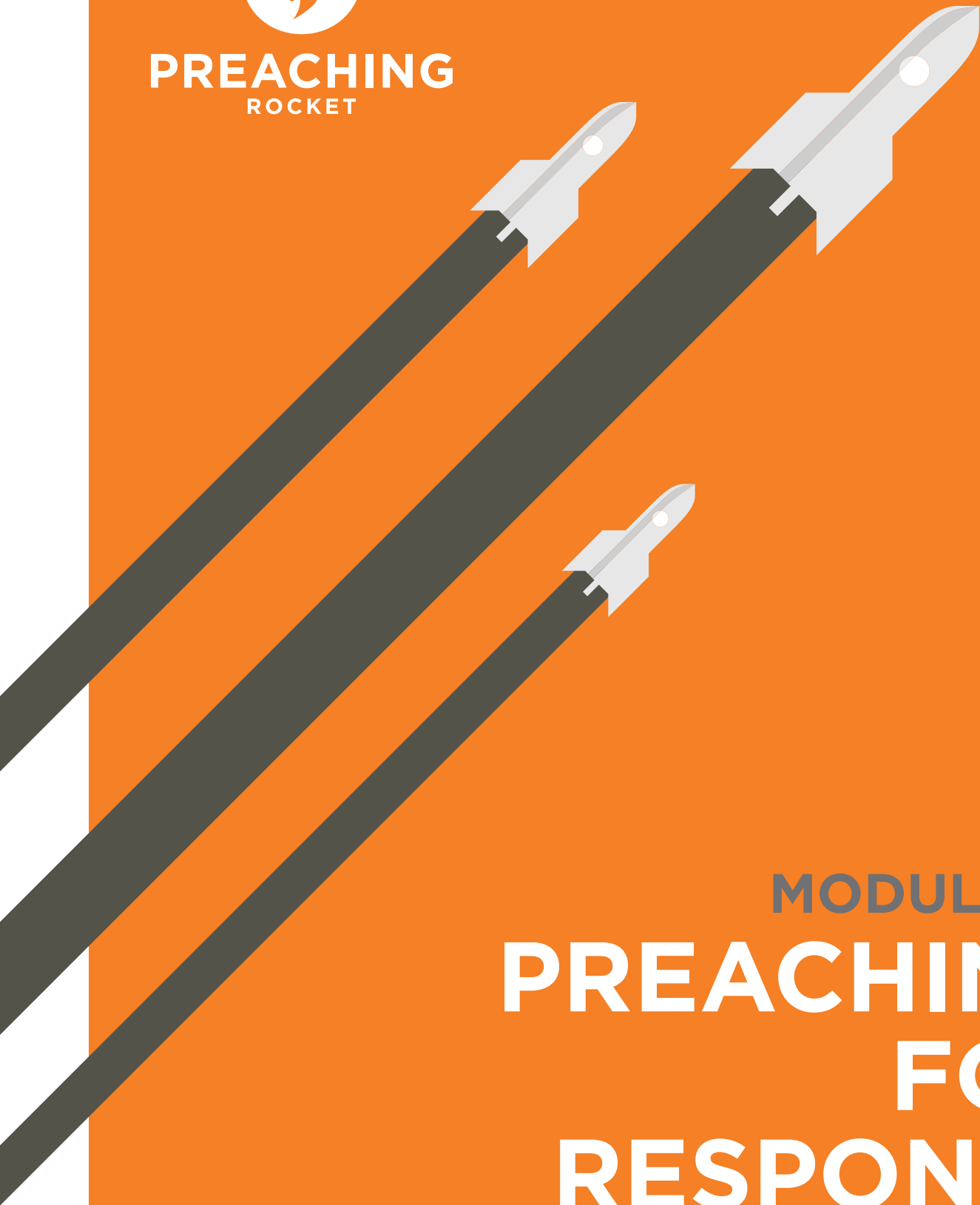




PREACHING
ROCKET



MODULE #7
PREACHING
FOR
RESPONSE

This eBook is a little different. It's an interview with Tony Nolan, a gifted evangelist. Since we're talking about how to conduct an effective invitation and call people to response, we wanted you to hear from Tony.

