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THE PREACHERS' PERSONAL LIVES AND THE RELEVANCE TO THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THEIR PREACHING

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Article Publication Details

This article is published in the **International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research and Bulletin**, ISSN 3108-1428 (Online) Volume 4 Issue 4 (July – Aug) 2025.

ABSTRACT

Preaching is essential to Christian ministry because it is the main way that God's Word is shared and the congregation's faith is developed and strengthened. However, a preacher's personal life and spiritual integrity are more important factors in determining the effectiveness of their sermons than their eloquence, theological knowledge, or rhetorical abilities. This essay explores the close relationship that exists between a preacher's personal life and the influence of their sermons. It contends that the authenticity and potency of a preacher's message are directly impacted by their character, which includes their spiritual development, moral behavior, emotional well-being, family life, lifestyle decisions, and public image. The study examines how a preacher's life must be consistent with the gospel they preach, focusing on the theological aspect. It does this by drawing on biblical foundations, such as Paul's exhortations to Timothy and the examples of Old Testament prophets.

Keywords: Preaching, Christian ministry, preacher's personal life, spiritual integrity, moral conduct, Gospel ministry.

INTRODUCTION

Preaching is one of the central tasks of the Christian ministry, serving as the primary means by which God's Word is proclaimed to His people. Through preaching, divine truth is communicated, faith is nurtured, and the church is edified. This is usually, though not always, accomplished by the oral presentation of the Gospel on the part of a Christian. The person who proclaims the Gospel is called a

“preacher,” and the presentation of the Gospel message is described as “preaching the Gospel”.¹ God uses preaching to communicate with men and women. People’s lives are built up, transformed, convicted, challenged, and changed by the preaching of the Word of God. One Christian commented on a powerful speaker he had heard saying, “The speaker preaches challenges to the people which touch them in their current needs. Many respond positively to God’s Word through repentance and confessions.” Preaching is not a speech but an encounter with God. The man of God is prepared spiritually to be used of God to speak to people.²

However, the power and effectiveness of preaching are not determined solely by the eloquence, theological knowledge, or rhetorical skill of the preacher, but also by the moral and spiritual condition of the one who preaches. We cannot divorce the preacher from his preaching. In a very real way the man is his message: the preacher is his proclamation: the speaker is his sermon. It is the man behind the message that determines its weight, for in this, as in everything else, quality is to be preferred to quantity. According to Karl Barth in Dwayne Howell, famously argues that, because the sermon is an event in which god speaks, the personal element in preaching should be minimized as much as possible.³ Barth’s primary metaphor for the preacher is that of a “herald” who proclaims a word he has received from the king, a word that is not the herald’s own and that is not shaped or inflected by his own history, experience, social location, or perspective. It was this fact that Paul had in mind when he wrote to Timothy, “Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them; for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee” (1 Tim. 4:16).⁴ The preacher’s personal life his relationship with God, moral integrity, and daily conduct plays a crucial role in determining how his message is received and how much impact it makes on the hearers.

In the contemporary church, there is increasing concern over the superficial disconnect between preaching and practice among some ministers. Humiliations involving immorality, greed, dishonesty, and abuse of power have weakened the moral authority of the pulpit and weakened public trust in the church’s witness. Consequently, the spiritual fruit of preaching in many congregations has been diminutive, as listeners increasingly judge the message by the life of the messenger. This reality raises a vital theological and pastoral question: To what extent does the preacher’s personal life affect the effectiveness of his preaching? Many preachers today demonstrate extraordinary silver-tongued skills, yet their personal lives fail to reflect the holiness and integrity demanded by the gospel they proclaim. This unpredictability has produced a credibility crisis in ministry, leading to spiritual disenchantment among congregants and

¹ Gibbs P. Alfred, *The Preacher and His Preaching*, (Dubuque: ECS Ministries, 2002), 31.

