

Preaching For Change

Connecting With the 21st Century Audience

A Series of Interviews With:

Dr. Erwin Lutzer
Colin Smith
Dr. Gary McIntosh
Dr. Larry Osborne

*Featured Speakers at the
October 2007 Great Lakes District Conference.*

*Written by Dr. Kurt Trucksess
January 2008*

Erwin Lutzer – [Staying Power in the Pulpit](#)

What does it take to preach with long-term effectiveness?

Colin Smith – [Transformational Expository Preaching](#)

Why is the rebirth of expository preaching crucial for the church?

Gary McIntosh – [Preaching for Church Growth](#)

What is the relationship between preaching and church growth?

Larry Osborne – [Preaching with Freshness](#)

How can I preach with creativity?

Dr. Kurt Trucksess enjoys reading, writing, time with his family and wrestling with his sons. His favorite topics of study are ancient rhetoric and preaching. Feel free to contact him at ktruck@gmail.com or visit his web at www.kurttrucksess.com

One on One with Erwin Lutzer **Staying Power in the Pulpit**

Preaching is like an old four-barrel carburetor, it needs constant tinkering to be kept in tune. Some preachers, like master mechanics, have the knack for preaching finely tuned sermons in spite of a changing audience.

Have you ever wanted to sit down with one of those preachers? Have you ever dreamed of just 15 minutes of their undivided attention to listen to their heart? In October I had the opportunity to fulfill part of that dream when I interviewed some excellent preachers at the Great Lakes District Conference of the EFCA.

What follows is my interview with Dr. Erwin Lutzer, Pastor of Moody Church. In upcoming issues we will sit down with Colin Smith, Dr. Gary McIntosh and Dr. Larry Osborne. I hope you enjoy a few minutes of their undivided attention; just as I did.

So grab a refill on the Starbucks, kick up your feet and join me with Dr. Lutzer in the foyer of Naperville EFC as we pick up a few gems of wisdom to keep our preaching well tuned for the long haul

Erwin, you have pastored Moody for 28 years. How have you been able to stay effective for almost three decades?

That is a good question. There are two things I learned to stay relevant with today's audience.

First, over the years I became inclined to topical exposition rather than simply going through a book of the Bible. When I first came, I preached expository messages working chronologically through the scriptures. I still preach expository messages today but I often base them on a theme.

For example, in January I hope to preach a series of messages on living with delayed promises. In the series I will wrestle with the health and wealth preachers who expect all the blessings of our relationship with Christ to be part of our lives today, they believe heaven should be now. This series ties into a "cultural stream" of our society. Health and wealth preaching is a hot topic both in and out of the church so we have a natural interest for of our listeners. Each of the messages in this series will be an expository message based on a text of scripture.

This doesn't mean that I *never* preach through a book of the Bible. When I preach straight through a book, I tend to take it in larger chunks. For instance, it wouldn't work for me to preach a series of fifty messages from the book of Matthew.

The second thing I have learned over the years is to be much more sensitive to the congregation. For instance, when I first came to the church in 1980, I would preach about abortion. Today I still preach about it but in an entirely different way. I will refer to the fact there are many women listening to me who had an abortion. I will remind them of God's cleansing and forgiveness.

Another example would be preaching about homosexuality. I realize in my congregation there are individuals struggling with this sin. I will make a distinction between those with a radical homosexual agenda and those who are not radicals but strugglers wanting release from this sin.

To preach without sensitivity to the people in the congregation who are struggling with sin is... well... a very insensitive thing to do. After all these years of ministry I have come to see much more clearly that we live in a very broken world and I must speak with sensitivity and compassion to broken people.

Have you ever done anything with audience feedback?

I always like to get feedback from those who either agree or disagree but I never had a formal mechanism. One year I handed out 3x5 cards to the audience and asked them what they wanted me to preach on. Come to think of it; in the evening service I have done questions and answers on the things I said... if that is considered feedback; then I have received feedback, but not in the morning service.

How do you approach a message?

