



The Purpose of the Survey

The Compelling Preaching Survey was collaboratively designed by Pepperdine University and Hope Network Ministries in response to the guiding questions within the Lilly Endowment's Compelling Preaching Initiative. The survey presented eight target audiences within Restoration Heritage Churches with a series of questions and choices related to compelling characteristics of sermon design and delivery, compelling personal characteristics of preaching ministers, qualities that make the story of Jesus feel real, powerful, and important to the listener, opportunities for improvement, and connectedness.

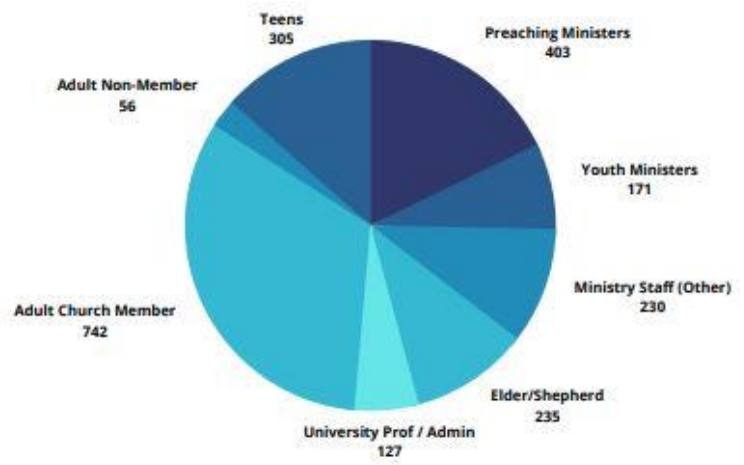


Figure 1. n = 2269

Sermon Design and Delivery

- When asked, "**How important is it that the sermon is firmly rooted in Scripture?**" 88.63% of all respondents answered "Essential" or "Very important." Response averages decreased among teens (76.4%) and adult non-church members (75.61%) and increased among elder/shepherds (98%), and Adult Church Members (96.7%).
- One of the broadest gaps surfaced in response to the question, "**How important is it that the sermon is comforting and reassuring?**" Only 6.28% of established groups responded "Essential." However, 35% of adult non-church members and 36.8% of teens responded "Essential."
- The most important characteristic of sermon design and delivery by target audiences:
 - The sermon is firmly rooted in Scripture** - All engaged adult groups (65.26 Essential / 27.4% Very important).
 - The sermon is engaging and motivating** - Adult non-church members (42.5% Essential / 42.5% Very important).
 - The sermon touches directly on the everyday lives of the listeners** - Teens (33.07% Essential / 53.78% Very Important).
- The least important characteristic of sermon design and delivery by target audiences:
 - All groups indicated **The sermon uses technology like visuals and video** as the least compelling characteristic (40.37% Somewhat important / 32.28% Not important).
 - When asked about the teens they serve, youth ministers indicated **The sermon is comforting and reassuring** as the least compelling characteristic (37.4% Somewhat important / 18.7% Not important).

Compelling Characteristics of Preaching Ministers

Participants were asked to identify the most desired characteristics of preaching ministers among all groups. the purpose of this portion was to look for complementary dynamics to sermon design and delivery. Two key themes surfaced from groups more fully engaged in church life:

- Speaker:** An effective communicator (38.3% Essential / 47.47% Very important).
- Partner:** Works cooperatively with our elders (43.1% Essential / 39.7% Very important).

Non-church members indicated the most desired characteristics as:

- Peacemaker:** Deals effectively with conflict (41.5% Essential / 48.8% Very important).
- Mentor:** Helps people develop their spiritual lives (34.2% Essential / 46.3% Very important).

Making the Story of Jesus Real, Powerful, and Important

Participants were offered the following choices to complete the sentence, "Preaching makes the story of Jesus feel real, powerful, and important to my life...":

- When it is deeply rooted in Scripture
- When it includes inspirational stories
- When it addresses a challenge I am currently facing
- When it is practical and applicable to my life
- When it focuses on cultural challenges and issues of the day

"When it is deeply rooted in Scripture" was the first choice of 62% of respondents except for teens and adult non-church members who chose "When it addresses a challenge I am currently facing" (31%). The data reinforce the centrality of Scripture to the majority of participants and reveal a shift to more applicability to life challenges among teens and adult non-church members.