² George E. Janvier, *Biblical Preaching in Africa*, (Jos: Ade Printing Press, 2002), 7.

³ J. Dwayne Howell, *Preaching and the Personal* (United Kingdom: The Lutterworth Press, 2013), 22.

⁴ *Gibbs, 31.*

weakening the transformative power of preaching. The problem is not merely ethical but theological it challenges the biblical understanding of the preacher as both a messenger and a model of divine truth. The need, therefore, arises to examine the theological and practical relationship between a preacher's personal life and the effectiveness of his preaching.

Theological and Biblical Foundations Of Preacher Personal Lives

The function of God's messenger goes beyond simply conveying words; it also includes living out the message from the very beginning of Scripture. Prophets like Isaiah (Isaiah 6:1–8) and Jeremiah (see Jeremiah 1:5–10) were called to speak into Israel's lives in the Old Testament. Jeremiah was instructed to “go and speak to them all that I command you, do not be afraid ... for I have made you a fortified city” (Jer 1:7-8), which included a charge to live a life that was compatible with their message. The notion that the messengers have a certain character and level of dedication is inherent in this calling.

Furthermore, according to Psalm 11:7, the Hebrew concept of "righteousness" encompasses more than just outward compliance; it also refers to an internal disposition of heart. The prophet incorporates elements of his life into his teachings. Accordingly, the Old Testament foundation places the preacher (or prophet) in a position where their life must testify to God's Word in addition to their words. The apostolic ministry of preaching in the New Testament is closely linked to the life of the preacher. For instance, the apostle Paul frequently cites his behavior as the cornerstone of his message's legitimacy:

“You are witnesses, and God also, how devoutly, righteously, and blamelessly we behaved ourselves among you who believed.” (1 Thess 2:10 NKJV)

Both doctrine and life are included in Paul's exhortation to Timothy: "Pay serious attention to both your doctrine and your life. You will save yourself and those who hear you if you keep on in them (1 Tim 4:16 NKJV). This demonstrates unequivocally the connection between a preacher's personal life and his sermons. The preacher's life is shaped by Christlikeness. Jesus own life is the prime interpretive lens for ministry. The ethic of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7) and Jesus sacrificial, servant leadership (Mark 10:42-45; John 13:1-17) call preachers to humility, integrity, purity of motive, and love for enemies.

The Preacher's Personal Life

The personal life of the preacher consists of various interconnected aspects that influence not only the identity of the preacher but also the manner in which sermons are crafted, presented, and perceived. These aspects encompass spiritual development, ethical and moral behavior, emotional and psychological well-

being, familial and relational dynamics, as well as lifestyle choices, financial status, and public image. Each aspect plays a role in enhancing the preacher's credibility, pastoral leadership, and ability to engage in sincere and compassionate ministry.

Spiritual Formation and Devotional Life

Spiritual formation encompasses the individual and communal practices of the preacher that nurture their relationship with God, enhance theological comprehension, and establish the rhythms of worship and prayer. A well-developed devotional life anchors the preacher's sermons in biblical integrity and spiritual genuineness. Consistent engagement in Scripture reading, prayer, participation in sacraments, and theological inquiry influences the content and tone of sermons, equipping the preacher with theological insights, spiritual discernment, and reliance on God rather than solely on rhetorical abilities. When spiritual formation is strong, sermons are likely to exhibit depth, humility, and a profound sense of vocation; conversely, when it is lacking, preaching may veer towards moralism, performance, or superficial topicality.⁵

Moral and ethical conduct

Moral and ethical conduct encompasses integrity, honesty, sexual ethics, truthfulness, and consistency between public teaching and private behavior. The moral life of the preacher functions as a living sermon: congregants habitually interpret a preacher's words in light of observable conduct. Integrity fosters trust, enabling the congregation to receive correction and challenge; inconsistency or scandal undermines authority and the perceived reliability of the preached word. Integrity is a virtue which is inbuilt in mankind from where sincerity and honesty are its end products. The person who poses true integrity has a unity of Pastoral ministry.⁶ According to Ajao, integrity involves being honest and having an acceptable moral life. Integrity indispensable in life and ministry. Pastoral ethics is a basic standard of conduct which determines what is appropriate, acceptable and expected of a Pastor both in his personal and professional lives.⁷ Ethical lapses damage both individual ministries and wider ecclesial integrity, which is why traditions and institutions commonly emphasize character standards for clergy and oversight mechanisms to protect congregations and preserve witness.