The decision of what to preach on happens in my heart through observation, reading the Word, and discussions with the pastoral staff. Some of the best ideas on how to shape a series come from the pastoral staff. If I was younger, one of the things I would do differently is spend more time interacting with them on what I preach.

When it comes to structuring a message, I have a simple method of outlining. All points are subsumed under a key word which is a plural noun. You have great parallelism this way. Incidentally, the key word does *not* have to come from the Bible. For instance, a key word could be “reasons”. A number of years ago I preached on seven “reasons” we should believe our Bible.

When I was beginning ministry at Edgewater Baptist, the idea of how to preach just blew past me. But 10 minutes over a cup of coffee with Lloyd Perry radically changed my approach. He taught me to organize things around key words. It is not just my preaching I do this way, but also my writing. Lloyd Perry had a list of 200 to 300 key words I used to work off of. I don't have to pull them out any more but they helped me learn to group my ideas and give form to them.

Remember, you have to be simple. Too many guys have too many ideas. You don't know where they are going. This is why I like the key word concept, it gives coherence. When I taught homiletics at Trinity I would tell the students that the most important thing to preaching, after being spirit filled, is the packaging. Think of a sermon as a piece of cloth, you begin with an intro, you lead them to where you want them to go, then you tie the ribbon at the end by referring to the introduction so it is a coherent piece of cloth. The key word keeps it sewn together, like one piece of fabric.

With those closing thoughts, Erwin and I parted company. How well did my last sermon hang together? Let's just say I needed more focus. Every one of us longs to preach sermons that purr like content cats enjoying the afternoon sun. The keyword concept unlocked sermonic unity for Erwin, maybe it will unlock it for you?

Sensitivity in the pulpit is another important piece of advice. Luke 4:22 tells us that our Jesus, our master teacher, was known as a gracious preacher,... a preacher sensitive to the people.

“And all spoke well of him and marveled at the gracious words that were coming from his mouth.” Luke 4:22

A long term pastorate takes a gracious preacher; a preacher sensitive to the struggles of real people in the real world.

As I finished the last sips of my coffee cup I jotted down a few things to remember. I hope you also found gems of wisdom to help with your next sermon.

© Dr. Kurt Trucksess. You are permitted and encouraged to reproduce and distribute this material in any format provided that: (1) you credit the author, (2) any modifications are clearly marked, (3) you do not charge a fee beyond the cost of reproduction, (4) you include the web site address (<http://www.kurttrucksess.com/>) on the copied resource.

One on One with Colin Smith **Transformational Expository Preaching**

“But Pastor, why don’t you preach on something relevant? I need help with my marriage, raising my children and advice on saving for retirement. How can a book of the Bible like 1 Corinthians or Deuteronomy relate to me?”

How do we relate an ancient text to a modern world? Preachers adopt a variety of ways to connect their message to their audience. Recent decades witnessed a swing away from classical expository preaching and the elevation of need based topical sermons. Don’t misunderstand me; topical preaching has a valid place in the church. But in our zest to connect with the sophisticated world, have we come up spiritually undernourished by ignoring expository preaching?

Colin Smith, Senior Pastor of the Arlington Heights Evangelical Free Church, believes many of us may have inadvertently done this. At the October Great Lakes District Conference of the Free Church, Colin taught a track on Transformational Expository Preaching, a rethinking of expository preaching for our day.

I sat down with Colin, listened to his heart and found myself emboldened to unashamedly anchor my preaching in the ancient text as I preach to everyday needs.

Join me as we sit down with Colin and listen to his heartbeat for the pulpit.

Colin, you champion expository preaching. How does expository preaching connect with our everyday needs?

I stick with expository preaching because God promised to bless His Word and the blessing will be upon the words of the preachers as they are a faithful reflection of the words God gives us in Scripture. It would be an absolute disaster if God gave us 66 books of His inspired Word and the best thing I could think of to do on a Sunday morning is give people my opinion on how they can do life better.