So rather than a traditional eBook, you're going to read Tony's thoughts. Before we dive in, take a minute to read his story.

Tony was born to a homeless, mentally ill prostitute who was placed in a mental institution. After his birth, Tony was immediately put in foster care where he suffered unspeakable abuse at the hands of his own foster parents. For the first three years of his life, he was repeatedly sexually abused, brutally beaten and thrown down flights of stairs for sport and burned with cigarettes when he refused to perform perverted sexual acts. At age 3, Tony was adopted by a poor and dysfunctional family for only \$200. His adopted father beat and verbally abused Tony regularly. In drunken rages he would often look at Tony in disgust and demand, "is this all my \$200 got me?! I wish I'd never bought you."

To soothe his bloodied and battered soul, Tony turned to drugs. Growing up in the seediest part of Jacksonville, Florida, provided easy access to illegal drugs. By age 13, he was addicted to marijuana, acid and alcohol. His drug habits regularly landed him in trouble with the law, and he became a social outcast. But God had plans for Tony and kept His hand of protection and blessing on him even as he continued to slide farther down a dark path.

The next step along Tony's road toward salvation

was a high-paying, luxurious job as a yacht captain for a major business mogul. He was convinced this job was his deliverance from the pain of life, and would bring him the happiness he longed for. It didn't. This led Tony to conclude that there is no reason to live. Hopeless, Tony wrestled with a deep desire to die. He quit his job on the yacht and spent his days drinking, even attempting to take his own life.

February 24, 1989, could have been Tony's last day on earth. Crushed by the rejection of his father's words, telling him that he wished he had never bought him, suicide haunted his mind and heart. However in the midnight of his storm, a ray of light from the Son of God broke through. Someone came and shared the Gospel of Jesus Christ with Tony. Hearing that Jesus came to give hurting people life to the fullest, Tony prayed and received Jesus Christ as his Savior and Lord. Learning that God the Father, in contrast to his adopted father, had never regretted purchasing him with the priceless blood of his Son Jesus, Tony was transformed by the Love of God.

His life changed completely that night.

Radically born again, Jesus delivered him from all his drug addictions and began to mold and reshape his character, freeing him from his old self-sabotaging habits. Soon God called Tony into full-time ministry and he went on to become an ordained and licensed Preacher of the Gospel.

Tony's spiritual gift is Harvest Evangelism, or drawing the net, which he simply defines as "helping people get it about God's great love and salvation."

God's saving power is distinctly manifested wherever Tony preaches. In a single speaking event, about 3,000 people responded at the invitation and made public professions of faith in Christ.

Today, Tony can be found enthusiastically sharing the Gospel at major events across America. Tony also leads UPGRADE, a "Salvation Awakening" movement. Its core mission is to facilitate corporate encounters with God through prayer, worship, biblical teaching, drama and media that supernaturally transform hearts resulting in resurgence of First Century outreach for the glory of God.

INTERVIEW WITH TONY NOLAN ON CALLING PEOPLE TO A RESPONSE

PREACHING ROCKET: Are there Biblical examples of calling people to action?

TONY: Yes. To name a few Old Testament examples, we see God doing this in the establishment of the Temple and the laws of worship in Exodus and Leviticus. He did it in detail, too, from how to hang curtains in the temple to trimming fat from the kidney of a bull.

Over in Nehemiah, with no mitigated speech, God led him to call people to specific tasks in order to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem in 430 B.C. In the New Testament, the examples are numerous.

Obviously, we have many exhortations of Jesus calling people to action; just consider the whole

Sermon on the Mount and the Great Commission. Remembering that the Church was in its embryonic stages, there are a few post-cross examples that could be implemented as Ecclesiastical objectives.

In Acts chapter 2, Peter is seen calling masses of people to repent, exercise faith in Christ, and be baptized. In all of the Pauline letters, there are many exhortations calling people to action about being holy, how to treat widows, giving to Church plants, and for people to believe in Jesus and be saved. So yes, a call to respond, is clearly in the Bible.

