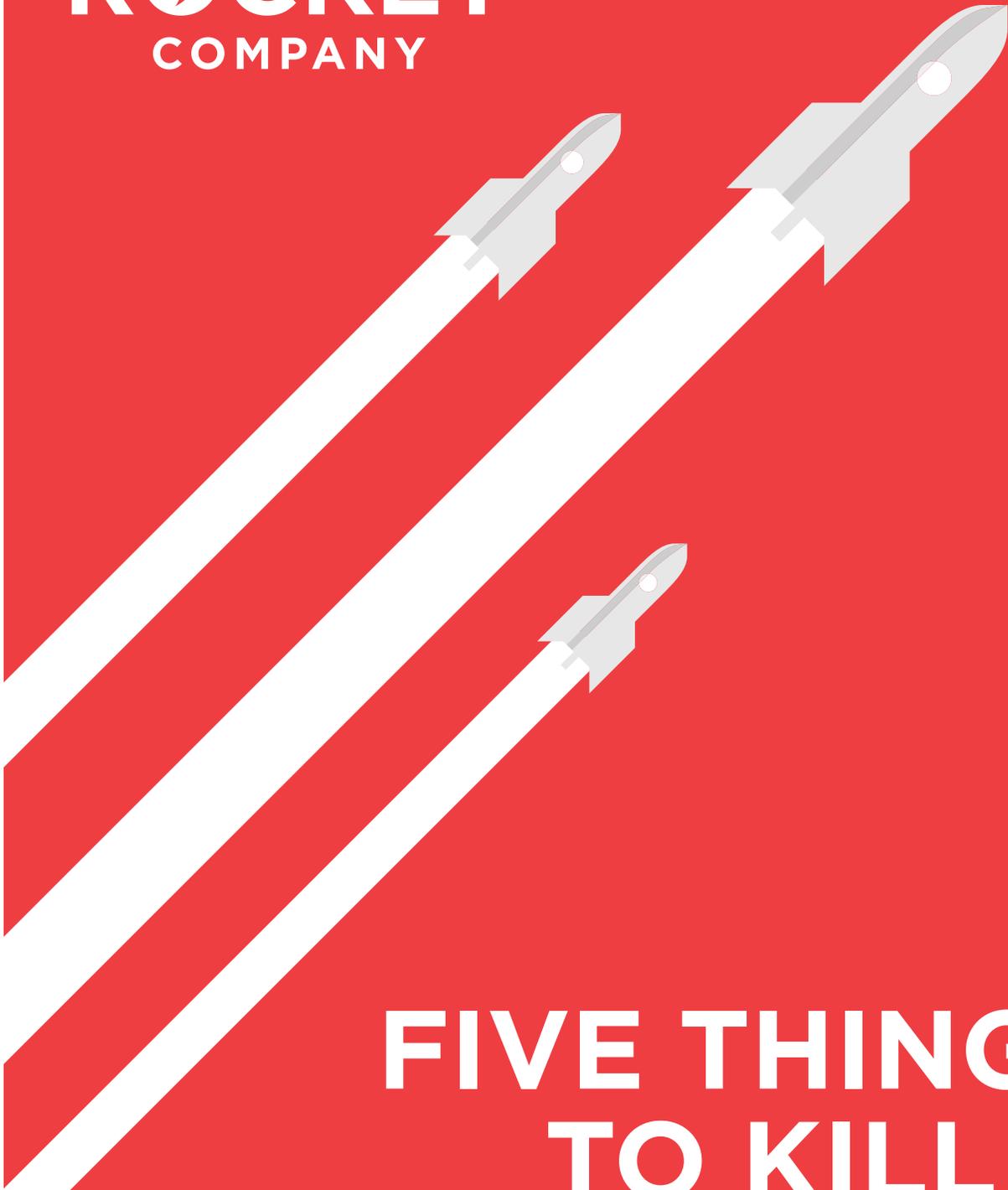


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**FIVE THINGS
TO KILL A
SERMON**

FIVE THINGS TO KILL A SERMON

In 1536, John Calvin said this of ministers: “Their whole task is limited to the ministry of God’s Word, their whole wisdom to the knowledge of his Word: their whole eloquence, to its proclamation.”

G. Campbell Morgan quotes John Broadus who wrote, “The supreme work of the Christian minister is the work of preaching. This is a day in which one of our great perils is that of doing a thousand little things to the neglect of the one thing, which is preaching.”

Though that was first said in the 1800s, it still rings true today.

In 2 Timothy 2:2-4, Paul writes “Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths.”

In other words, preaching is important. For most churches in Western culture, the sermon is the centerpiece of the church service.

In [Surprising Insights from the Unchurched](#), Thom Rainer reports that 90% of unchurched people choose a church based on the pastor and the preaching. A quality sermon is the most effective growth strategy, perhaps even more important than mints in the bathroom or follow-up emails on Monday.

Yet for all the historical examples, double-blind surveys and Biblical mandates, most sermons fall short of their desired outcome. Too many sermons die in the space between the mouth of the speaker and the ears of the listener. Here are five ways to kill a sermon

SERMON KILLER #1: FAILURE TO ADEQUATELY PREPARE

“The interest of the audience is tied directly to the preparation of the presenter.” - Nancy Duarte

“If I only had more time to prepare my sermons, I know I could do a better job.” - Most Preachers I Know.