⁵ David, Chul Seung Lee, *The Role of the Personality of the Preacher in Preaching* (University of Pretoria 2004) 534.

⁶ Pukumah Haniel Yakubu, *The place of Integrity in Contemporary Pastoral Ministry in Ministerial Integrity paper in Honour of Rev Dr. Sunday Aramide Fagbemi @ 60 ed. Abraham Olutoye Odelele* (Ibadan: KOGIAH Communications, 2018), 235-236.

⁷ Olalekan Olumide Ajao, *The Minister and Family Integrity in Ministerial Integrity paper in Honour of Rev Dr. Sunday Aramide Fagbemi @ 60 ed. Abraham Olutoye Odelele* (Ibadan: KOGIAH Communications, 2018), 20.

Emotional and psychological health

Self-awareness, emotional control, resilience, and pastoral empathy are all components of emotional and psychological well-being. Preachers who maintain their mental and emotional health are better able to handle criticism, handle the rigors of ministry, and empathize with others without becoming burned out or trapped. When preaching, emotional maturity allows for appropriate vulnerability by sharing personal struggles in ways that foster connection rather than draw attention to the preacher. On the other hand, untreated trauma, chronic stress, or mental health problems can slope sermon content, impair pastoral judgment, and raise the possibility of negative behaviors. For this reason, having access to counseling, supervision, and supportive peer networks is a practical requirement for long-term ministry.

Family life and relational integrity

The minister's relationship with family is foundational to both personal spiritual health and public ministry effectiveness. Scripture clearly presents the family as the first institution established by God and as a vital context for spiritual formation, leadership development, and the modeling of gospel values. For ministers in the Nigerian Baptist Convention, where the pastor is often seen as both spiritual leader and community example, the integration of family and ministry is both a biblical mandate and practical necessity.⁸

Family life and close relationships are central to a preacher's personal testimony and pastoral credibility. The preacher's marriage, parenting, friendships, and peer relationships model relational practices such as love, patience, conflict resolution, and forgiveness. Healthy family dynamics lend authority to teaching on marriage, parenting, and community; dysfunctional or secretive relational patterns weaken the preacher's capacity to speak fruitfully on domestic and interpersonal topics. The attitude of Pastor Family determines the effectiveness of his ministry.⁹ Ministers with relationship problems often do not admit to reality. Instead they view the people around them as the problem.¹⁰ Churches often evaluate pastoral fitness partly through the lens of family stability and relational maturity, recognizing that ministry is relationally

⁸ Olusayo Bosun Oladejo, Biblical Paradigms for the Gospel Minister and His Relationship in the Nigerian Baptist Convention Context in *The Gospel Minister and His Relationship*. Stehen Oladele Ayankeye and Olufemi Samuel Amoran ed., Ministry Enrichment series Volume 12 (Ogbomosho: NBTS Kingdom Impact Publishing and Media Service), 44.

⁹ Olalekan Olumide Ajao, The Minister and Family Integrity in Ministerial Integrity paper in Honour of Rev Dr. Sunday Aramide Fagbemi @ 60 ed. Abraham Olutoye Odelele (Ibadan: KOGIAH Communications, 2018), 21.

¹⁰ D. O. E Madoghwe, *The Gospel Minister and His Relationship* in *The Gospel Minister and His Relationship*. Stehen Oladele Ayankeye and Olufemi Samuel Amoran ed., Ministry Enrichment series Volume 12 (Ogbomosho: NBTS Kingdom Impact Publishing and Media Service), 29.

intensive and that a preacher's household provides a primary context for discipleship and character formation.

