

Truth Serum

by

Dr. Gary Hewins

Gary Hewins is one of my closest friends and a pastor whom I admire. Gary and I served together for several years in pastoral ministry at Mount Paran Church. He provided me invaluable support and encouragement. He highly values the preaching of the word of God both to redeem the lost and to restore the believers.

He provides inspiring and informational insights into the dynamics of preaching in his book *Truth Serum* in order to help us become better preachers. This book will help you stay on track in a day where people are being blown back and forth by every wind of teaching. He challenges us to remember that our highest calling and purpose in ministry is to “preach the word” (2 Tim 4:2).

Dr. David Cooper, Lead Pastor Mount Paran Church, Atlanta, GA.

Truth Serum is a refreshing call back to building our ministries and our preaching on biblical clarity and the power and presence of the Holy Spirit. It is a needed reminder that preaching is not the same thing as delivering a speech or impressing people with our ability to communicate. Thank you, Gary, for speaking the truth in love. What a gift!

Dr. Crawford W. Loritts, Jr.

Author, Radio Host, Sr. Pastor Fellowship Bible Church, Roswell, Georgia

Dr. Gary Hewins is a master with words! In his unique style, he authoritatively exhorts preachers to examine their ministries for proper alignment to God’s Word. Gary’s sense of humor eases the blow, while illuminating possible mission drift in a preaching ministry. The personal stories shared from experience reinforce the principles taught, provide credibility to the author, and instill confidence in the reader.

Truth Serum is a reminder for all preachers to re-align their ministries—by way of examination in clear focus—with the person and work of Jesus in Scripture. This is a practical guide for re-calibrating tenured ministries and simultaneously, a handbook for young ministers called to a new pastorate.

Jesus is the Way, the Truth, and the Life from whom flows power, authority,

and anointing for transformational preaching ministry. *Truth Serum* illuminates his method, his rhythm, his ways—a must read for today's preacher!

Paul Clayton
President Mission One, Scottsdale AZ.

I have had the honor and blessing of sitting under the teaching and tutoring of some amazing Pastors. Gary Hewins is one of them! Gary is an amazingly valued and impactful "sharp iron" in my life...our summer Pastor for about 8 years in Highlands, NC. As I read *Truth Serum*, it sounded just like the Gary I have grown to love and respect... bold, Christ and scripture centric, respectful and powerful truth teller, graceful challenger, desiring God's best for me and the body of Christ, passionately unpacking the full counsel of God. Gary does not play around the edges of God's truth, or the power of the Trinity! He unpacks his real-life and God-taught learnings in this book the same way he swings his driver on the first tee...all out! Unabashed, respectful and genuine caring for every listener, or in this case, reader.

I know he wrote this with Pastors in mind, but this is a great read for anyone desiring to have an authentic walk and talk for Christ. May the "tribe" of Pastors like Gary increase because you read *Truth Serum*. America and the world needs you!

Steve Robinson
Chief Marketing Officer Chik fil a Corp. (retired), current Board Member

As one who has been blessed to have Dr. Hewins as a consultant not only for myself, personally, but also for my church, I heartily endorse his "ministry to ministers," and their flocks. In this book, the reader will be treated to much challenging truth, including a critically important section on the benefits of coaching and team play. I urge every pastor to embrace the humility needed to engage in, as Gary writes, "direct, honest feedback based on their very own preaching that will help them to improve." Our church has been richly blessed by Gary's gifts, and I warmly commend him to any pastor and church seeking to become more effective in advancing the kingdom of Jesus Christ.

Father Gray Echols, Prince of Peace Church, Melbourne FL.

A Preacher's Prayer

Father, we who speak your truth remain in need of words—words of love, words that encourage, words that soften even the most calloused of hearts and words that penetrate one's soul. Give us such living words. Give us you.

Make and keep us fearless, resolute, and abandoned to you and to the call you have placed within us. May we fear you and not man.

We are “voices crying in the wilderness.” May our service not stray far from the trenches of everyday life. Make us foot washers in a world of entitlement.

May you increase as we decrease. Lord, give us eyes to see and ears to perceive what your Spirit is saying to us. Manifest your Spirit in us for the up-building of the kingdom of God. May there be a fragrance of worship about us as we speak the truth in love and serve your people.

May your word be like a fire shut up in our bones as we discharge the duties of our ministry...as we do the work of an evangelist...as we rightly divide the word of truth. Lord, fan into flames the gift of God that is in us through the laying on of hands.

We treasure your mantle of your authority that pierces the darkness and your anointing that lifts up your Son that all men will be drawn to him.

Many could easily serve in our place, yet you have called us. Humbly we worship you for the privilege of knowing you and making you known. Amen.

Eph. 9:19–20, Heb. 4:12, Prov. 1:7, Jn. 1:23, Jn. 13:5, Jn. 3:30, Matt. 6:33, Jer. 20:9, 2 Tim. 4:5, 2 Tim. 2:15, Mk. 1:22, Lk. 4, 1 Jn. 2:27, Jn. 12:32, 2 Tim. 1:6.