We’ve all been there. The fatigue from preaching this Sunday’s sermon wears off only to be exchanged with the pressure of preparing for next Sunday’s sermon. I would love to tell you that we’ve created a pill that provides you with more time to prepare. If we ever do, you’ll be the first to know. Well, you and the FDA.

The reality is this - there will never be enough time. You will never find enough time.

How’s that for some encouragement??

FIVE THINGS TO KILL A SERMON

Instead of wishing for the elusive dream of “more time” what we need to do is leverage better the time we have. We can all leverage our time better.

From here on out, you hereby have the permission to place your sermon preparation at the top of the list of your priorities. Go ahead and block a full day every week for this. Let’s start with Wednesday. No meetings. No hospital visits. No interruptions. One full day each week.

We all know what it feels like to be prepared. Those are the days that preaching is fun. We also all know what it feels like to not be prepared. And here’s the scary part. The audience can tell. Let’s not fool ourselves into thinking they can’t. They’re smarter than that.

SERMON KILLER #2: THE SERMON GOES TOO LONG

“Make sure you have finished speaking before the audience has finished listening.” - Doroty Sarnoff

I’ve rarely met people who say, “That was a good message, but I wish it was a little bit longer.”

Brian Croft of [Practical Shepherding](#) encourages pastors to determine the length of the sermon based on “where your people are, not where you think they should be.” We must push our people, but we can’t push them beyond what they are capable of receiving. A great message be hindered with twenty extra minutes of material, or the one last story.

Just because Mark Driscoll preaches for upwards of one hour, doesn’t mean your audience is ready for that much information. I know Ezra read the entire book of the law “from morning until midday” (Nehemiah 8:3). In Acts 20:7, Paul preached until midnight. Most of us haven’t developed our skill to the level of Mark Driscoll, and the Puritan preachers didn’t preach two-hour sermons to an ADD generation.

SERMON KILLER #3: TOO MUCH CONTENT

The most valuable of all talents is that of never using two words when one will do. ~Thomas Jefferson

Good things, when short, are twice as good. ~Baltasar Gracian, The Art of Worldly Wisdom

A sermon shouldn’t be a shotgun – spraying a wide array of points in the general direction of a target. Instead, it should be a rifle, taking aim at a specific issue.

Too many points is no point at all. When you give 10 Ways To Do This or 7 Ways to Do That in a 30 minute message, your people are drowning in a sea of bullet points. By the time you’ve reached the third sub-point under Main Heading B, people are done. Too much content leads to information overload, and instead of thinking about what you’re saying, people shut down their minds.

FIVE THINGS TO KILL A SERMON

What is the single most persuasive statement I want them to remember? Drill down on that one point; dive deep into that one thing.

If you have too much content for one message, make it a series. Don't fall into the trap of thinking you have to say everything on a subject in one message. It's okay – in fact, it's beneficial – to leave people wanting more.

SERMON KILLER #4: TOO FEW STORIES

Max Lucado writes: “In this post-modern culture in which we live -- where people question absolute truth -- they are resistant to platitudes; they're resistant to me making declarations of truth to them. A story can do that in kind of a Trojan-horse fashion. Truth can arrive within the story and ride latent -- a bit incognito -- within a story, and people are more prone to receive it. I think one reason is our society is just less open to platitudes, more open to stories.”

Studies have consistently shown that people more vividly remember ideas that move them emotionally. We remember what we feel, more than what we hear.

Stories connect emotionally with people. And people will remember stories laced with Biblical truth far more than the carefully worded bullet point list. I'm not talking about a cliché story from an Internet search or a Book of Sermon Illustrations – I'm talking about a developed story with emotional depth.

Jesus' teaching was full of stories. Matthew 13:34 says, “Jesus spoke all these things to the crowd in parables; he did not say anything to them without using a parable.”

[Rick Warren](#) gives three benefits to using stories in preaching:

1. Stories hold our attention. The reason television became so popular is because it's essentially a story-telling device, whether you're watching comedy, drama, the news, or a talk show. Even the commercials are stories.
2. Stories stir our emotions. They impact us in ways that precepts and propositions never do. If you want to change lives, you must craft the message for impact, not for information.
3. Stories help us remember. Long after the outline is forgotten, people will remember the stories of the sermon.

SERMON KILLER #5: NO CLEAR ACTION STEP

Most people listening to your sermon live in the status quo. In fact, they are naturally resistant to anything that challenges the ordinary. This makes clarity even more important.

FIVE THINGS TO KILL A SERMON

What do you want people to DO as the result of listening to your message? That question should permeate your preparation. The Bible tells us faith without action is dead, so keep people's actions in mind as you wrap up. Point them in a clear direction.

- In a sermon about serving, hand them a card with three serving opportunities.
- In a sermon about marriage, give husbands a practical challenge to plan a date with their spouse in the next seven days.
- In a sermon on faith, ask people to write down an area of their life where they need to act in faith.

Help people put feet to their faith by giving a simple and clear action step.

THE GOAL OF PREACHING ROCKET IS TO HELP YOU PREACH BETTER SERMONS. SERMONS THAT TRULY CONNECT WITH YOUR CONGREGATION. SERMONS THAT HELP PEOPLE FOLLOW JESUS. JOIN THE COMMUNITY AT PREACHINGROCKET.COM.