But, if you're asking if we find any descriptive summaries identical to our modern day Church invitations, whether they include calls to salvation or appeals for humanitarian efforts, they just aren't spelled out in Scripture. It's been my observation that this absence of clarity has incited a sort of "invitation vigilante" mindset among leaders. Zealous to ensure the Church's ministry paradigm doesn't practice anything that's not Biblical [not in the Bible], they frown upon others who choose to have invitations.

Today a tension exists within the Culture of Church leadership and it's resulted in much debate (hence you felt the need to even ask this question) and in many Churches, they have abandoned any Invitation for people to respond to the Gospel. I think this is problematic and borderlines on being hypocritical.

If we get to shine our "we're Biblical badge" by not having an Invitation, it's only going to get smudgy again with the other things we practice in our

worship experiences that aren't in the Bible. How about those big video screens? Are they in the Bible? Using iPads, is that in there? How about high tech presentation software? Do I even need to mention worship leaders with the skinny jeans, rocking out with mega amped up sound systems, accented with strobe lights and fog machines? Nope, not in there. But why do we do them? Because they aren't sinful (there are those who would debate that concerning skinny jeans) and they create moments in our worship environments that help people connect with God. It's for that same reason I think that preachers should have invitations in their worship experiences. It's the culmination of all the other moments, where we as leaders, tie it all together for the listener and help them make a personal connection with God.

PREACHING ROCKET: Is an invitation “old school?” Is it still culturally appropriate?

TONY: “Appropriate” is often determined by the moment. For instance, it would not be appropriate for someone to walk into a Black Tie dinner party and throw a round life preserver across the dinning room to a guest eating dinner. But, if the dinning room was on the deck of a sinking Titanic, it wouldn't just be appropriate, it would be obligatory!

The Bible says, in 1 John 2:17, that this world is passing away; it's a sinking ship. Ministers who are not wrapped up in being culturally vogue, but are serious, compassionate spiritual thinkers, will keep this reality on their radar. When they do, I think they will find themselves injecting some form of an invitation in their services, whether it's every time they preach or at intervals throughout their year. It

bears noting here that “out front” leaders not only consider the societal culture but also their Church culture.

Most pastors I know, who have a desire to really reach their communities for Christ, know how important it is to constantly fuel the evangelistic culture of their Church. Doing an invitation is a powerful way to do that and I will expound on that in a later question.

PREACHING ROCKET: How do we balance the sovereignty of God and a trust in the Gospel with our role to call people to respond? If God calls people to salvation, why do we need to do it?

TONY: I think that's just it. An authentic belief in the sovereignty of God doesn't sit dormant in a mind, but shows itself in one's form of Ecclesiology. As I mentioned earlier, I have found that those who have a serious understanding of God's sovereignty tend to trust that He is at work and they are willing to throw themselves out there to let Him work through them as He said He would do in Scripture. 2 Corinthians 5:19 states that God was reconciling people through Christ and now has given us the “ministry of reconciliation”.

Paul, who spoke of the sovereignty of God more than anyone other person than Christ, believed that, in preaching, God was actually preforming His work of salvation and bringing people unto Himself. In verse 20, he said, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, that we are “ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us; we are to implore people on Christ's behalf to be reconciled to

God.” It’s an interesting day in Church History here in America. We have preachers claiming that we are saying something negative about our belief in the sovereignty of God if we do an invitation.

Yet, the reality is, Scripture seems to suggest the opposite. We are actually saying something more negative about God’s sovereignty when we aren’t creating space in our sermons for a moment where God can do His work of reconciliation. So, I don’t think the goal here is balancing the Sovereignty of God as much as it is believing the Sovereignty of God.

PREACHING ROCKET: What is the appropriate use of emotion? Many are afraid of abuse and manipulation.

