

**How to Illustrate (continued)**

Let us pray.

*Heavenly Father, we thank You that we might know You through Your Son. And this is not because of anything we have done but because of an infinite mercy that, before time began, cared for us. Thank You that we can be instruments now of that mercy, yet help us even as we think today about this task of preaching to be better prepared for Your purposes. We ask Your blessing not only for us. We pray, Father, that what we would do would be part of that salt and light in our society. We pray that not only those of our near families and friends would know You, but by our influence in this society, leaders, people, and nations would name the name of Jesus. For we know that there will be a time that comes that every knee will bow and every tongue confess that He is Lord. We are part of the process by which this will occur. We, in these moments, do not feel the magnitude of that. But we ask that You would help us to sense even slightly that the task we are preparing for would be not only important to us but dear to us. Grant us Your blessing even in what we do this day we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.*

I would like to begin today by having you look at a sample sermon. We will talk very technically about how illustrations function. There are technical things we do to make them work. Last time we talked about why illustrations are important, and we went over some basic story principles of how they work. Now we will see homiletically, in very technical ways, how they fit into a sermon and how you make them serve your purposes.

Let us look at main point number two in a sample sermon. Let us observe some things about it. The main point is: because God will judge sin, we must proclaim His Word to defend the truth. There are subpoints that follow that are answers to analytical questions. The analytical question is “when must we defend the truth?” The first subpoint is “when others abandon sound doctrine.” The second subpoint is “when others flock to false teachers.” The third subpoint is “when others will not even listen.” You have seen the subpoints, and you should recognize that they are in parallel wording. The adjectives, modifiers, and nouns all line up with key word changes. Before you get into the illustration, there is a summary statement. There are three subpoints, but there is a summary statement before the illustration. It says, “Such accounts remind us that even though others may abandon what is sound, flock to what is false, and turn their ears away from the truth so as not even to listen, we still have an obligation to preach the Word.” The key words of the subpoints are underlined in the notes. They are the changed words of the parallel subpoint statements. There is a summary statement prior to the illustration because the illustration always illustrates the last thing you said prior to it. If the illustration is going to be about all three subpoints, you have to bring the subpoints back into view for the ear. We turn the ear into the eye. We bring those subpoints back into the hearing before we tell the illustration. This is the illustration:

As he stood before the Diet of Worms on the afternoon of April 18, 1521, Martin Luther was asked one question: will you recant of your writings and the errors which they contain. After spending the night in prayer searching for the right thing to say, he answered, “Unless I am convicted by Scripture and plain reason, I do not accept the authority of popes and counsels, for they have contradicted each other. My conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not recant anything, for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe. Here I stand, I can do no other. God help me, Amen.” Martin Luther believed the Word of God demanded for him to stand for the truth even in such a difficult situation. He knew that though others might abandon sound doctrine, he must stand firm. When his human judges had the power to

excommunicate him, exile him, or even execute him, he said, “My conscience is captive to the Word of God.” Martin Luther believed the church had flocked to false teachers. And knowing they would probably not even listen, he answered them by saying, “Here I stand.”

A diet is a conference or a trial. That is the setting of the illustration. This story is about the famous statement of Luther. You may recognize this.

In this illustration, there is “expositional rain.” The key terms of the subpoints in the explanation have rained down into the illustration. It is what makes the illustration function as illustrating this particular message. Earlier we talked about the aspect of sways-ability. When you say something that is interesting but does not seem to connect, interest goes up, but sways-ability goes down. When we tell illustrations, we connect by using the key words of the subpoints in the illustration. That way there is not a disconnect. The connection is that in this explanation you had subpoints. In the explanation I had a main point statement, then I had a subpoint that had a key word change. I had a second subpoint with key word changes as well. As it were, those words “rained down.” They come down into the telling of the illustration.

Next they will go into the application. You do this because, first, you want to keep credibility in tact. The illustration is not disconnected, but it is illustrating precisely what you said the explanation was about. The reason you keep precision is because you keep the key terms. My illustration is precisely about what I said this text was about. That then enables me to use precisely the terms that I said this text was about when I do application. That does not just maintain continuity; it maintains authority. I tell you to do what I said this text said. I use these terms even to explain the application. I stated the truth, and I proved it was here. When I apply that truth, I have the authority of the Word of God because I proved to you that what I said was in the text. Therefore now I have the authority to apply. This double helix, which looks something like a DNA chain, is made up of strands of concepts and terms. The concepts link together, and the terms are kept together. Your English teacher would say not to do that because using the same terms over and over again is redundant. But we are in an oral medium. We want precisely those terms because we want the ear to say, “I have heard that before. I know that is what that text says.” When you illustrate, you are illustrating the concept because I hear the terms. When you apply those concepts, I know you have the authority because you are using the terms you have used before. Those terms that have always drawn the ear and the attention are the changed words in the parallel statements. When my students turn in subpoints, I am so rigorous in grading to make sure they used parallel language. I do that because I am getting ready for this step. I know that without parallel language that gives us key terms to work with, this could start falling apart. It might hold conceptually, but the ear would not have the terms it needed to hold the matter together. This is true first for illustration, then for application. That is the big picture.