The preacher is entrusted to communicate what God entrusted to us. One must recognize there are some inherent problems with topical preaching. First of all, it assumes I know the needs of people better than God does. God knows what we need and that is what he gave us in His Word. We must be careful when we create our own solutions to people’s needs and then simply attach Bible texts to support them. Coming to the scriptures first allows God to set the agenda of what our real needs actually are. Many times what we think we need and what God says we need are two different things. Expository preaching lets God’s analysis of people’s needs set the agenda.

Now I realize this can go astray and this is why I like the term “transformational expository preaching”. I am very concerned about preaching that is merely Bible explanation that sounds something like a running commentary rather than a sermon. Preaching is not just making comments on Bible texts, as John Stott describes it, preaching is a bridge between two worlds.

In my own pastoral work I have seen how the preacher can teach the text, but not adequately connect it to people's lives. We need to be every bit as intentional about connecting the text to the people as we are about understanding the text.

Transformational expository preaching is preaching driven by the text of Scripture, because there is nothing better to say than what God has to say, and it is what God has to say to us today.

To apply the text I must know the needs of the people. Pastors are not to just be in their study; pastors need to pastor, they need to be with their people. As we meet with those in pain, weep with those who weep and rejoice with those who rejoice, we understand the needs of our people and we see how God applies his timeless words to His people. It is the Word of God, not the preacher that changes people's lives. The preacher's power is only found in his ability to take the Word in one hand and our lives in the other and bring them together.

I have seen young men fall into the trap of what I call "cerebral expository preaching." This is preaching that is scripturally sound, but it is not brought to bear upon the needs of the congregation. It is not earthed. People put up with it for a while, but when the pastor leaves, the congregation longs for a topical preacher because they have never heard how God's Word brings encouragement and hope to their lives. This "Cerebral Expository Preaching" is what killed expository preaching in many churches.

So it is important for the pastor to not just study the text, but to study the people. How do you address the needs of the people when you are constrained to preaching chronologically through a book?

I think there are two parts to this. First is the necessity of doing pastoral work, not just being a preacher. As I said before, knowing the needs of the people helps the Holy Spirit apply the text to their lives. This is a pressure for me serving in a larger church. I don't necessarily need to do pastoral work. I have a staff. People don't expect me to see them. When I invite people in, they are surprised. While I can't do this for everyone in the church, I do this for some. The reason I do it is because if I don't, it will shrivel me. The effectiveness of my preaching will diminish if I spend all my time with one hand in the text, but fail to use the other hand to touch the people.

Second, as part of my preparation process, I try to think intentionally every week about who is in the congregation. I think about how the text relates to the middle school kids, to the children, to the unconverted, to the woman having an operation, to the man who is bereaved of his wife. Mentally bringing the text to the congregation drives me to say, "What does the Scripture say to them?"

Being in touch with the wounds and worries also helps me avoid a pitfall many preachers fall into, that is preaching all Law and not Gospel. The message of the Bible is to lift high Christ and what God has done for us through Christ. Who we are in Christ is the foundation and motivation of all that we seek to do in life. For example, the Heidelberg Catechism has all the Law of God in a section entitled, "Gratitude." That is brilliant! The whole of the Christian life is lived as an

expression of gratitude for who we are in Christ. It is life dependent and delighting in the Spirit.

There is a lot of preaching today that wouldn't give you the impression the Christian life is responding to what God has done for us through Christ. Most preaching is about what we do for God by obeying the great commission, making sure we love God adequately, dealing with the sin in our lives. This kind of preaching is a bunch of law and it is laid on people who really need to be fed Christ.

The topical preacher can fall into this trap because at the end of the day, all "how to do life" sermons are law. They are about what we can do, what we ought to do, what we should do. This appeals to our ego, but it isn't the message of the Bible. The Bible message is that we live life as an expression of gratitude for undeserved grace.

What words of advice do you have for younger preachers trying to share the gospel in our culture?

If the focus of our preaching is on how to do life, we will need to push heavily in the direction of cultural sensitivity. If we are about preaching Christ, what God has done for us in Christ and how that enables us to live in this ever changing world today; then we don't need to worry as much about cultural sensitivity. What God has done for us in Christ and how that enables us to live in the world is really no different from what God has done for anyone else in every other time.