Lifestyle, finances, and public reputation

Lifestyle choices, stewardship of finances, personal habits, and public reputation shape congregational perceptions and the preacher's social witness. Lifestyle includes how time is spent, leisure practices, consumption patterns, and public comportment. Financial integrity transparent stewardship, avoidance of exploitative gain, and responsible use of resources guards against scandal and models biblical stewardship. Improper spending habits could mar one's record of liberality, or they could give added emphasis to this virtue. A minister of God should not spend his money on things he does not use on regular basis. The Bible says that not only did Samuel refuse to take anything not belonging to him, he also asked his countrymen to identify anything that he had accumulated through the power of his office, and he would quickly and cheerfully return (cf. 1 Samuel 12:1-4).¹¹

Wolfe asserts that display of integrity and honesty in the handling of finances would make the leader has credibility with his followers. According to him, this virtue made it possible for Paul to have followership. It is possible, therefore, to see people grieving so openly about losing a man of financial integrity.¹² A preacher's public reputation, including social media presence, community involvement, and professional conduct, influences the reach and reception of preaching. When lifestyle and finances align with proclaimed values, the preacher's message gains weight; when discrepancies appear, sermons risk being dismissed as hypocritical or self-serving.

Interrelationships among the dimensions

These dimensions do not operate in isolation; they interact dynamically. Spiritual formation informs moral choices; emotional health affects family relationships; financial practices influence public reputation. Strength in one area can compensate temporarily for weakness in another, but sustained effectiveness typically requires integrated development across dimensions. For instance, strong devotional life without emotional maturity may still yield sermons lacking pastoral sensitivity, while excellent relational skills without theological grounding may produce warmly received but theologically thin preaching.

The Relevance of the Preacher's Life to the Effectiveness of Preaching

¹¹ Banji Adepoju Olaniyan, *The Minister and His Finances in Ministerial Integrity* paper in Honour of Rev Dr. Sunday Aramide Fagbemi @ 60 ed. Abraham Olutoye Odelele (Ibadan: KOGIAH Communications, 2018), 7-11.

¹² Lorin Woolfe, *The Bible on Leadership* (New York: AMACOM (American Management Association, 2002), 7.

Preaching, in theological terms, is the proclamation of celestial truth through human character under the encouragement of the Holy Spirit. Preaching is to make known (Ephesians 6:19), to proclaim (Romans 9:17) to bear witness (1 Corinthians 15:15); to teach (Romans 12:21).¹³ According to Haddon Robinson, “Preaching is the communication of biblical truth by a human personality to contemporary hearers with the resolved of leading them to a spiritual response.”¹⁴ In this view, effectiveness is measured not by articulateness or passionate appeal but by the transformative impact of the message on both the preacher and the congregation.

According to theology, successful preaching happens when the Word of God inspires in the listeners conviction, faith, repentance, and obedience (Romans 10:17; Hebrews 4:12). Therefore, the preacher serves as a conduit for the dissemination of divine knowledge. However, the message is tainted and its impact diminished when the vessel is defiled morally, spiritually, or ethically. According to John Stott, “preaching is truth through personality; therefore, if the personality is flawed, the truth is likely to be distorted.”² Therefore, a preacher's integrity and spiritual energy are just as important to their efficacy as their faithful explanation of Scripture. The message's potency is linked to the messenger's life.