TONY: Well, I certainly hope that the goal isn’t that we not have any emotion at all. That’s going to be quite lofty, being that humans are emotional beings. I would suggest that when one tries to be unemotional, he or she is border lining on being fake. When the goal is to keep emotions low, you are suppressing something that God actually wants us to express. God gave us emotions and He desires for us to experience them.

Have you ever been to a Messianic Jewish service? They are more amped up than a worship team on RedBull, and I think God loves it! The focus shouldn’t be about marginalizing our emotions. I think we should never restrain ourselves for feeling strongly about something, especially faith in Christ. When we do, I think we stifle the faith experience and are committing emotional hypocrisy. But, as you alluded to, there are those who stress over

making sure they don’t coerce someone into doing something. I think that’s a good thing. Not the stressing part, but being committed to making sure the convert is making their own decision, not one we force on them.

However, in our efforts to balance this tension, there is a growing negative mindset among leaders that have caused them to turn into a sort of emotion police. As a result, now otherwise good hearted ministers, walk gingerly along the lines of emotion, fearful they will be ticketed as a manipulator. All the while, a world of emotional beings, who bang their heads in rock concerts, blow out their vocal cords at a ball game, weep and laugh during their favorite TV shows, peer into the stain glass windows of the church and see emotionally challenged people, sitting reserved, enduring Jesus instead of enjoying Him. Really? How can this be? We are children of God, blessed and highly favored. We are missing hell and going to Heaven, we have the power of God in us to do all things in this life, and we have leaders wanting to gear down on the emotions that should swell and erupt from our grateful hearts?

That kind of leadership resembles President Snow in the Hunger Games, telling Seneca Crane that a little bit of hope is a good thing, but a lot of it is dangerous. There is something jacked up about that. Listen, we can’t let someone’s assessment of what we are to do with our emotions marginalize our ability to lead others to Christ. In today’s world of stoic, scientific reason attics, I think the bigger violation being committed, is the danger of SATAN hijacking our passion.

I’m most fearful about those who think reasoning

is the **ONLY** way one should be approached when invited to respond to Jesus. Should we think? YES! Should we think so much that we find our churches filled with calculating emotionless members that don't have any resemblance at all to the fervent passionate, audaciously emotional followers of First Century Christianity? God forbid, but yet, if we aren't careful here, it will soon become the landscape of our modern day idea of Christianity.

PREACHING ROCKET: What methods (hand raising, come forward, etc) work in different settings?

TONY: Let's clarify that question. What you're not asking is, "What practice have you used to see MORE decisions happen?" We just frowned upon coercion in the previous question, so I think we would want to avoid that with any pragmatic approach to the response time.

I think what you're really asking is, "Once you've preached the Gospel and have given them an opportunity to respond to God in faith and repentance, what has been the best way to connect with them, so they can get in community where solid follow up can happen?"

I've been preaching in arenas, mega churches and tiny congregations across America for over 15 years. I have witnessed a diversity of creative practices with all of them being particularly effective. I have done a number of "come forward" type invitations at churches. On the Casting Crowns tour, I had to come up with a way where the arena's fire marshal wouldn't shut us down for having mass amounts of people coming forward like a Billy Graham

Crusade. So, we had volunteers stationed in every aisle with decision cards for them to fill out. We gave those cards to local churches to do follow up.

I just preached at a vibrant multi-ethnic Church in Las Vegas and they used a card for the response time. It was very effective with over 70 people indicating they embraced the gospel. I've also seen events and churches take advantage of the unique opportunities that social media provides to help with follow up. They use Twitter, Facebook, and chat rooms. Many churches set up inquiry rooms within their worship space that are low on confrontation but high on conversation, where those who respond to the invitation can go mingle with other believers and relational traction occurs, which enables meaningful follow up. I think the key is in the leadership, breaking the code of their communities, and nailing a spot on point of service that resonates and facilitates that connection point.

PREACHING ROCKET: How long should a response time be?