There are some good things we can learn from material about cultural sensitivity, but I am often left wondering what the author really thinks is important for the Christian? What does the author think really changes lives; cultural sensitivity or Christ? For many authors, it doesn't seem to be the Gospel. Focusing first on the culture undercuts the real message, which is the transformational power of Jesus.

For example, the trend in our culture is a fascination with what is "Uniquely You" but the Bible addresses "What is Commonly Us." Every one of us is plagued with original sin; every one of us is born alienated from God. Every one of us is powerless to save ourselves. God sent his Son into the world for us. In Christ is found everything we need to face life this week.

What is life in this world? This week I prayed with a 10-year-old child who is going through open-heart surgery as we speak. What is going to help him? To know he is secure in the love of Christ. How is that need different from a guy in the 19th century, or a guy in Australia or a woman in the Middle East? It seems to me that our focus should not be on relevance to particular niche groups, but on bigger things that are common amongst all of us. If I properly understand how Christ addresses the bigger issues that we all wrestle with, that is what I need to communicate. In any situation, in any culture, in any age, in any crisis we are to focus our eyes on Jesus.

Preachers often change their preaching style over the years. How has your preaching changed?

My preaching has become more Christian. I looked back upon my preaching in the early years and I came to the devastating conclusion that it was not Christian preaching. It was Law centered. I used to preach Law, Law, Law... here is what you should do to be a Godly person. The problem was that there was nothing Christian about it! When I was younger I didn't preach messages that exalted Christ, and the hope we have in him, as the center of our lives.

Jay Adams reminds us to ask of every sermon the question, "Is this Christian?" "Would I be thrown out of a mosque or synagogue for preaching this?" I love those questions. Through the years, I learned to make Christ the centerpiece of my words.

With those closing words, Colin was off to teach another track on "Transformational Expository Preaching." Did God's Spirit speak a word of encouragement to you? Many expository preachers are known for being more informational than transformational. It doesn't have to be that way. With one hand planted firmly in the text and the other planted firmly in the lives of our people, God uses preachers as a cable to flow the grace of Christ to our desperate world.

Let us preach what is uniquely Christian.

© Dr. Kurt Trucksess. You are permitted and encouraged to reproduce and distribute this material in any format provided that: (1) you credit the author, (2) any modifications are clearly marked, (3) you do not charge a fee beyond the cost of reproduction, (4) you include the web site address (<http://www.kurttrucksess.com/>) on the copied resource.

One on One with Gary McIntosh **The Importance of Preaching for Church Growth**

If you have studied church growth, you recognize Gary McIntosh's name. He has spent his life helping churches reach our culture with the gospel. One of the ways he helps many of us is through his writing. He is the author of over a dozen books; I expect you have at least one of them on your shelf. Spending time with him at the Great Lakes District Conference was personally encouraging and intellectually stimulating.

I was interested to hear his thoughts on the relationship between preaching and church growth. How important is preaching for church growth? What are sermons like in growing churches? What are things a preacher should consider to increase his effectiveness?

Join me around a circular table in the Jr. High Sunday School room of Naperville, EFC for a stimulating conversation.

Gary, how important is preaching for church growth?

It is extremely important! Church growth books rarely talk about the importance of preaching, but they should. Much church growth material views the church as a package of worship and programs. Preaching is traditionally viewed as just another piece of the worship package. The latest research is showing that preaching is *the most important piece*. Preaching is 90% of the reason people *stay* in a church.

Churches grow through the congregation inviting their friends and family. The entrance into the church is the relationship the congregation has with their community. Once people are there, it is the pastor's ability to communicate the word in a way that connects with their life that *keeps* them coming.

Our congregations are looking for how the Bible relates to life. It is the pastor's responsibility to provide those connections. When he does it well, the people will come back for more. Like honey-bees, they will tell others where the church is that the best pollen is found.