The Preacher's Character as a Barrier to the Gospel

The preacher's life serves as a channel for or a hindrance to the power of God. God's use of His servants was frequently associated with their personalities throughout biblical history. Personal virtue enhances divine usefulness, as demonstrated by Paul's integrity (Acts 20:33–35) and Moses' meekness (Numbers 12:3). On the other hand, the moral failings of Eli (1 Samuel 2:12–17) and Samson (Judges 16) show how moral weakness can obstruct God's work. "The effectiveness of the sermon often depends upon what the preacher is, as much as upon what he says, “Charles Spurgeon confirmed.¹⁵ Either the preacher's moral and spiritual qualities increase or decrease the impact of his message. When the vessel through which the Holy Spirit operates is compromised, the flow of divine grace through his preaching is impeded (2 Timothy 2:21). This idea is still relevant in modern ministry. Gatherings are more common.¹⁶

The Connection between the Anointing of the Spirit and Lifestyle

¹³ Gibbs P. Alfred, *The Preacher and His Preaching*, (Dubuque: ECS Ministries, 2002), 14.

¹⁴ H. Robinson, *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages* (2nd ed.). (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001), 45.

¹⁵ C. H. Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students*. (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1874), 75.

¹⁶ D. Bryan, The Role of Moral Credibility in Religious Communication. *Journal of Practical Theology*, 21(3), (2018): 45–61.

The anointing of the Holy Spirit is essential to preaching that works. Speaking with spiritual authority and transformative power is made possible by the preacher's divine empowerment (Luke 4:18; Acts 1:8). This anointing, however, is intimately related to the preacher's moral and spiritual life. The life of the preacher is the life of his ministry, according to M. Bounds.¹⁷ The vigor of his spiritual life dictates how powerful his sermons are. Preachers who live in obedience, purity, and communion with God become conduits for the unrestricted work of the Holy Spirit. Spiritual authority, however, is undermined in the presence of sin, arrogance, or hypocrisy.¹⁸ According to the Psalmist, “the Lord will not hear me if I regard iniquity in my heart” (Psalm 66:18). Similarly, according to Isaiah, sin keeps people from God (Isaiah 59:02). The preacher is also subject to this rule: sin is not just forgiveness.

Audience Perception and the Messenger's Credibility

From the standpoint of communication, the preacher's ethos, or personal credibility, has a significant impact on how his message is received. Along with pathos (emotion) and logos (reason), ethos is one of the three fundamental elements of persuasion according to Aristotle's classical rhetorical theory.¹⁹ In homiletics, this principle aligns with biblical teaching: the preacher's life reinforces his message. By telling the Thessalonians, “You are witnesses, and God also, how holy, righteous, and blameless we were among you who believed,” Paul demonstrated his understanding of this dynamic (1 Thessalonians 2:10). His message was reinforced by his credibility. Even the most biblically accurate sermons may be rejected by listeners who see a discrepancy between the speaker's words and deeds. This perspective is also supported by contemporary psychology of religion. According to McCready's research, moral authenticity in preachers boosts listeners' emotional receptivity and trust.²⁰

Practical and Ministerial Implications

There are significant practical and ministerial ramifications to the relationship between a preacher's personal life and the efficacy of his sermons. Preaching is an act of spiritual representation in which the preacher becomes both messenger and message; it is not just a question of eloquence or theological

¹⁷ E. M. Bounds, *Power Through Prayer* (New York: Revell, 1929), 67.

¹⁸ J. O'Neal, *Anointed to Preach: Spirit Empowerment and Holiness in Ministry* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2016), 45.

¹⁹ G. A. Kennedy, *Classical Rhetoric and Its Christian and Secular Tradition* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 87.

²⁰ J. McCready, “Moral Authenticity and Listener Engagement in Sermons.” *Journal of Religious Communication Studies*, 14(2), (2017): 102–119.

proficiency. The preacher's moral discipline, spiritual development, and personal integrity determine not only the message's transformative power but also its credibility. In a sense, the preacher's life serves as a living commentary on the gospel he teaches. In practical terms, this suggests that character development is the first step towards ministerial effectiveness. In order to have an impact on others, a preacher must first be affected by the truth he teaches. A life that is resistant to its own transforming power cannot receive the gospel. As Oswald Chambers correctly noted, "the message must be part of the messenger before it can ever be delivered with power".²¹ Therefore, theological schools need to prioritize spiritual development just as much as academic achievement. Personal holiness, prayer, and ethical behavior must be taught in addition to biblical studies, theology, and homiletics. A minister who possesses intellectual capacity but lacks spiritual maturity runs the risk of becoming a professional speaker instead of a prophetic voice.

