed the reputation of ministries, major ministry figures and churches, and contributed to the destruction of Christian movements. In this article I share some of my time-tested experiences, ideas, and observations, which I trust shall assist you to “stay on track” in your own ministry.

Ministry Killer #1: Following untested ideas, concepts, or plans proposed by books, tapes, television preachers and seminars.

Over 100 years ago, a famous theologian made a remarkable statement relating to Biblical matters: “When something is new, it is not *really* true; but when something is *really* true, it is not new.” In my opinion this statement alone, is one of the most profound statements ever made concerning Biblical truths and matters that concern churches, people, Bible teaching, etc. Essentially this theologian was saying: *Real truth must be tested by the passing of time, but untested [new] doctrines, ideas, plans, etc. that arise suddenly will, in most cases, prove devastating.*

The following “killers” will eventually destroy people, ministries and churches:

- Teaching a different [or new] doctrine based upon the views of a popular television preacher.
- Teaching a congregation something new based upon a tape, book, movement, seminar, etc. (This may lead a congregation down a path where recovery will be impossible).
- Teaching from the pulpit in such a way that you demand control of every aspect of a person’s life. When Biblical truths are delivered through a legislative style of preaching or teaching, there is no freedom for the Holy Spirit to bring about change in a person’s daily walk with Christ. This leads to legalism and control, and is one thing that Jesus disliked in the Pharisees. A visit to any church for the first time will usually reveal if “control over people” is a major factor. Such “control” may be observed during praise and worship, special events, through a sermon, or during an altar call.

Ministry Killer #2: Ignoring the importance of honest evaluation from an audience, or your inner circle of leaders or friends.

- Great preachers/pastors do not build strong and dynamic churches as often as strong churches build great preachers and pastors.
- Shouting, “Amen” and other phrases do not indicate how well a preacher is doing in delivering a sermon. However, when a congregation is programmed through many years in this style of worship, it occurs regularly, and such phrases are generally believed to be “markers” as feedback for a “good sermon.” Of course, these markers are not accurate.
- Feedback does occur during a sermon. Although listening may seem passive (like people watching a sports event), communication is happening nonetheless, and the eyes and actions [more than the words] of people tell the real story. How can you accurately evaluate how they are receiving your sermon? Observe their eyes, posture, smiles, smirks, trips to the rest room, looking at their watches, etc. Nevertheless, if you’re invited to preach in a classical Pentecostal church more accustomed to a “good shout” than to a “good sermon” you must be prepared to see a lot of smirks.
- The best preachers always allow their eyes and ears to program what their mouth will say before and during a sermon. They study the audience before they begin preaching. They take cues from the audience and learn to go in many directions with the sermon. After a sermon has been delivered, do not rely upon comments like “I enjoyed your sermon” as a true marker of how well you did.
- Some evaluation may be observed during an altar call. Questions related to the sermon may arise. But above all “audience response and evaluation” are important. A sermon may be filled with wondrous content, but the sermon will fall on “deaf ears” if the delivery is weak. In most instances I have observed that Pentecostal churches prefer “strong delivery” in comparison to “strong content.” Is it possible to have both? I believe it is.

Ministry Killer #3: Ignoring the importance of diligent [personal] Bible study and prayer.

- Studying for sermons to impress people will not keep you strong in the faith. You must spend additional prayer time on your knees searching out the deep truths and mysteries of scripture that will give you a “Holy Heart Burn.” Such Biblical truths may be too deep and analytical to share with a congregation, but will certainly set your heart aflame [and keep you burning].
- You should never preach a sermon from a difficult passage of scripture when you have not thoroughly researched it. When you are questioned by others as to your interpretation, the old adage of “God told me” is never a good answer.

- You should study the culture of the period during which a Bible book or passage was penned. Glean information from various Bible translations, commentaries, Hebrew & Greek lexicons, transliterations, etc. Remember, the Old Testament contains many beautiful stories and events that hold the attention of the audience, but the interpretation of the Old Testament is not as difficult as New Testament passages which form most doctrines of evangelical churches.
- You will never gain depth in the Word of God if you do not invest extra hours in diligent exegetical Bible study. Keep a balance between this kind of study and sermon study.
- Never exalt yourself in the pulpit. One who begins to learn great truths can't wait to tell someone what they've discovered. However, it's important "how" you explain yourself. Remember this: "If you are not preaching Christ, you are preaching self." Never exalt your knowledge, your holiness, your wisdom, your family, or harp on any outstanding characteristic you may possess when preaching. Doing so will certainly ensure that everything you say will be rejected. Often pastors and preachers unknowingly exalt themselves or family members with no evaluation from the audience. However, in my opinion, it is a big mistake!
- Stuart Briscoe gives Seven Signs for Great Preaching: (1) God-centered, (2) Biblically based, (3) People directed, (4) Intellectually competent: appeals to the mind with logic, (5) Emotionally moving: addresses not only the mind but moves the heart. (6) Volitionally changing: appeals to the will, and (7) Practically comprehensible: a great sermon must be clear in its meaning and intent.

Ministry Killer #4: Disregarding proper order and etiquette both in the pulpit and church.

- "Rudeness" to others should never be given as an excuse for Biblical "boldness." Jesus gives us many examples of "How and when to be bold." But He always tempered bold statements with compassion and kindness. Because Jesus was somewhat of a Mystic, He was misunderstood by the religious leaders and people of His time. And He continues to be misunderstood today by Christians and non-Christians alike who've misinterpreted His sayings.
- Do not take twenty minutes to introduce a guest speaker by preaching a sermon. Keep the introduction short and exercise good ministerial etiquette (and ethics). If too long, then you have taken away from the importance of the guest speaker's message. Furthermore, when a guest speaker has finished his/her sermon; do not preach his or her sermon over again before the service closes. Remember, our God is a God of order and not confusion. *NOTE: I have personally experienced this numerous times when visiting churches in the USA and abroad. After I finished my sermon, it was then "re-preached" by the presiding pastor who attempted to bring out points that I may have left out. How did this make me feel? Not good.*
- If you are a pastor, you should keep order, but exercise caution in setting standards for attire. This is a difficult point to discuss since every church holds different views concerning this matter. Some believe if one wears beautiful suits he/or she is being arrogant. On the other hand, some believe if one wears everyday clothes, he/or she is disrespectful of God's house. Great caution must be exercised in the areas of clothing, hair styles, ear rings, nose rings, etc. *NOTE: On one occasion, I observed a squabble in a church between some elders and pastor because the pastor's teenage son had dyed his hair blue.*

Ministry Killer # 5: Ignoring the fact that when you are perplexed by personal or family problems, it is apparent in your preaching. Your preaching may come across as angry.

- You will not be at your best, and may say or do things you will later regret. The worship leader must also be evaluated, since he or she leads people into worship. Evaluation is important.
- Be careful not to make any references to what you've learned in counseling sessions that may be relevant to those in the audience.
- Do not preach when you are angry, lest you preach an angry sermon to a congregation. Check your attitude. If you are angry with a deacon in the church because of what he said during a board meeting, it can ruin your message. A bad or angry attitude is to be compared with "throwing cold water on a fire."

CONCLUSION: In Chapter 1 of 1st Corinthians Paul is laying a foundation concerning division in the church at Corinth. This church was experiencing division over "pulpit supply" and the past contributions of pastors. Paul wants them to understand that preaching is not based on the contribution of the preacher, but on the message being communicated. Preaching, in the mind of Paul is to be valued by its core truth, not the charisma of the speaker! *May God help us as we examine ourselves and strive to grow and mature in this Most High Calling.*