It is no secret that the pastor's preaching ability can also hinder a church's growth. For example, smaller churches have a relational atmosphere. A pastor of modest communication skills can compensate through his interpersonal relationships with the people. For the church to grow, the pastor will need to develop communication skills that enable him to connect with people from the pulpit, not just at the pew.

I have seen some creative ways pastors compensated for pulpit skills to overcome this church growth barrier. One friend knew he was not comfortable preaching in a large auditorium. His preaching skills were not suited for that kind of pulpit ministry. As the church grew, rather than build a larger auditorium, the church moved to multiple smaller auditoriums. He preaches in the other auditoriums through video feed. It worked! The church continues to grow and his communication style continues to fit the congregation.

From a communicational perspective, what have you seen help and hinder church growth?

The 50's and 60's were a time of declaring the word and expositing the text. In the 80's the popular preaching style was topical. Today we have shifted into a hybrid topical-expositional model where pastors are preaching on larger chunks of scripture and applying the bigger themes to their congregation. This topical-expositional model is something I would encourage young pastors to consider.

Pastors today must be known as authentic, they must have believability. Their preaching posture must be that of a fellow struggler. Good pastors let their people know, within reason, they also lose their temper, they struggle at home just like everyone else. Transparency makes the communicator real. If it is done appropriately, it creates an intimacy that helps people realize the pastor is one of them. If Christ helps the pastor, he can help me.

Pastors also need to be good story tellers. Our culture is not looking for linear logic but a narrative that captures their interest with conflict, climax and resolution. Stories are a legitimate way of preaching. Most of the Bible is stories and that is how God chose to reveal much of his character. I am not a homiletician, but I think it would be wise for pastors to have a story go with every major point in their message. If the story is memorable, it will help anchor the message, not replace it.

Pastors also need to fit their audience. It is not wise to approach a congregation as a scholar and hope they understand what you say. A good pastor will work hard to communicate to the audience he has in a way they understand. The pastor needs to know the heart of his congregation. He needs to read what his people are reading, he needs to watch the television programs his congregation is watching (within reason), and he needs to attend the local sports events that the youth of the congregation are playing. The pastor needs to use every tool at his disposal to understand how the Bible relates to his people

Let me give you an example of the importance of understanding and connecting with an audience; take the example of Joel Olstein. While I am not supporting his theology, it is hard to argue he is *not* a good communicator. Why is he so effective? In my estimation, he is immensely popular because he tried to understand and connect with a deep wound in every one of us. It is the wound of hopelessness. This world is filled with tragedy, dashed dreams and unrealized desires. Joel's messages are targeted to provide people with hope in a world filled with wounds. He understood this need in the American public, he connected with the need in his preaching and his church grew to be the largest in the country. What do you think would happen if we worked on better understanding and connecting with the needs in our congregation?

As we ended the interview and headed for dinner, Gary's reminder to connect with my audience was reverberating through the corridors of my mind. The theme of spending more time understanding the people, not just the Bible, has come up in most of my interviews.

The congregation will bring people in, but 90% of the reason they stay is the pastor's ability to connect the Bible to the people.

© Dr. Kurt Trucksess. You are permitted and encouraged to reproduce and distribute this material in any format provided that: (1) you credit the author, (2) any modifications are clearly marked, (3) you do not charge a fee beyond the cost of reproduction, (4) you include the web site address (<http://www.kurttrucksess.com/>) on the copied resource.

One on One with Larry Osborne

Preaching with Freshness

Have you heard any fresh preaching recently? We like things fresh. When the lettuce in our salad bags becomes old and brown, we throw it out rather than serve it up. Our favorite orange juice touts that it is “fresh squeezed” and “not from concentrate”. I have yet to see a sign that says, “Old Fish.” It is fresh fish or no fish at all!

Our preaching is another thing people want served “fresh”, not with the freezer burn of a by-gone era. Don’t misunderstand me. We all stand on the shoulders of great men and women of faith who walked before us. But our preaching is not to stop with what God said and did in their lives; it needs to have a ring of freshness as we reach for what God is doing in our own. While Spurgeon was an incredible man of God, reheating and serving one of his sermons to our people is like serving a freezer burned steak and a green baked potato to a valued dinner guest.