“I will raise up for myself a faithful priest, who will do according to what is in my heart and mind. I will firmly establish his priestly house, and they will minister before my anointed one always” (1 Sam. 2:35).

Introduction

Have you seen spy movies where captives are given sodium pentothal, and suddenly they can only speak the truth? I have wondered whether that is really legitimate. If so, what would be said *about* the pulpits of America if only the truth could be spoken? What would happen *in* the pulpits of America if only the fullness of the truth was spoken?

There are some incredible ministers and ministries in our land that are not only bearing fruit but fruit that will last. Many rock-solid pulpiteers are leading by example and showing the body of Christ a more living and excellent way while also providing our culture with the most relevant, spot-on gospel message. This book is intended not only to encourage those faithful servants but to offer some suggestions to make each ministry just a little bit better. After all, does not iron sharpen iron (Prov. 27:17)

What Do Preachers Want?

Typically, ministers long for their church to grow in depth and their congregation to grow in number. They want their lay leadership to flourish and their staff to develop and mature. They want their congregation to enjoy life. They want innovation that works in their specific context. At times, they want relief from the pressure of ministry finances, vacillating church attendance, and interpersonal nonsense. They want to go to the next level but no one really seems to know what “the next level” truly means. Ministers of the word long for the Lord to demonstrate his power in and through their communication. They want to see people give themselves to Christ and the cause of Christ. They want their body of work to be significant as their ministerial clock continues to tick. They want what the Lord wants.

Maybe your ministry has leveled out as you have mellowed out. Has the status quo of your ministry been the status quo for a long while now? Perhaps a truth serum would reveal that you are in a season of predictability. In fact, maybe consistency has become a new mediocrity. Maybe you have experimented with alternative approaches, only to conclude that those approaches are not for you. Maybe you are up to your ears in logo/brand suggestions and promotional strategies, counting more on social media and social justice than socializing with the Spirit of God. A website is a tool, but it isn't salvation. A tweet is nice, but so too is a fresh spiritual breeze moving through your sanctuary.

They say that you never really know another until you have walked a mile in that person's moccasins. I get that, and I feel that, and I have worn many moccasins.

What is it you want? Maybe you want deeper insight into your culture and the word. Maybe you want an improved approach to your preaching while remaining yourself. Maybe you want a shift in your approach that generates more impact than a

wardrobe makeover. If you hear your ministerial clock ticking and your body of work can still make even more of a kingdom impact in the days ahead then perhaps some outside insight is needed.

What is it that you want to become? Maybe you want to be more fully *you* but with a refreshed sense of satisfaction, zeal, and expectation.

Most ministers want to become better at “doing family,” and they want to become better communicators and better friends. These leaders want to become more open, more understood, and more personally connected with a few rather than experience a loneliness in leadership.

How does this heightened effectiveness come about? Sometimes a fresh set of eyes are necessary, maybe you could benefit from someone to guide you into your next season of ministry—someone who understands, feels what you feel, wants what you want, and knows what you are called to provide. Though we do not often readily admit it, we need the right someone to help us become even more effective—if not on a personal level, then certainly on a vocational one.

Taking on Water in a Sea of Ministry?

Still others feel alone, misunderstood, and frustrated. These soldiers need grace, encouragement, and even correction. Well-meaning messengers are leading some congregations, while the message has gotten off center. There is movement in those churches, but in the wrong direction. Will the last person out please turn off the light? A substantial change must take place in these ministers. Some within this group have a genuine calling to preach, but without a change, they will one day be working in an all-you-can-eat steakhouse. It’s not the communication and delivery that is the problem. The content is wrong. This book is written to love on you with truth and help you possibly see a way to avoid a spiritual perjury charge. While many accentuate style there too is the vital need to provide the correct substance.

What do these struggling ministers want? They want someone to help them navigate this deep water. They want a way back to where they know they need to be, though they are reluctant to admit it. They want to be heard as they sort out where they have been, where they are, and where they need to go.

I am the way, the truth, and the life (Jn. 14:6).

Truth Serum’s Purpose

The chapters ahead are intended to encourage, inspire, and challenge preachers and teachers of the word of God to think more intentionally and strategically

regarding their proclamation of God's word. All ministers are in need of an occasional truth serum to elicit an honest assessment of how effectively their calling is calling others to radically and lovingly follow Christ.

In the following pages, you will likely read things concerning preaching that you have previously heard or practiced. I share them with the intent that your joy in ministry will only be multiplied.

You will be encouraged and challenged to consider perspectives and approaches that are out of your wheelhouse to make you an even more effective preacher. These biblical approaches are shared with you to enhance and expand your preaching and teaching ministry for the glory of God. It is God who is perfect, not our manmade wheelhouses.

