

## 7 Ways to Improve Your Preaching Using YouTube

By Gregory K. Hollifield

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A wise old man in my former church was locally famous for saying, “I don’t understand all I know about that.” When you think about it, that makes perfect sense. All of us know about many things that we don’t fully understand. Consequently, we can sympathize with Agur when he confessed, “There are three things that are too amazing for me, four that I do not understand: the way of an eagle in the sky, the way of a snake on a rock, the way of a ship on the high seas, and the way of a man with a maiden” (Proverbs 30:18-19).

Like that wise man, we all know about eagles, snakes, ships, and courting couples, but there are things about them that we do not completely understand, and what we do not understand, we fail to appreciate as much as we might otherwise.

If Agur had lived in our times, I wonder whether his list of four imponderables would have remained the same. What in our age might he have found fascinating but beyond comprehension? If he was anything like the majority of us, he may have mentioned the way of a man with a computer and internet connection.

The web is a fascinating thing, and it grows by the hour! Back when I was beginning my doctoral studies in the late nineties, I performed a web search for “Haddon Robinson.” (Remember when you had to include the quotation marks?) That query generated 48 hits. When I googled that same name a moment ago, without the quotation marks, it produced 1.63 million results in two-tenths of a second. I don’t understand all I know about that! The sheer volume of information available online is staggering to me.

The website YouTube reports that 500 hours of video are uploaded there every minute, 300,000 every hour, resulting in approximately seven million hours of content uploaded daily. Those videos range from the inane to the profound, from the humorous to the tragic. A preacher does not need to understand everything about YouTube or the internet to profit from their use.

No matter how much like a foreigner one feels when exploring the worldwide web, there are preaching treasures to be discovered there. As a preacher and teacher of

homiletics, I suggest that using the sermons found on YouTube can help a preacher in the following ways.

### **Feed your faith.**

Paul touts the value of preaching for faith when he declares that “faith comes by hearing” (Rom. 10:17). The spoken word impacts us in ways that the written word does not. If the communications experts are correct, words spoken before our own eyes are even more impactful. They claim that 86% of communication is nonverbal.

We all need to see and hear the Word preached by others. If not, Paul could have saved himself a lot of trouble by remaining in Tarsus and relying solely upon a correspondence ministry to nurture his converts abroad. Instead, he insisted on visiting and revisiting them time and time again. Paul sensed that they needed to see his face and to hear his voice.

A surgeon doesn't keep himself healthy by operating on his own body. Why should we think that a preacher can do so using only the scalpel of his own sermons? This is not to say that we preachers don't benefit from our own preaching. We certainly should! But we are all blind to many of our personal shortcomings and needs. We don't know what we don't know. God can use the preaching of others through YouTube to minister to our souls.

### **Pick up new ideas.**

Listening to others preach we can pick up exegetical insights, personal illustrations, and ways of applying a text that may have never occurred to us personally. No two preachers' bookshelves house the same books. No two preachers' lives experience the same events in the same ways, and no two congregations need to hear the same text applied exactly the same.

If we depend solely upon our own books, our own experiences, and our own perceptions of what people need, our preaching will grow stale, if not predictable, very quickly.

### **Find a guest speaker.**

How often have you been moved by another preacher's words only to find them powerless when you attempted to relay them to your own congregation? There was something more to what the preacher said than he said. It was something in the way he

said it. There was a power, a depth of conviction, a rare flash of raw sincerity that you could not recapture. If those words were captured on video, why not play them for your people? You need not abdicate your pulpit for the whole sermon necessarily. Edit the clip to what you found to be the most poignant.

Pastors used to have to spend hundreds, if not thousands, of dollars to bring in guest speakers. Some speakers they could never afford; others felt too ashamed to ask visit their small congregations. YouTube costs nothing, and the preachers there will never gossip about anything in your church.

### **Hear the author.**

It's one thing to read what a writer says about how to construct a sermon. It's another to hear him preach. Some homileticians write far better than they preach, and some preach far better than they write.

I think that all of us who attempt to write about preaching naturally use our best sermons as examples of the concepts that we're describing. We also try to provide the purest examples of those concepts. The problem is that none of us are at our best every Sunday and rarely are our sermons purely topical, textual, or expository. In any given message we may violate as many of our homiletical principles as we keep. Still, on the whole, regular patterns do emerge, and principles manifest themselves in practice.

Whenever we come across a book on the theory or methods of preaching, we ought to look for video examples of the author in practice. The more examples, the better we can gauge how well his theory and methods work and whether we want to follow suit.

### **Study good (and bad) examples.**

Closely related to the last point yet distinct is the way that YouTube yields good examples for preachers to dissect. Many excellent preachers never take the time to write out their methods. They may even be embarrassed trying to explain what they do so naturally without thought. Like the oral prophets Elijah and Elisha, they remain worthy of study despite their inability to commit their procedures to the printed page.

Yankees great Yogi Berra reportedly said, "You can observe a lot by watching." The late Adrian Rogers would have agreed. When I once asked him to identify the five books that most influenced how he preached, he could think of only one book that he had read

on the subject. It was a title by Andrew Blackwood that was required reading while he was in college. “Most of what I know about preaching,” Rogers told me, “I learned from observation and experience.”

The internet is full of good and bad examples of preaching. When I find one that is particularly good, I ask why. “What did that preacher do that made his sermon, its introduction, his illustrations, applications, conclusion, or whatever, so effective? How is that different from what I normally do?” When I find one that’s remarkably bad, I once again want to know why. “Why didn’t this sermon, introduction, etc. work? What could have been done differently to salvage the message?” An observant preacher can see as much watching the bad as he can watching the good.

### **Listen to others in your own league.**

If I can be painfully honest for a moment, I struggle with a sense of inferiority as a preacher. It’s intimidating for me to listen to men like Haddon Robinson, Tim Keller, Adrian Rogers, and others. I just don’t feel like I’m in the same league. While I know what Paul says about the dangers of comparing ourselves with one another (2 Corinthians 10:12), I can’t seem to help it. I doubt that I’m alone.

When we hear preachers like these, we tend to think that they preach that way all the time or that everyone preaches like them – at least everyone that we admire. We forget that they produce their fair share of clunkers too. We ignore the likelihood that they’ve preached that particularly wonderful sermon in dozens of churches and conferences before. We overlook the possibility that they may employ research assistants or other support personnel that allow them time that the rest of us don’t have to concentrate on developing and polishing their sermons.

Many of the sermons on YouTube are posted by preachers like most of us – preachers who may be relatively unknown outside their own congregations, communities, or denominations, but who still give the Lord their best Sunday after Sunday. Listening to them, we may come to realize that we’re not nearly as bad, or as good, as we previously thought. That can be either as encouraging or as humbling for us as the Lord wants it to be.

### **Learn from another culture.**

Because I teach in a multi-cultural setting, I try to read as widely as I can in the field of homiletics. Most of the books on preaching that I know anything about are written by

men, and a few women, who look like me. Over the past few years, I have grown increasingly aware of my need to read from homileticians of color. Doing so has given me new insights. Their suggestions, when I've acted upon them, have stretched me and made me into a more well-rounded preacher. I realize though that I still have much to learn.

Listening to the late E. K. Bailey, along with current preachers like Frank Thomas and Ralph Douglas West, has helped me to develop a joy and creativity in preaching that I previously lacked. How much more might I or any preacher learn from our brothers and sisters of other cultures, along with all of the rest just like us, who are waiting for us online?

He who has ears and an internet connection, let him hear!

**Greg Hollifield** is Associate Dean for Assessment and Reporting, Memphis College of Urban and Theological Studies of Union University in Jackson, Tennessee.