Let us talk about illustration in details and see how it functions in description. We will come back to this example, but I wanted you to see the big picture before we now start talking about the details. We started by saying that you isolate and associate illustrations. You isolate an experience, and you associate it with the concept you want to relate. We talked about ways that you do that. You separate in time, space, or situation. You pause, and you do different things to set up the illustration in order to tell the story. Now we want to think very technically how this small story fits in the life of the sermon you are doing.

Now that we have some to that conclusion of the illustration, we relate and apply it. We relate the details of the story to the principle we apply. The Bible itself tells us why this is necessary. You cannot just tell a story. The Bible said, “Without a parable, Jesus did not say anything to them.” Then it says that later

on in private Jesus explained the parable to His disciples. The story in itself does not explain itself. We often think it does, and if it is close enough conceptually, it may get very close. But people will pick up on all kinds of strange things. “Is this what you meant? Is that what you were talking about?” It is our obligation to not only tell the story but also to tie it to the concept that we relate. We do that by using grouping statements or interpreting statements.

A grouping statement is a sentence or two following the illustration in which the preacher reaches into the illustration for details pertinent to his truth concept, extracts them, and then ties them together with the central idea he wishes to communicate. For example, I tell the illustration, then I reach back into the illustration and pull down the pertinent details that make the point. I say, “This is what I meant to say.” It is the grouping statement that comes at the end of the illustration. It is also preparation for something else because it ties the concept to the forthcoming application. I reach back up into the illustration, pull down the pertinent details, and say, “This is what I mean to say.”

The Martin Luther illustration ended with “He said, ‘Here I stand,’ even though they would not listen.” This is what the preacher said next, “He viewed himself as ultimately responsible only to a divine judge. It motivated him to remain faithful to proclaim God’s Word in the most challenging situations. You and I have a similar calling. In this day and age, where truth is relative to most persons and tolerance for many kinds of evil encouraged, even standing for truth can be dangerous to our friendships, to our reputations, and to our careers.” The preacher reaches back into the illustration. He says Martin Luther was willing to stand firm and to proclaim the truth even though it was dangerous to him. We are called to do the same. Reach back into the illustration, which used these key terms. State the real point you want to make, and that point is preparation for the application. This grouping statement is typically very much like the summary statement that got us into the illustration. Make a statement about what you will illustrate, make the illustration, and make a statement about what the illustration meant, particularly tied to application. It is like saying, “Now you know I am going to illustrate,” which is the last thing I said prior to the illustration. Then after the illustration, there is a grouping statement that says, “Here is the meaning of this,” which is usually tied toward the application. If your eyes scan well, you see that these two statements are often very much like the main point statement itself. That makes sense. If you summarize what the subpoints were, and the subpoints are a development of the main point statement, it would stand to reason that summary at the end of the illustration is a lot like the main point statement. The grouping statement at the end that is going to be applied should probably also be a lot like the main point statement. It is not exactly the same. The grouping statement proclaims the truth out of the main point statement. We knit together concepts with key terms and make sure the ear hears how these things are connected.

Let us talk a little more about what grouping statements are. They are interpreting statements or parallel phrases. In the Martin Luther quote, it was a conceptual summary because you did not hear a lot of parallel wording. Listen to this, which goes back to the story I told you about the children’s fingerprints on the bricks of the church in Savannah. Here is how that illustration ended: “God used faithful children to build His church in that day. And He will use faithful children to build His church in our day also.” The grouping statement uses parallel wording. It says, “Just as something was the same, so this also is the same.” Here is another example about people who had to find their way home through the woods. They were lost but then a guide helped them. I might say, “Even as the children could not find their way home without a guide, we will not find our way to heaven without God.” There is parallel wording there. It is a very common way to end an illustration. The summary points to a concept that is in this illustration (you cannot find your way home without a guide), and then I tie it to the concept I want to say (you cannot get to heaven if you do not depend on God.) I really play off the ear here. I construct what I say, not for you to read, but for you to hear. That knitting depends on the key word structures and

tying things together. So we end the illustration with some grouping statement, either an interpreting statement or parallel wording.

