

PLANNING A PREACHING CALENDAR FOR MAXIMUM IMPACT >

BY TIM LUCAS & TOM KANG

When we first started Liquid Church, we found that the earlier we knew stuff, the better. Over the years, as our teaching and processes have matured, we've gotten it down to a pretty slick method. We (Tim and Tom) are the Preaching Team at Liquid Church and collaborate on all of the teaching series together. After many iterations and attempts, we have created a tried-and-true process that, as a new multi-site church, you may find useful.

PREACHING CALENDAR

Every year, we go away for an annual retreat to plan the preaching calendar. Essentially, we look over the previous years and assess which topics we have already covered, the passages, scriptures and content we've shared with our people. Then, we look at where the needs are; what we are sensing our congregations have a desire to learn; where do we need to grow as congregations?

This preaching calendar is the lynchpin of our planning. As a portable church, we don't have the luxury of operating on a whim. Planning twelve months ahead, in broad categories, give us the space to be creative as a portable church.

Throughout the year, we will both collect ideas throughout the year. These ideas can be derived from anything - popular TV Shows, national tragedy, viral stories, songs, artists, etc. We also maintain tight communication with our LifeGroup Leaders and relationships within our congregation. We take feedback we get from our leaders and congregants into the Preaching Retreat. We sift through our ideas, the feedback, the previous topics and we broadly plan the next series.

This process has been so great for us because it keeps us from creating a "Saturday Night Special" where Sunday is prepared for at the last minute. Don't get us wrong - sometimes there are some Saturday Night Specials. For instance, this year our community was struck by Hurricane Sandy. Instead of doing the series we had scheduled on our Preaching Calendar, we changed course and began a new series we called "Storm Front".

The goal of the Preaching Calendar is to balance extremes. We don't want to leave everything to the last

minute, yet we don't want to be so tightly structured and "calendared out" that we don't leave space to hear the Spirit or understand changes in culture. A Preaching Calendar helps us be flexible. The series we had planned to do during Hurricane Sandy was awesome, had all of the creative done, our people were prepared and ready. Then, boom, Hurricane Sandy washes away half of the New Jersey coast line. Because we had planned, we had flexibility. We weren't so crammed to the gills that we couldn't shift.

The Preaching Calendar gives us the framework for the year, but we allow ourselves the option to shift and respond to the needs that we see.

SKINNING THE SERIES

When we get back from the Annual Preaching Retreat, we have about 10-11 series a year planned out, plus some stand-alone weekends like Easter, Christmas, Baptisms, etc.

For each of these series, we write a Creative Brief, which is a one paragraph overview of the series. In this creative brief, we'll list possible guests, scripture passages, pictures for visual inspiration, music, testimonies. We want to produce a Creative Asset that will paint the picture for how the series will look and feel.

We continue collecting ideas for the series as it approaches. We upload the entire Preaching Calendar onto Google Docs, so as we "skin the series", we can continue collecting information. The Creative Brief keeps getting more and more information. For instance, if we're doing a series on humility and we find a powerful quote on humility, we'll dump it into the Creative Brief on Google Docs. We call this our "Magpie Folder". When magpies build their nests, they grab whatever they can to build it. They will grab straw, gum wrappers, twigs, hay - whatever they can find - and weave a nest together. This perfectly describes our Sermon Skinning Process.

We share the Magpie Folder with many of our staff members who will also contribute to the file. When it finally comes time to fully plan that series, we have a treasure trove of inspiration. We are not starting from scratch.

We begin “skinning the series” about four weeks before each series begins. We have developed a tight partnership together through this process and the collaboration we have as a team has allowed us to have all sorts of conversations in the margins.

THURSDAY NIGHT GOSPEL

Every preacher has that “Sunday’s Coming” feeling - that feeling that comes when the services are over and you’re exhausted and you realize ‘Oh No, Sunday’s Coming. I got to do this again.’ Early on in our ministry, we found our weeks were getting eaten up by this feeling. We would stay late on Wednesdays, then try to finish up a few things on Friday -- which of course meant the whole day -- then, Saturday, there would be back and forth with Powerpoint, finalizations, etc.

A pastor we know here in the NYC area encourages pastors to have a “Thursday Midnight Rule”. He encourages us, essentially, to have everything for Sunday locked and loaded; to treat Friday and Saturday as the Sabbath. So, we now have an agreement with our spouses that we will have everything buttoned up for Sunday services by Thursday. It’s been really liberating for our spouses because we have the freedom to button up the sermon and they know we’ll be physically and mentally present for the weekend.

Every Thursday night, we are in the offices rehearsing the sermon for Sunday. We go over all the slides, videos and props. We have one of tech producers on hand who will make necessary tweaks to graphics, camera frames, slides, etc. It’s a live rehearsal. This is essential because it’s committing Sunday’s process to muscle memory.

Earlier this year, we were talking about the Burning Bush. To illustrate this, we had a Bonsai Bush and blowtorch on hand. Trust us, this is not something you want to try for the first time on Sunday morning. In rehearsal, the bush literally caught on fire and we knew we had to adjust how / when to bring the blowtorch to the bush.

We don’t just rehearse the sermon - we rehearse the tech and the props, too. When we get all the way through, we wrap up for the week and that “Sunday’s Coming” feeling is quite relieved.

APPLICATION

We’ve gotten our sermon planning process down to a science for us, but it wasn’t without a lot of tweaking and failed attempts. In ministry, you will always be tweaking, always trying to make it better. The perfect product doesn’t come right away.

Regardless of where you are as a multi-site church, our philosophy is to keep it simple. Early on, we would always get discouraged by looking at churches that were more advanced, more mature or by the capabilities they had. We would walk away from other churches thinking “we can’t possibly replicate anything like that.” You have to be comfortable with where your church is, where you are. As you mature, you’ll get better.

Liquid Church has made many of their sermon series available online. You can download free resources and “skins” at liquidchurch.com.



TIM LUCAS & TOM KANG



Tim Lucas and Tom Kang serve as the Teaching Team for Liquid Church. Tim is the founding and Lead Pastor while Tom serves as a Campus Pastor to their Morristown Campus. Liquid Church is one of New Jersey’s fastest growing churches with three metro locations and an online global community. Launched in 2007, Liquid has grown to over 2000 worshippers at weekend services. Their innovative approaches to outreach and cultural engagement have been spotlighted by *CNN* and *The New York Times*.

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