Areas of Focus

On a scale of 1-5 with "1" being "None" or "Not at all" and "5" being "Extremely" or "Constant," participants were presented with a series responses to the following statements/questions:

- "How compelling is the preaching at your church?"
- "How evangelistic is the preaching at your church?"
- "The preaching at my church focuses on discipleship."
- "How important is compelling preaching to you personally?"

Elders/Shepherds (3.74) and Teens (3.69) indicated the preaching at their church was compelling with non-church members tending more toward less compelling (2.89). Youth ministers (3.36) and Teens (3.5) indicated the preaching at their church was evangelistic with preaching ministers leaning more toward their preaching being less evangelistic (2.79).

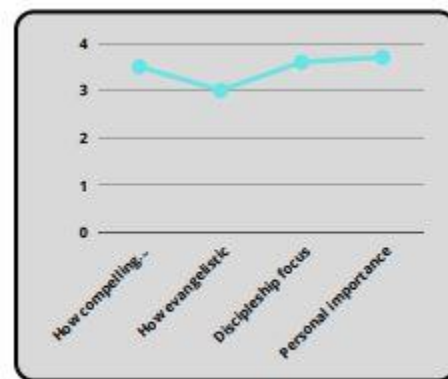


Figure 2. Average of all responses

Elders/Shepherds (3.74) and Teens (3.69) indicated the preaching at their church was compelling with non-church members tending more toward less compelling (2.89). Youth ministers (3.36) and Teens (3.5) indicated the preaching at their church was evangelistic with preaching ministers leaning more toward their preaching being less evangelistic (2.79). All groups noted preaching tends to lean toward a discipleship focus with preaching ministers (3.9) indicating the highest emphasis. Similarly, all groups indicated compelling preaching is important at a personal level with preaching ministers (4.11) topping the list and non-church members (3.2) scoring just slightly less than active church members (3.65).

Church members, non-members, and teens were asked to consider two-word choices on a continuum and plot where they are personally in response to the statement, "I am more compelled by preaching that is..." The survey revealed that most people are more compelled by preaching that is:

- More "challenging" than "comforting"
- "Engages the heart" slightly more compelling than "engages the head"
- More "serious" than "humorous" for older, established respondents but more "humorous" than "serious" for non-church members and teens. All participants indicated more "joyful" than "somber" with non-church attenders leaning slightly more toward "somber."
- More "passionate" than "polished." Teens (n=249) placed a much higher emphasis on "passionate."
- More "applies scriptural truths to current topics" than "examines Scripture verse by verse" with teens more highly gravitating to applying Scriptural truths.
- More "brief and to the point" than "may take a while to explain." Teens were most likely to lean toward "may take a while to explain."

Remaining participants were asked to consider the same two-word choices but from the perspective of what they think listeners are more compelled by. Generally, the results were similar with a handful of exceptions. Namely, church attenders are more compelled by preaching that is challenging and non-attenders and teens gravitate more toward preaching that is comforting. Youth ministers indicate their audience may slightly prefer applying Scriptural truths to current topics, yet teens strongly indicate that preference over verse-by-verse study. Elders/shepherds and preaching ministers are strongly aligned in every category. Church members/attendees have an opportunity to explore slight gaps between their wants/needs and wants/needs of non-church members in use of humor, expressions of joy, and balancing comfort and passion.

The Problem With Preaching Today

Participants were asked to select from a series of choices and finish the following sentence, "The main problem with preaching today is that it is often..."