I want you to think even more now about the concept of expositional rain. We are looking at one single main point of the whole sermon. Let us think about what is included in explanation, illustration, and application. There will be, in the explanation, a main point statement followed by subpoints, which are about a paragraph each. The subpoint statement has parallel wording with key word changes. If it is a bullet statement, you have parallel statements with key words changes. If it is an analytical question with responses, you also have statements that are parallel. If you have interrogative subpoints, the interrogatives are in parallel, but the answers also have to be in parallel. It is the answer that holds the key terms. The answers need to be in parallel too. When I have these subpoints, I will develop them. Then I will have a summary statement that gets me into my illustration. My illustration will be told using the key word changes of these parallel statements.

This sounds technical, but if your ear were to hear it, you would recognize what was going on. Because of the key word change I can say, "That is what he is talking about!" The change is what draws the attention, therefore that is what you illustrate. If you have two subpoints together, you will have to summarize them before you tell the illustration. The illustration is told using the key terms, and they will ultimately go down into the application. If my illustration goes between the subpoints, I will only use the key terms of the first subpoint. That will be the case at times. Sometimes a subpoint is so clear, obvious, and dynamic that you will not want to use an illustration there. You may want to use it to deal with the first subpoint. If that is the case, before you do application you will probably have to do another summary that brings both subpoints together. But your illustration might just deal with one subpoint. That is a prudential choice I will make from time to time. Sometimes, though, people will tell an illustration, and through the whole thing you think, "That is really interesting. I wonder what he is illustrating." Probably in his mind the preacher illustrated the subpoint or main point he talked about. But because he did use consistent language, sometimes called term consistency, the ear does not follow it. You do not always have to have subpoints. If you do not have any subpoints, the key terms of the changed term of the magnet clause of the main point is what goes into the illustration and application. It is the thing that changes. The explanation is about the changed term, and it is what goes in the illustration and the application. That concept of expositional rain will be the turnkey from being an average preacher to someone whom people really understand. People will say, "When he preaches, it makes such sense." All you really did was learn the lesson of term consistency. The reason we shy away from it is our English essay training, which taught us to use different terms. We forget that in preaching one of our most powerful tools of communication is repetition. We use those key terms to tie together the message. We will talk about this more, but hold on to it now. When we get to application it will be important. You will begin to apply these truths, and if you begin to change terms, people will think you have no basis for what you say. You will say that it was the concept, but the ear does not hear it that way.

You will have to make transition statements in your sermons. If you have a main point statement, there should be a few sentences that get you ready for the subpoints. It has to flow logically. You do not just speak from point to point. We have talked about an outline of the structure, but there would have to be transitions to make it flow. We will talk about that in a few lessons. The grouping statement sometimes is the transition statement to the application, but other times you will need another statement or two to lead to the application. Each of these points in the outline is a place of transition. The transition should at least include these summary statements, but it may be more. It needs to at least have these summary inclusions.

Sometimes the illustration is about one of the subpoints, but sometimes it is about the main point. Most of the time the subpoints' language reappears in the illustration, but when you do the grouping statement, it is often the main point statement that is the full aspect of what the illustration is about. You tell the illustration to illustrate the main point statement, but you use the key terms of the subpoints to get there. It is part of the building process. At times my illustration may just be about a subpoint. It may be in the summary that I build the concepts together to focus on the main point. Expository rain uses consistent key terms from the explanation in the illustration and application. The key terms in the subpoints are used in the illustration. If there are no subpoints, it is the key terms of the main points that are used. Sometimes key terms from both the subpoints and the main point are in the illustration. It is not just the concepts that should be consistent but also the terms. If you have interrogatives with answers that are positive and negative, you still want to use those key terms in the illustration. This really gets important, not so much in the illustration, but in the application. People will say, "You spent five minutes developing that idea, but you did not do anything with it. Why did you tell me all that if you were not going to apply it?" As preachers we may feel like it was academically interesting for us. We probably do not mean that, but it is the impression when we spend a lot of time in a subpoint but do not do anything with it. If we explain something, people want to know why we took the time to tell them. That is why we pick it back up in application. We will work with this more when we move into application. Right now it is important that you see why subpoints are in parallel and how we use key terms for expository rain.

Let us do a quick summary of other things that you will pick up very readily. We can get illustrations from contemporary experience. They may be experiences we have had or that we gather from others. A second place for illustration source is historical accounts. Finally, we can get illustrations from biblical accounts. Of those three, contemporary illustrations are most likely to connect with people. If you tell historical or biblical illustrations, you have to make sure to bring them into contemporary terms. We will talk more about how to do that later. It is important that we not just make our sermons archaic. That might happen if we simply go to an ancient account of Martin Luther written in the seventeenth century. If I just stick it right into my sermon, it will remove people from it. You also need to make sure your illustrations from a more contemporary book or monthly mailing of illustrations sound like you. They need to fit into your message, so you need to use key words of your sermon. Use the illustration as a catalyst for your illustration. Do not just cut and paste, but you have to retell it. You need to mutate it, change it, or adapt it. You want to retell it using your key terms in your language. That is where the ear says, "This fits! I see exactly what he is talking about." You can therefore legitimately take illustrations from others and adapt them to your purposes in a way that seems inartificial because you use key terms. You can hear sermons where you just know that the illustration is not of that person. It does not sound like them or the rest of the sermon. It just does not fit. The way that we make them fit is with the use of key terms.