TONY: The invitation shouldn't be a tagged on moment at the end of a disconnected message. I've seen this in action and they tend to drag out and be counter productive. I think it's best to make sure that the moment doesn't deplete the energy of the worship experience. It should be seamless and organic to the overall DNA of the sermon. I tend to do mine quickly. I invite people to call on the name of the Lord (pray). I, then, invite them to make the confession public, in light of the exhortation from Jesus in Matthew 10:32,33, so I extend a time

to confess Him before men. I walk them through that process, and whether it's a come forward type moment or a fill out a card thing, it only takes about 5-7 minutes to do the whole thing.

PREACHING ROCKET: Do you do an invitation in every message? Pros and cons?

TONY: When the moment calls for a response, I give it. Most of the time, it does, therefore, most of the time, I do.

On Pros and Cons, let's deal with the Cons first. Let's be honest, there is always that chance that somebody won't respond. But, that's not a bad thing. Like I tell my son before he hits the court in his basketball games, you can't make it unless you shoot. Sometimes he misses, other times he scores, and that only happens when he takes the risk and goes for it. It's an emotionally risky moment.

However, what might be a CON for you emotionally could actually be a Pro congregationally! Earlier I talked about how offering an invitation could actually fuel the evangelistic culture of your Church. Here is how that works. When you do one, your people see you willing to risk it all because you care about people so much and you want them to be prepared for eternity. This, in turn, could propel your members to be willing to follow your example, risk it all in their families, at work, in school and with their neighbors. When that starts happening, then you know you have cultivated an evangelistic culture within your church. An "out front" leader is willing to take the Con risk and have faith that Jesus will use it Productively no matter if anyone responds in the moment or not.

PREACHING ROCKET: How should a church logistically prepare for people to respond? In other words, what happens next?

TONY: If you're talking about a "come forward" invitation, it's most helpful to have people trained to be able to simply pray with those making decisions public and help by connecting them with small groups, where residual ministry and follow up takes place in the context of community. If it's in the context of any of the other paradigms I mention earlier, then it's imperative for that connection point to have a moment in it where the responder is strategically and intentionally invited into an environment with moments that help them to develop into vibrant followers of Jesus Christ. I think all of your viewers already know this and are working to have these systems in place, but what might be helpful to them is to consider a "leap" that is happening in those moments.

Traditionally, we have focused on "follow up", and rightly so, because of the mandate from Jesus. However, in recent days, I have been making sure that there is an element of "follow through" that happens, as well. You see just as much as there is an exhortation for the Church to follow up with a convert, there is an emphasis for the convert to follow through. We can't live Christianity for them. But if we aren't careful we turn into babysitters just because we, in our follow up efforts, cover the bases so well. Before long the convert is dependent on us for everything and they only grow as much or little as we pour into them.

Yes, follow up, but don't neglect to exhort them to follow through. Jesus said they are to pick up their Cross and follow Him. The Convert is to put his or

her hands to the plow and not look back. Peter says they are to give all diligence and add to their faith. It's imperative that our follow up message has within it a follow through mandate. But I think the next version of invitation includes a more healthy balance of follow up with "follow through".

But practically, at the point where people are coming forward in your service, have people who can pray with the person, but I think the communicator or preacher should be treating their sermon like it was one big counseling session with everybody in the room. Cover the fundamentals of the doctrine of Soteriology and be clear in what you are inviting them to do. That way, when the responder connects with a team member (or counselor), the whole Gospel story doesn't have to start all over with them. Then the counselor can pick up and direct them toward the fundamentals of prayer, bible reading and community.

PREACHING ROCKET: We think of response as evangelistic, but how can this apply to other action oriented sermons? Example: Sign up to serve, go on a mission trip, give money, get in a Bible study.

TONY: When we call people to action, I think there are several elements that need to be in the appeal:

1. Clear direction in action: what is it that you are calling them to do? Support, serve, or believe by faith; be specific.
2. There must be a temporal aspect in the action: be specific as to when they need to respond. Now, at the end of this service, today, etc.
3. We must answer the question, "Why?" Explain

the reason for the action being requested: i.e., meet the need, implement cultural change, be in right relationship with God, revitalize your marriage, transform your parenting, etc.