Accountability becomes an essential defense of integrity in the context of ministry. Every preacher needs supervision, guidance, and correction; none are spiritually self-sufficient. Lack of accountability encourages moral negligence and loneliness, which frequently result in ethical collapse. Olagunju points out that the lack of appropriate accountability mechanisms in African churches has led to an increase in immoral scandals involving ministers, undermining public confidence in the gospel.²² The purpose of accountability structures, like pastoral boards, peer mentorship, and denominational oversight, is to protect ministers rather than control them. The integrity of the pulpit is preserved and ministers' public testimony gains credibility when they are held accountable.

Furthermore, the spiritual fruitfulness of a preacher's ministry is directly impacted by his inner life of devotion. Deep communion with God is the source of life-changing preaching. Prayer, fasting, meditation, and scripture study are examples of spiritual practices that mold the preacher into a vessel suitable for divine use. Without them, ministry becomes uninspired and mechanical. Charles Spurgeon once said, "A holy preacher is an awful weapon in the hand of God,"²³ highlighting that the real power of preaching is holiness rather than eloquence. Preachers' sermons, no matter how well-crafted, lose the anointing that touches people's hearts when they neglect their personal relationship with God. Furthermore, the pulpit should be seen as a moral platform rather than a platform for self-

²¹ O. Chambers, *My Utmost for His Highest* (Grand Rapids, MI: Discovery House, 1996), 25.

²² A. O. Olagunju, "Moral Integrity and the Ministerial Call." *Nigerian Baptist Theological Review*, 8(2), (2019): 54–66.

²³ C. H. Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1990), 59.

promotion.²⁴ Since the preacher is a symbol of divine authority, his moral behavior must reflect the holiness of his vocation. A hypocritical minister undermines the church's overall witness in addition to his own influence.²⁵

Conclusion

Within the divine economy of ministry, the preacher's personal life and the quality of his sermons are inextricably linked. The message's credibility is based on the messenger's sincerity. Even if a preacher is a master of rhetoric and theology, his words are useless without holiness. True preaching comes from godliness rather than talent. Preachers who live out the message of the cross and whose behavior exemplifies Christ's holiness, humility, and compassion are desperately needed in the church today. The pulpit's moral credibility and the church's spiritual vitality can only be restored by such preachers. John Stott once said, "The secret of preaching is not mastering certain techniques but being mastered by certain convictions." These beliefs must be firmly anchored in a life fully given to God. A preacher's words have divine weight when his life is in line with the gospel.

Article History

Received: 10-July-2025

Accepted: 25-July-2025

Published: 09-Aug-2025

Revised: 15-Feb-2026

Article Publication Details (rpt*)

This article is published in the [International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research and Bulletin](#), ISSN 3108-1428 (Online). In Volume 4 Issue 4 (July – Aug) 2025

The journal is published and managed by [IRPG](#).

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Acknowledgements

We sincerely thank the editors and the reviewers for their valuable suggestions on this paper.

²⁴ J. Stott, *Between Two Worlds: The Art of Preaching in the Twentieth Century* (Michigan: Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982), 75.

²⁵ T. F. Torrance, *Incarnation: The Person and Life of Christ* (Illinois: Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008), 90.

Funding

The authors declare that no funding was received for this work.

Data availability

No datasets were generated or analyzed during the current study.

Declarations**Ethics approval and consent to participate**

The author(s) declare that it is not applicable.

Consent for publication

The author(s) declare that this is not applicable.

Competing interests

The author(s) declare that they have no competing interests.

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