One other place to get illustrations from is a "pre-sermon file." This is different than contemporary, historical, or biblical illustrations. Almost every homiletics professor I know has at times said we should collect illustrations. We should create files of illustrations. That is very good to do, and I know very few people who do it. I have found it even more helpful over the years to make what I call a pre-sermon file. I find that many pastors do this. They know what they will be preaching about, at least generally through the quarter, so they create folders. You know that you have a semester or quarter of preaching ahead of you. You might be in the first part of Ephesians 1 the first week and the second part of Ephesians 1 the second week. So you create files for these topics. Through the course of living, as you read newspapers, articles, and magazines or see things on television, you do not try to form a sermon, but you can throw information into the file for the future. That way, when you actually write the sermon that week, you are not scrounging for an illustration on Saturday night. You get into the Saturday night fever of trying to

get everything into the sermon! But if you have been preparing, not extensively but just by throwing things in the file, it will help you a great deal. You will often have more in the way of illustrations and even thoughts about the sermon than you will include in the sermon.

I always keep a note file in my wallet, and as I go through life I make little notes. Right now I have four illustration notes on this one little page. On another page I have three more illustrations. On this third page I have three more illustrations. Typically I will take these and either put them in my pre-sermon file, or if I do not have a place for them, I have my secretary put them in my illustration file. I go through all of life this way because it is my profession to preach. I have adapted to the mode that I have to have illustrations. I go through life collecting them, and you will too. It is not a bad habit to get into. Preachers are in a different mode because everybody else just lets life go by. But we are constantly reminded of spiritual principles as we go through life. We can help people see something better if we take life experiences and turn them into illustrations. "You know what my child did? That was really cute. I better write it down!" You might think that you will remember it later, but inevitably you will forget. There is too much happening and too much going by. So we make notes. I make notes of people in chapel and preachers that I hear. My family gets tired of reading magazines after me because I tend to butcher them with my scissors. I highlight newspapers all the time. It is my profession, and it is what your profession will be too. You get in the habit of collecting, and there is not a thing wrong with it. People will grin a little bit when they know you as their pastor and you take out your wallet and write something down. They know what you are doing. It certainly connects them to your message when they see the life they know come to reality in the messages that you preach. That is the goal.

Let me give some illustration cautions for us. We have talked about the importance of making the abstract familiar. First, do not think of illustrations more highly than you ought to think. Illustrations illustrate a message, but they are not the message. Often when preaching degenerates into entertainment, it is because the preacher has a great set of illustrations and no real text to be explained. The old line is "Every heresy begins with a great illustration." It is also true that many entertaining sermons have great illustrations, but they do not have much meat in them. We are trying to interest people rather than explain a text. It is far better to explain what a text means than to have good illustrations.

There is another way in which I will put a governor on a few of you. We are different kinds of people with different ways of thinking about things and processing information. Some of you will hate doing illustrations. It will be your nature to think, "Why can they not just hear this logical essay that I have put together? It was good enough for Moses, so it ought to be good enough for them." You will not like doing illustrations. Others of you will love doing illustrations. You will have an illustration for every main point and an illustration for every subpoint. Then you will have illustrations for subpoints of subpoints. You will have these skyscraper sermons of illustration upon illustration. And I discourage you from that too. In this course I limit (or force) you to one illustration per main point. For the people who hate doing illustrations, they have to do them consistently. For the people who want to do illustrations all the time, I ask you to spend your nickels wisely. You have to do explanation too. You have to do some exegesis. If I only have one illustration per main point, I might make it the illustration that comes after both or three subpoints. Or I might just put it with one subpoint. Or I might not have any subpoints, and it might be the illustration for the main point statement. But we will not have two and three illustrations in one main point. Wherever you think it will best serve your purpose, do one illustration per main point this semester.