4. Vision: We need to paint a high definition picture in the minds of those listening of what their lives are going to look like having responded to your requested appeal. Orphans fed, city shelters supplied, peace with God now and eternal life in Heaven. etc.

PREACHING ROCKET: What do you want people to DO? The desired response should be woven through your sermon, not tacked on to the end.

TONY: For the gospel, it's a matter of instructing them to do what God has invited them to do, namely, acknowledge their sin, understand by faith the ministry of Jesus, in taking their punishment on the cross and appeasing the wrath of God, exercising an exchange of trust and, in so doing, submitting control of their lives to Jesus as Lord, and living a new life where Jesus is the center of everything they do.

PREACHING: How does a pastor's unique style fit in with how they conduct a response time?

TONY: Be uniquely yourself. Old school use to pray, "Hide him under the cross, get him out of the way..." I understand when they prayed like that they were simply asking Christ's power to supersede all my inadequacies. I need that, because I, and any other minister, am completely unable to save a soul. But, it's not the case that God wants us "out of the way". He wants to use us in the process, and that means He allows room for the color of our personality to

show up on the canvas.

Take a look at the Bible, did God prohibit any of the uniqueness of the apostles to be expressed in Holy Scripture? An honest assessment of the New Testament says, "No." Each one had a particular shade of interests and thinking that showed up in the text. Mark's dynamic personality shines bright in his Gospel account. Luke's attention to detail splashes across every page of his more "accurate" Gospel. And the bleeding heart of the evangelistic Apostle Paul stains every letter of his epistles with concern for the lost and his passion for the growth of Christ's Church.

So, in that light, I think God made us all diverse and we should celebrate it and see it as a manifestation of God's glory in creation. Copies of art rarely get the prolonged gaze, but originals capture attention. Those that know me, know that I am a humor addict. Not that I am funny, I'm more sort of like Nemo's clownfish dad most of the time, but I love to laugh. If you listen to some of my early sermons, you won't find me injecting much humor. I was very serious and prophetic (if you listen you may say I was more delirious and pathetic), rarely taking a moment to share a chuckle.

Then, one day I was at a conference and as I sat on the front row, seconds from stepping up to preach, God spoke to my heart and said, "Tony, I miss you." I immediately said, "What do you mean, You miss me? I am closer to you than I have ever been." He replied, "When you are preaching, you aren't yourself. You're more of a version of someone else." That hit me hard, and through a journey of releasing my propensity to copy others, God guided me into being able to just be me in those moments. He didn't

want ME hidden behind any Cross. He wanted me bold, out front, showing off His mighty handiwork in salvation for the glory of His name.

Where did laughter fit in? I don't really know, its not like I write out a joke, I am horrible at telling them. I just get up to preach, with an overwhelming sensation that I am completely inadequate to perform this mission, but with a faith that believes He who called ME will preform the job. I'm glad I listened to God on that point. I never dreamed He would have me preaching across the nation to mass numbers of multi-denominational and largely pagan audiences.

Some of the story of salvation is hard to swallow, and as Mary Poppins puts it, "a spoon full of sugar (in my case laughter), helps the medicine (the Gospel) go down. If I would have not settled into who God called me to be, I think I would have done more damage than good in my invitation times.

PREACHING ROCKET: Can you talk about sneaking up on people with an invitation? I've seen that done before.

TONY: This is simple. Bait and switch very seldom gets respect. Once you lose respect with your audience, you lose. Just be straight forward about it.

And if it's any encouragement to you, I have an interesting story for those who have sort of bought into the idea that if we are straight forward with today's audience, we will drive them away. Having preached on many tours in packed out arenas across America, it's given me a broad audience, and with that, some amazing stories. I've seen lawyers,

Philosophy professors, C.E.O's, and the stereo typical Hell Raisers get saved. It's always awesome when anybody gets saved, but when the Hell raisers get it, I kind of feel a rush of satisfaction overtake me. Having talked with other preachers, they seem to feel it, too. When a Hell raiser comes to Jesus and their life is radically changed, it sort of dispels doubts about the effectiveness of the Gospel's power to change lives. We sort of say within ourselves, "Hey, this thing really works."