While "dry and boring" and "not enough Bible" were the top two overall choices, the following breakdown reveals the "problem with preaching" from various perspectives:

- Preachers: "Not relevant to the listener" and "Not enough Bible"
- Youth Ministers: "Dry and boring," "Not enough Bible" and "Too entertaining."
- Ministry Staff: "Not enough Bible," "Dry and boring," and "Too entertaining."
- Elders/shepherds: "Not enough Bible" and "Not relevant."
- University Profs/Admin: "Not enough Bible" and "Not relevant."
- Church members: "Not enough Bible" and "Doesn't address current issues."
- Non-church members: "Dry and boring," "Critical," and "Doesn't address current issues."
- Teens: "Dry and boring" and "Not relevant to the life of the listener."

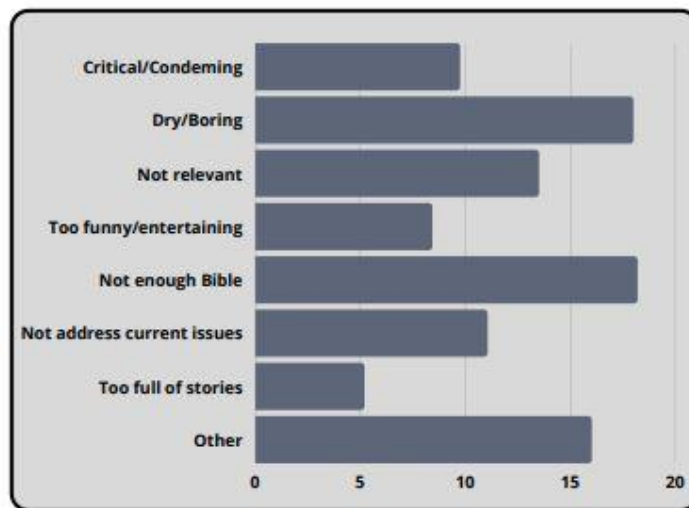


Figure 3. Average "Problem with Preaching" Responses

The responses showcase opportunity for further exploration. For instance, 30.28% of teens find sermons "dry and boring" while only 11.7% of church members feel the same. Additionally, 18% of non-members feel preaching does not address current issues while 9% of preachers feel the same. 28.7% of preachers feel their preaching is not relevant while only 5% of non-members see this as a primary problem with preaching. Church members (n=600, of whom 82.3% attend a worship assembly four times monthly) see "not enough Bible" as the top problem with preaching while only 8.8% of teens see this as a main issue.

Participants also shared feedback in response to, "I would like our preacher to be more..." (preaching ministers were asked to respond in first person). The top responses were:

- Preaching ministers - Relevant (20.8%), Passionate (18.37%), and Personal (16.3%).
- Youth ministers - Passionate (32%), Interesting (17.7%), and Personal (17%).
- Ministry staff - Passionate (21.4%), Relevant (18.7%), and Personal (17%).
- Elders/Shepherds - Passionate (24.3%), Relevant (19%), and Encouraging (18.5%).
- University Profs/Admin - Educated (20%), Straightforward (18.4%), and Passionate (17.5%).
- Church Members - Straightforward (19.9%), Relevant (17.9%), and Encouraging (16.3%).
- Non-Church Members - Passionate (25%), Personal (17.5%), and Educated (15%).
- Teens - Passionate (24%), Personal (18.7%), and Straightforward (16.3%).

The data indicate a deeper dive into passionate and personal preaching is worthy of consideration particularly in relationship to connecting the Gospel to non-church members and teens.

Staying Connected

The final question asked participants to identify what motivates them to stay part of their local church. The top response of every adult classification other than non-member was "My church's values" (23%), and "Exercising my spiritual gifts (18.8%). For teens, the top two responses were "Friends" (23.5%), and "Family" (19.5%). "Compelling preaching" and "Small groups" were the least selected criteria at 7.7% and 3.8% respectively. Non-members were asked "What keeps you from becoming part of a church?" Their top response was, "My values do not align with the church's values" (24.4%) and "The worship experience" (17%).

Pepperdine will be working with preaching ministers and other key church leaders over the next 5 years to deepen understanding and implementation of compelling preaching. We anticipate gaining greater insight as we continue qualitative analysis of participants' lived experience while identifying and collaborating on desired program outcomes.