What does it take to up the freshness factor in preaching? Some preachers have a knack for keeping the sermon in touch with reality. Larry Osborne is one of them. At the October 2007 Great Lakes District Conference of the Evangelical Free Church I sat down with Larry and talked with him about freshness and creativity. Tilt your head our direction, eavesdrop on our conversation. I trust you will pick up a few ideas to keep it fresh; I know I did.

Larry, what are some of the ways you keep your messages from appearing routine?

To begin with, I keep good records of what I preach. What was the topic? What were the Bible passages I preached on? What are the Bible characters I covered? If I taught on something in the last seven years, I won’t use the same points or sound bites. Only a few key word pictures or illustrations that I want to drive home will be used a second time. It is very important that people don’t feel like we are going over the same ground again and again, especially in our applications.

When I approach a text, I ask first, “What does it say to me today?” I always try to start from a fresh point rather than from commentaries or my old notes. If I preached on something before, what God taught me then may be different from what he wants to teach me today. I am at a different point now than I was 10 years ago.

When it comes to creativity, I believe we must be creative in terms of who we are. We need to ask ourselves, how can I teach this in a way that is fun for *me*? How can I use stories and sound bites that fit me and not someone else? And when I preach I always try to talk *to* the people and not *at* the people.

Approaching the Bible from a constantly fresh perspective helps me get excited about what I’m teaching because it is fresh, it is real. It is something God is teaching me – and us today.

Do you intentionally craft what your audience will remember when they head for the parking lot? If so, how do you do that?

I work *really hard* on boiling my main points and principles down to a sound bite. The sound bite captures the essence of what I am teaching in a memorable way that people can take home. I also teach so people can take notes. The reason we do this at North Coast is because people remember what they write. Note sheets give me the opportunity to include things I can't in my preaching. I always have verses of scripture underneath each point so people can look them up on their own later. Some blanks to be filled in also cause people to interact with the message on a kinetic level. In addition, we use sermon-based small groups. At North Coast 80% of our congregation is involved in these. As the small groups talk through the message, the sermon is reinforced and applied in their lives.

While I work hard to have memorable sound bites, I certainly don't expect people to remember everything I say. I don't expect them to go home and rattle off the five points of a message. I think of a typical message as a cafeteria line – people walk through and take what fits the need of the moment. They don't remember everything on the menu. God often takes things I say and applies them to a life in a way I didn't expect. I want the Holy Spirit applying the Word to people's heart this way. My job is to take the scripture and to put within reach of the people. We shouldn't expect everyone to treat our messages like a thanksgiving meal, where they stuff themselves on everything we offer.

What are obstacles to communicating in our culture that you have creatively overcome?

We live in an information saturated society. People don't care about random Bible information. I've learned to make the "so what" of a passage the main points of the message. This means that my points are worded in a way that teaches how the Bible relates to us. I don't want to just teach biblical data. I view myself as teaching people how to live the Christian life with the Bible as my only authority. Those two pieces must be stitched together. People don't care about the three things the apostle Paul did, they care about what it means to them today.

With another friend waiting to talk with him and another presentation to give in ten minutes, I thanked Larry for the interview, gathered my notes and headed for lunch; something Larry had gone without in order to give the interview.

The preacher's job is to let the people know what God is teaching us today. Do I expect God to teach me something new from a well worn passage I know by heart? It is hard work to let the Holy Spirit talk from the text before turning to commentaries and notes. Yet, it is something we must do if we are to

preach to *our* audience, in *our* culture and in *our* day. It is the key to preaching with freshness

© Dr. Kurt Trucksess. You are permitted and encouraged to reproduce and distribute this material in any format provided that: (1) you credit the author, (2) any modifications are clearly marked, (3) you do not charge a fee beyond the cost of reproduction, (4) you include the web site address (<http://www.kurttrucksess.com/>) on the copied resource.