One night, I was at my book table, praying with people and writing words of encouragement in the books they purchased and in their personal Bibles. I've come across all sorts of interesting individuals in those long lines. Cory was one of those. Skulls, knives, naked women, and snakes flowed on every square inch of his tattooed face, neck, and arms. He also had a nail that was pierced through his nose and an array of hooks and spikes poking out of his lips, eyebrows, and ears.

According to many church leaders, this guy was a poster child for the "you better sneak up on him or you won't get him" stealth approach of preaching. So, you could imagine my surprise when he shook my hand and thanked me for a "bold presentation of the Gospel." I told him, he was an anomaly. Most experts would say that I would have scared him off with such a straightforward approach. His comment was one I think we can learn from and it's filled with hope as we reach out to the millennium generation. He said, "Go tell those leaders, my generation isn't scared of anything. They don't see that? We've been through it all; divorced parents, school shootings, 911, a recession, and besides all that, we tat and pierce our bodies and

invented the X-games! Scared? Come on! And just so you know, I knew that hard stuff was in the Bible; judgment, sin, Hell and stuff.

My grandmother read it to me from her Bible. I always wondered what Bible the preacher on TV was reading from, because it didn't sound like anything I heard her reading. Thanks for keeping real." What a great piece of intel! How liberating is that? Instead of spending so much time and energy shrouding the Gospel in an effort to make it palatable, we can just share it raw, real, and straightforward? I think as long as it's delivered from the heart, to the heart, and in love; they can handle it.

PREACHING: When we add other stuff to responding to Jesus' call to salvation, we complicate it. The response time should be about one thing.

TONY: This is most definitely a statement and not a question. I happen to totally agree with you.

Keep it singularly focused. For instance, when I preach a Gospel message, at the end of it when I get to the response time, I don't mix it with a call for rededication, recommitment, come if you think you should be closer to Jesus than you are now kinds of stuff. I go straight to confessing with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believing in your heart. I lead them in a prayer.

I know there are many that don't agree with me on the prayer and, quite frankly, I don't understand it. The apostle Paul who wrote most of what we understand about the doctrine of Soteriology, said, "With the heart one believes unto righteousness and

with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.” Romans 10:10. I understand that to mean, we are invited by God to pray to Him about his offer of grace and mercy through Jesus Christ. And why not, what other thing are you going to do to connect with God? You can’t call Him on your cell phone. You can’t email Him and you can’t text message Him. But, He did text message us and, through the Holy text of Scripture, He said, “whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved,” Romans 10:13. It’s clear in Scripture that prayer is the language of the soul to God.

So, I help them in a prayer.

After clearly articulating the essentials of the Faith, that we are sinners, the finished work of Christ on the cross is our only remedy, we are to believe and repent, acknowledging that Jesus is Lord, and this great exchange of trust is articulated to God through praying to Him, followed by a life that lives out, by the power of the Holy Spirit, what was prayed in that moment of conversion.

Then, I walk them through making their decision public, because it’s a very serious deal to God. He said some astounding words in Scripture, Matthew 10:32,33, “If you confess me before men....” People ask me all the time what that means, and I have to be honest, those verses are very mysterious to me. I have parsed the verbs and diagramed the sentence, but I have to admit I do not know the full scope of these verses.

I do, however, have this much down, if someone prayed that prayer, Jesus does not give us the option of keeping it private. He calls us out into the wide

open to confess Him before others, as the Lord of our lives. So, I like to personally invite them into a sacred moment where they can do that. I have them publicly leave their seats and come to the front of the area of worship. Sometimes, it isn’t possible because of the mass amounts of people, so I have had them to boldly stand to their feet, publicly declare what they said in private prayer, and shout that Jesus is their Lord. They confess Him, and I always make it a point to be clear that the confession isn’t about what we say with our lips in one moment, but it’s a mandate for us to faithfully let it show up in our lives!