A second caution for illustrations is do not think less of illustrations than you ought to think. I have listed for you the hierarchy of memory retention. This can often be very discouraging to preachers. The most remembered feature of any sermon is the illustration. In fact, the last illustration is the most likely

to be remembered. The second most remembered illustration is the first one. The third most likely thing to be remembered in a sermon is any other illustration in the middle! Illustrations are the most remembered aspect of sermons. It is true of you, too, and not just “little minds” out there. If not illustrations, the next most likely remembered portion of the sermon is the application. In particular, the applications we most strongly disagree with are remembered. You will remember the part that you do not like from the preacher! Next remembered, after applications you strongly disagree with, are those that you strongly agree with. Here is the hard thing for preachers. If you just mildly agree or give assent without even hearing the sermon, we do not remember it at all. You either strongly agree or strongly disagree or you will not remember it at all. That is threatening, is it not? We are pretty far down the list, and we have not mentioned explanation at all. No one goes home and says, “Was not that a wonderful second subpoint under his third main point?” No one says that. They say, “There was some impact on my life by that.” Think about that. We pour our hearts and souls, sweat and toil, into the explanation and exegesis, but people are not going to remember it. Be careful, though, this is very deceptive. If there is not solid content, they will remember you as a shallow preacher. They will think there was not much thought there and nothing to sink their teeth into. They will feel like there was nothing really authoritative for their souls. The thing that people remember more than anything else out of a sermon is the ethos of the speaker. They remember this more than illustrations, applications, and explanations. If you get caught into thinking that illustrations make people think you are a good speaker and you bank on the illustrations rather than the meat of the sermon, they will remember that you do not have much to say to them. We construct homiletically knowing how people work. Illustrations are powerful tools of communication, so we want to remember that and not think less highly of them than we ought to think. But we should not be deceived because illustrations cannot carry the spiritual water themselves. Explanation is also needed to communicate, “That man has something to say to me. There is spiritual weight in what he says, and that means I have to do all of these things.” Even though this is the most remembered, if there is not gravity to the explanation, then the person himself will not be listened to.

As we begin to think about the importance of content, I want to think about some cautions for illustrations. There are 10 of them that I will mention. We have begun to realize how important illustrations are, and we know they require crafting with care and integrity. That is why I give you these cautions. A lot of this has to be under the rubric of pastoral prudence. I cannot tell you when you have crossed the line with what is appropriate. I want you to begin to feel, not only the power of illustrations, but the seductive nature of them. They can take you down paths, because they communicate so well, that may undo what you want to do. I want you to think about some of these cautions even as you think about the power of illustrations.

The first caution is to be accurate. To talk about the 76 Theses of Martin Luther or the prison ministry of George Colson or Einstein’s discovery of x-rays may be very interesting, but you just lost all credibility. Those were all inaccurately stated. In the course of preaching I have done every one of these things, and you will do them all as well! But the goal is not to blow your credibility and your illustrations. You need to look up the facts. Being able to “google” things these days has done wonders for being more accurate. You can find out quickly when something was written or what the correct name is. It really helps to be able to get your facts straight. That helps a lot with the illustrations.

A second caution that is more difficult is to be careful about what you reveal. Homiletics professors debate all the time about how we can and should talk about counseling situations. My thought is that counseling situations are usable only if you are obviously protecting identities. There are teachers of preaching who will say that preachers should never use illustrations from counseling situations. They say this because no one will come to you if they think you will talk about it. At times I think people need to know there is counseling help in the church though. Progress can be made spiritually with a wise

counselor and a spiritually minded person. But if you even give a hint of who the person is whom you are talking about, it is death to your ministry. Sometimes ways that we can do this is to talk in ways that obviously hide names. I might say, “A man came to me recently to talk about a problem in his marriage. I will call him Bill. What Bill said to me was...” When I use the phrase, “I will call his name Bill,” it tells you his name is not Bill. I just made it obvious that I am protecting this person’s identity. If in the course of telling the story I tell you the make and model of his car, that is not good! I have underdone things. But if I can tell the account in such a way that I say, “I want to tell you how people can be helped,” it is a redemptive use of counseling situations rather than a revealing use of counseling situations. If I can use it redemptively, it is okay.

There is so much caution that should be put on this, though. If you do it weekly, no one will come to you. If on occasion you can tell people how there is help in a situation, that may be something to think about. It gets difficult when the church staff sees who comes and goes from my office because they may know who an illustration is about. My office was in my home when I pastored a small church. Our home was on a major thoroughfare, so when people came for counseling, they would park in our driveway for a while. Then people would say, “I saw John’s car over there the other day. Is everything okay?” We began to urge people to park other places for that very reason. I cannot give the specific rules of how to do this, but you have to obviously protect people’s identities. If the word “recently” is inappropriate, do not use the word recently. You might say, “I remember a man who came to me and...” That puts it in a larger frame of time because you have not put any time frame on it. I want you to be very, very cautious, and at the same time you can sometimes give people hope. There is something you can say about a situation like that. So you need to be careful what you reveal about counseling situations.

