

## Eliminate Dull Sermons Using These Seven Tips

### Ever write a message or talk that even *you* suspected was boring?

That's exactly where I found myself this week.

I'd outlined my message for our current series weeks ago, but when I went back into it 6 days before delivery, I realized I'd written a basically boring sermon on a fundamentally exciting subject.

What's worse, it moved me into one of the worst cases of writer's block I've had in years.

I worked at the message day after day but I just couldn't make it interesting, despite having a fascinating subject (heaven).

Don't get me wrong. As a preacher and Christian, I'm the first to tell you God's Word is never boring. But sometimes we preachers make it boring. That's exactly where I was heading this Sunday.

I kept tweaking the message for a few days with little success. I still found it...boring. And preachers, if you're bored by your message, it's a guarantee your audience will be as well.

How did I get through it? Well, I dug out everything I know about beating writer's block and solving the problem of boring writing.

It worked...I think. You only ever really find out on Sunday. But I'm no longer bored by my message. In fact, I'm excited to preach it.

Almost every communicator I know has been there...so I thought I'd share my 7 best tips on beating writer's block and eliminating boring sermons.

### 1. Find the tension

If a sermon or piece of writing comes off as boring, it's often because it lacks tension.

As much as we all dislike tension personally, without the tension, there is no story.

Think of the universal plot line for every story/book/movie you've ever loved.

It's NOT this:

Good thing happens.

Another good thing happens.

Then lots of good things happen forever.

As much as we wish our lives were tension-free, there's actually no story in that. You'd never watch a movie without tension.

Instead, the universal plot line people come back to again and again is:

Things are good.

Something bad happens (enter death, illness, a villain, a problem).

There's a struggle between good and evil.

A hero enters.

Good wins.

Hopefully, people live happily ever after.

If there's no tension in a story, there's no story.

So what's the tension point in your message?

If you can find that, you've created a plot line the audience will follow and identify with. Because everyone has tension in their lives.

For my message, the focal point was that heaven is a beautiful place...beautiful beyond words.

The tension points in the message became the fact that most of us don't realize how beautiful it is, and that we experience both beauty and tragedy in this life. Once I picked up on those points, the message became both more relevant and interesting.

## **2. Identify, build and solve an actual problem**

Most people showing up at your church, at your blog or who open the first pages of your book face problems they don't know how to solve: marriage problems, money problems, hope problems, forgiveness problems.

When you identify a problem and lead people to a solution (or potential solution), your message immediately becomes relevant.

What I had to do in my message was identify a problem that most people would want to see solved.

In my message, I zone in on why people instinctively hate the idea that there's a hell or separation in eternity, but I also explain how that resolves some of the tension people find

impossible to resolve in their lives right now.

Ironically, your writer's block problem often gets solved if you can identify and solve someone else's problem.

### 3. Find the Why

You can find tension and find a problem to solve but still not have a fascinating message.

Why?

Because you haven't yet identified why any of it matters.

In any kind of communication, the *why* is the most important question you can answer for someone.

*Why* establishes relevance. When you establish the *why* – a money problem suddenly matters to your listener; when you explain *why* forgiveness is an issue, or *why* the existence of hell or the beauty of heaven matter, interest in a subject piques.

The problem with far too many sermons and far too much Christian writing is that they focus on the What and the How and they completely miss the Why.

In this post, [I outline the 5 questions I use to evaluate every message](#) as I write it (I got them from [Andy Stanley](#)). My two most favourite questions are the questions of why the audience needs to know what they need to know and why they need to do what they need to do.

When you're stuck, keep asking yourself "Why does any of this matter?" When you can answer that, you've got an interesting message.

If you can't answer why your message matters, your message won't matter.

### 4. Look for surprises

Even in an age of declining biblical literacy, familiarity is a problem with preaching from the Bible.

It's a problem because people *assume* they know what a text means. And even people with little Christian background *assume* they know what Christians would say about an issue.

Even as a preacher, you might read a text and miss the shock and surprise of the original text.

To get over this, I try to pretend I'm reading the text for the first time. My text this week was from Revelation 21-22. Here are some surprise angles that could make a sermon on Revelation 21: 1-3 (and this just scratches the surface on three short verses):

John is in exile on the Island of Patmos and he sees *this*? Why? What would that have meant to him?

Wait...there's a new *earth*, *not just a new heaven*? What????

And why a new heaven? What's wrong with the old one?

Wait...heaven's a *city*? What about the endless golf game in the sky that people imagine?

What's this bride and groom language all about and why is it so intimate?

Hey, in Greek, the word for 'dwell' is 'tabernacle'...does this go back to the Old Testament and John 1 and then the Holy Spirit dwelling in us (actually, yes it does) and what on earth does this mean?

See...that's just three verses.

Approach the Bible as a stranger or a child and it pops to life.

## **5. Talk to ~~someone~~ another writer about your problem**

Honestly, when you go to a non-preacher or non-communicator for advice, their advice often isn't that helpful.

Why?

Because writing problems are usually best understood by other writers.

So sure, you can ask questions of your neighbour or someone else who doesn't write for a living.

But keep in mind that a quick consult with another writer or preacher can zero in on the problem faster than you might think.

## **6. Imagine you're being pulled off the stage...**

I don't know how I developed this trick, but it's tremendously helpful.

Years ago when I felt stuck in the writing process, I started imagining myself being pulled off the stage in the middle of my message (almost by a cane...like in the comics) and getting 30 seconds to shout out my last line before the message was over.

If I didn't have anything to shout in that last line, I knew I hadn't found the main point of my message.

If I could say it, I'd found the tension and the main point of my message.

Last week, the single line was "You should have a better plan for eternity than you do for your next vacation."

Try this exercise... it works.

## **7. Come back to it another day**

If you find that you're striking out, again and again, pack it in and come back to it fresh in the morning. I find so many breakthroughs happen this way.

Of course, that doesn't work if you're starting your message Saturday morning for Sunday delivery.

But if you work ahead like I do, time becomes your friend as much as deadlines do.

So work ahead. And come back to it fresh after a good night's sleep.

> [Read more from Carey.](#)