You also need to be careful what you reveal that may be compromising. Tales on your family fall into this category. If you talk about your family, not only do you have to get permission, but in the course of telling the illustration you have to say that you got permission. Otherwise people will think that you are abusing your own loved ones. Even if you tell a positive thing, it is always embarrassing to be the point of a sermon. Even if it is positive, you should say, “I asked Jane if I could tell you this, and she said I could...” It may sound silly, but you need to do it. People may laugh and think it is funny, but they will not trust you.

You also need to be careful what you reveal about uncaring attitudes. This includes stereotypes that are ethnic or gender related or making fun of other people’s dialects. It could be talking the way an older person, a Native American, or someone of another race talks. Even just using someone else’s dialect to mimic it is typically insulting unless it is your ethnic dialect. So the only person you can make fun of is yourself. You do not recognize that mimicking someone else’s dialect is presumed to be ridiculing. We could have uncaring attitudes in criticism of people regarding other political parties, religious groups, churches, faiths, or even occupations. “I went to a used car dealer, and I said...” You just insulted all the people in your church who sell cars by bringing a stereotype on them. Lawyers and blondes are often the object of jokes, but pastors cannot tell those jokes. They certainly cannot tell them from the pulpit without creating attitudes.

Unsavory pasts are another area to be careful about what you reveal. We talked about this before, and I do not have a Bible verse to back this up. Sometimes it is my obligation to talk to you about the realities of this culture. If you have difficulty in your past regarding chemical addiction, you can probably talk about it from the pulpit if it is far enough in the past. You can probably talk about God giving you victory, how He has helped, and the difficulty of it. You can probably talk about the mishaps of your teenage years. You can talk about the difficulties of raising your children. Sexual conduct is probably the thing that is very difficult for people to hear in this culture. I suggest to you men that at times if you



are speaking at a men's group, there may be an opportunity to be very honest with people about what men struggle with. But to talk in the pulpit about sexual practices, even from years ago, that are inappropriate for Christians to pursue makes it very hard for people in the congregation to hear that and still trust you. I cannot tell you never to do that, I just want you to be very cautious. This is the gasoline type of discussion on our culture, and you need to be very cautious about how you have that type of discussion. I cannot defend that. In some ways, I confess, it bends to the sin on our culture that some things are more taboo than others to talk about. I acknowledge that, but part of your job as a pastor is to exegete your culture as well as your text. Consider what people need to hear and what they are able to hear and still treat you as a pastor. Make those prudential choices as well. We usually think when we preach that Sunday morning is the only time I can preach. But there are a lot of opportunities to begin to salt the congregation with issues that they need to deal with.

Obviously sexual sin is a huge problem in this culture. Everybody here struggles with it. When we say not to speak about it from the pulpit, we also need to realize that we need to provide tools for people to handle sexual sin. I need to recognize that, because of the degree of struggle, how I deal with it must be managed very carefully or I will actually hinder my ability to help people. I really want to encourage you to use pastoral prudence and exegete the congregation. I want to make you aware of the difficulty people have with this situation more than telling you never to mention it or to mention it all the time. I want you to be aware that it is very hard for people to deal with. Right now Harvest Ministries is here in Saint Louis, which helps people who are sexually broken through pornography or sexual addictions of various sources. To talk about that in itself is very helpful in this culture. The far end of not dealing with sexual issues when they needed to be dealt with would be like Amy Carmichael. In the Victorian era, she was trying to rescue Indian girls from temple prostitution. When she would come to the United States to try to talk about that, because of the Victorian ethics, she could not in public mention what her ministry was. She would have been thrown out of the churches. But because of her persistence and speaking in private to a few people, she was able to raise funds to change a whole culture of India. Now Graham Waterhouse, one of our graduates, is going to Thailand to deal with very similar issues of the sex trade. The first time she gave her talk here in chapel, we had board wives who were here listening. I heard them gasp about what she would be doing; yet ultimately they got behind her. She had to be aware that this was very difficult for them to hear and think about, yet it was necessary. You have to pick your moments. Wisdom knows there is a tension, and pastoral prudence helps you know how to deal with it. Wisdom is not there when you say, "They ought to know that everybody struggles with that, so I can just talk about it." That is not very pastoral at all. It is very hard for someone to know how to deal with it; that is why they struggle. Pastoral prudence says, "I will deal with that carefully."

Let me move on quickly to other cautions. Be careful what you endorse. Entertainments are one area of potential landmines, particularly movies, music, books, and television shows if they have certain content in them. This includes sex, violence, profanity, or what people may view as values of our culture that are inappropriate to endorse. It is curious that people nowadays will talk about the obscenity of *Leave It to Beaver*. People will say that they were just emphasizing middle class, American, materialistic values. I understand that there may be values there that you do not want to endorse, but I am not sure that that is as bad as some other things. At the same time there are things that you want to be careful of. You make those choices by exegeting the congregation as well as the text. For some congregations, you can mention particular R-rated movies that the pastor, for whatever cultural exposure, has seen. But in other congregations, a pastor will find himself looking for a job if he mentions that he went and saw such a movie. You may not like that, but that is the culture in which we live. You do not just talk to all adults when you are a pastor in the pulpit. You talk to parents, toddlers, grandmothers, and teenagers. You recognize that to simply mention without discretion movies that have strong sexual, violent, profane content is actually not to be pastoral at all. You make prudential choices, and you get into trouble when

you do not think. Or you end up saying that whatever is acceptable to you must be acceptable to everyone else. It is a strange thing to become a pastor and realize that you are not just responsible for yourself anymore. You are responsible for the souls of many people. This includes baby Christians through very mature Christians. You are responsible for them all. Our tendency is to say, "It does not bother me, therefore it is okay." But a pastor has to think about what is best for everyone. Some need to be moved to become more understanding, and others cannot take it yet. You need to exegete them all.

Be careful about recreations. Can you quote about the fact that you went down and had a wonderful dinner at Harrah's Casino last week? Some people will accept that, but others will look for your scalp when they hear that. Another one that depends on the church that you go to is whether or not you can mention major league sports that are played on Sunday. "Remember that Super Bowl two years ago when...?" Certain churches get very upset if you talk about the Super Bowl because it is always played on a Sunday. You need to exegete the congregation as well as the text to determine what you can mention from the pulpit.

Be careful even about what you endorse in terms of quotations. It is wonderful to quote from Schaffer, but a lot of people quote from Bonhoeffer. That is difficult in evangelical circles because Bonhoeffer's biblical position was not that the Bible was inerrant. He had wonderful social ethics, but his biblical understanding was not what many evangelicals will share. What about Rudolph Bultmann? He had a lot of insight into Scripture, but you probably cannot mention him and be okay. If you mention someone who will compromise what you are perceived to be, you need to explain both what they said and why you mention them. If you know what is compromising about them, you should mention it. Those are the easy ones, but here are some hard ones for those of us in Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) circles. Robert Dabney and Stonewall Jackson might be Bible-believing men and great theologians, but they also endorsed slavery in the course of their lives. Can your congregation hear that, should they hear it? These are very hard choices. In a lot of places I go, pastors will have a picture of Stonewall Jackson on their walls. I tell them that is great for the suburban, urban, white, southern culture that you are in, but if any African American walks into your office, he will now walk out of your office and out of your church. Is that what you want to happen? Make choices that take into consideration who you minister to now, who you are going to minister to, who you endorse, and what it means.

The next caution is to be careful what you describe in illustrations. Once we learn the power of illustrations to engage, we will begin to recognize that there are many aspects of our lives that are fun to talk about, particularly the ones that are exciting. "During the labor of our firstborn, when my wife was at eight centimeters..." The older generation just fainted, but you have videotapes of it! You have to exegete the congregation as well as the text. These are the four "B's" of being careful what you describe: blood, births, bedrooms, and bathrooms. I will let your mind take care of all of those and tell you just to be careful.

The next caution is to not be the hero. If you do something good, you need to give the credit to God. A way to not be the hero of your own illustration is to tell it in the third person. You may really want to talk about how a wonderful experience happened. The Lord may have brought someone into your life whom you were able to lead to spiritual maturity in some way, and you might want to talk about that. It is often better to say, "I know a pastor who..." The pastor who you know is you, but you do not want to talk about this wonderful thing that you did in front of everyone. If you do talk about the wonderful thing that you did, it is often helpful to say, "I want you to know that I was scared about that. The Lord helped me do this." Confess your weakness even as you tell something positive that happened. Give credit to Him, "The Lord helped me. The Lord enabled me. The Lord carried me through."

You also need to be honest in your illustrations. I say that because of the power of illustrations. The more you begin to use illustrations, you will learn the power of those things that happened to you. To talk about something happening to another preacher has a little power, but it is so much more powerful to say, "I remember when..." That never happened to you though; you read it somewhere. Do not say it is true if it is not. You can use a fable or fictional account as an illustration, but you need to introduce these illustrations with "Let us say ...," "imagine that..." or "I can imagine it would be like..." As long as you put those little phrases at the beginning, everyone knows that you are telling an account that does not have all truth in it. They are perfectly willing to accept it then. You get into trouble when you say that it did happen when it did not. Do not say it happened to you if it did not. This is similar to what I just said. You may have heard Swindoll say it, but do not take it as your own experience.

This has gotten some of my friends in very big trouble. I remember a guy who came here in chapel, preached a sermon, and told an illustration of something that happened to him. The difficulty was that Sproul had been here a few weeks earlier and said it happened to him! Everyone knew this man was lying. You just wanted to die for the guy. He said it happened to him, and he obviously heard it from Sproul. Do not say it happened to you. These days there is so much availability of other people's sermons on the Internet and cassette tapes. You and I both can begin to label the people who are out of their pulpits today for plagiarism. To use other people's illustrations and be perfectly fine you can say, "I have heard it said..." That is all you have to do. You do not have to quote source and all that other stuff. You could also say, "Preachers say..." or "I can remember someone once saying..." All those phrases that help you give away the credit make it okay to use someone else's illustration. I have heard a pastor with full integrity say, "I was in Dallas last week, and I must tell you I heard a sermon that I want you to hear. I am telling you that I am passing along to you what came to me." People fully and readily accepted it. He did not do that every week, but he heard something he wanted them to hear. He gave the credit away and basically presented someone else's sermon. It was perfectly fine because he gave the credit away.

The last thing I will say about being honest is even if an illustration is true but does not seem true, question its use. I was pastor of a church one time, and we built a new building. It was a very cloudy day, and at the time that the steeple was put on the building with the crane the sun broke through a crack in the clouds and it just put a shaft of light right on the steeple as it was being put on the building. It was not across the field; it was right on the steeple. I even have videotapes of that, but whenever I tell it to people they do not believe me. They think I am doing the "preacher elaboration," so I do not tell it anymore except to this class. It creates so many questions that I cannot use it. You might say at times even if it is true but it creates doubts to your credibility you should question whether or not to use it.

Sometimes there are social issues that in order to discuss legitimately you must bring in graphic details. If I am going to talk about partial birth abortion, it may be very hard to get anywhere without giving some specifics. You have probably heard pastors do this, and I have done it too: tell people a week ahead of time that you will be talking about something graphic in church next week. Or in the morning service say, "Tonight in the evening service we will talk about something that is very difficult. It is going to relate to this issue, and if your children are not ready to hear that, I want you to be aware. This is what we are going to be talking about." You can even say that again in the service itself. "We are going to talk about some very graphic things because you need to know the truth." Give them a heads up. That is very powerful, strong, and right to do to be fair to people.

The next caution is to be real. We really like identifiable human-interest accounts. People like to identify with you. It helps to talk more about what is going on in our lives now than the great saints of yesteryear. This is tough, but be wary of it. If my illustrations are only of William Carey and Martin Luther,

people ultimately think that the faith does not apply to regular folk. I am not saying to dispense with those. But if you use the giants of the faith as in illustration, I would use some midgets in the sermon too. I would use some regular folks and their difficulties. If you only use the giants, then people will feel like the faith has nothing to do with real people. One way that you can make the sermon real is redemptive transparency. Talk about your own struggles. Forgive me, because this is graphic language for a moment. It is the difficulty of the pastor knowing this: the pulpit is not just a feel-sorry-for-me booth. "I am so wicked. I am so bad." It is redemptive transparency, "I struggled, but God has helped." It is not just recounting the struggle so people will feel bad for you. It is so that they will know there is hope. This is redemptive transparency. We should often include ourselves in the struggle but show that God provides victory.

You should also be complete and finish where you begin. I tell you these things, and I still make mistakes all the time! You tell an illustration in the sermon, and you get to the point you wanted to make, so you stop. Then at the door everyone says, "Well, did he get home or not?" You forgot to finish the story! If you tell a story that is incomplete, people will just hang there. They almost do not hear the rest of the sermon. If you tell the beginning of something, try to resolve it.

The next caution is to be balanced. Do not use the same source for illustrations too often. You cannot talk about baseball all the time. Military guys, you cannot refer to your military experience all the time. Use those stories about three times a year and that is it. If you do it all the time, even though it is a big part of your life, it will remove people. Do not talk about your baby, the dog, or your hunting adventures all the time. You need to vary your stories. You also need to be precise. Try very carefully to use expositional rain so that people know what you are doing.

Let me say a few final things by way of five key reminders on illustrations. Illustrations are told using the key terms (changed terms in parallel statements) of subpoint statements. The process by which the key terms of the explanation's subpoint statements "drop down" into the illustrations and applications is called "expositional rain." Since an illustration is about "the last thing said prior to it," the key terms of a subpoint statement (or multiple subpoint statements, if they are being illustrated together) should be placed in a summary statement immediately prior to the illustration. The key terms of bullet-and-answers-to-analytical-question subpoints are found in the parallel subpoint statements; however, the key terms of interrogative subpoints are found in the parallel answers to the interrogatives. If there are no subpoints in a main point, then the key terms for "expositional rain" are found in the magnet clause of the main point statement.