Your True Calling

There is something unique about you. You are in your vocation for a reason, and you are in your location for a strategic reason as well. Be encouraged. There will be trends and fads in ministry, and many of these innovations will be enticing and some even effective. There will be styles and people to emulate in your ministry. At times, this may be a good thing. However, it is not a good thing for you to be someone else fulfilling a calling that is not yours to fulfill. You are uniquely God's craftsmanship. Mentors are good, but great mentors will help you maximize the blend between you and your experiences, your personality, your gifts, and the Holy Spirit to produce fruit through your unique ministry. Be yourself.

For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do (Eph. 2:10).

God has prepared things for you to do in advance. Make sure they are *your* things, not someone else's.

Many are called to minister to a younger generation; you may be called to do the opposite, even though you are young yourself. There are no rules. When many are serving the poor, you may be called to the rich. Here is good advice: discover and pursue your specific course. Discover the good works prepared in advance for you to do. Yes, you can emulate others in their ministry and do well. But what if the day comes when what you were truly supposed to do is revealed? Maybe you would have done ten times more in building the kingdom had you experienced your personal calling.

Your personality was well established before you came to Christ. Before his Damascus road encounter, Saul was brash, arrogant, and aggressive. Post salvation, Paul was forceful, at times sarcastic, and certainly assertive. Paul's personality didn't

change that much, but his motivation certainly did.

If you are wondering whether you are walking out your calling, you are likely missing it, at least in part. There comes a point where you know your zone. People will confirm your gifts, opportunities will find you, you will not be striving to serve, there will be an effortlessness in your ministry, and you will bear fruit that lasts. Imparting things to future ministers will be a cakewalk. You will have the resources to carry out your calling as well. For every divine vision there is provision, even if at times it undergoes occasional revisions. Always be on guard for the desolation of division.

A Sober Approach to the Topic at Hand

In the chapters ahead, I use strong, pointed words at times, but certainly not for dramatic effect. The sobriety with which the minister of the word must approach the sacred calling of preaching is unusual, to say the least. The preacher holds a flashlight on a cold dark night. The preacher dispenses hope to those without it. The preacher has a high, if not higher, calling than most. Perhaps even stronger language is warranted. If I have weakened any point within these pages by holding back, I ask for your forgiveness. There is a time for candor; if not on this subject, then when? I use strong wording in both a positive light and in a negative light. In each case, I choose words in love. May you forgive me if I overstep some book writing boundary. Please know that writing this text has been a humbling experience.

Concerning boundaries, doctrine is an incredibly important subject to me, as I hope it is to you. When we look at biblical doctrine, there are core doctrinal issues that are absolutely, non-negotiable, and there are peripheral doctrinal issues that we often discuss, debate, and even question. Should you have any immovable views on peripheral doctrinal issues, I am asking that you suspend some of them enough to crack the door for at least some healthy and humble consideration. I do know experientially that an application of such doctrine will assist you in expanding and enhancing your biblical preaching and teaching ministry.

I know I am asking some readers to be a little bit open to a new way of looking at scripture. It will be OK, I promise. It might even be fun, and you don't have to tell anyone. You likely do not know me, but you can count on one thing as you read: we are going to stick to the scripture and the author's original intent.

I have heard there was a time when the word "reverend" was commonly used to refer to a minister of the gospel. In fact, the reverend could enjoy some favor within the community every now and again. My son calls me "Reverend" sometimes in fun. I often wonder if he thinks of the implications of such a title. Are preachers today worthy of such a respectful title? Are there those among us to be revered? Surely so, but I personally enjoy thinking my son lacks a full, clear grasp of the implications of

calling me Reverend. I rather like thinking he doesn't know what such an office asks of those called to fill it.

I like the way Dr. Tim Elmore in his book *Habitudes*¹ discusses the difference between a thermometer and a thermostat as it pertains to leadership. The former reads the temperature and reports it; the latter sets the temperature, and then others acclimate to it. You are a temperature setter. As a preacher or teacher of God's word, you obviously have a visceral concern for people's salvation and their quality of life. Because you have such a longing to see God move, I am counting on you to be open to making that communication even just a little bit more effective for the people listening and for the glory of God.

To that end, let's highlight something that will help further set a tone for the remainder of this text. From time to time it is healthy to do a checkup on your preaching and teaching ministry. Let's make sure we fully understand the role and responsibility of the minister of the word of God.

Is Your Ministry Too Natural?

Are we not called to provide a quality ministry that on some level produces results that are increasingly inexplicable? Is there a supernatural aspect to your ministry? I have always thought that if the hand of God is on a person, there should at times be fingerprints left behind. Our ministries should on some level be mysterious, beyond rationalizing, and in no need of our defense or debate. A strong preaching ministry should speak for itself. Such a ministry is not always predictable and formulaic. Should we not be pursuing a depth in our preaching and teaching that invokes inspiration and an awe of God? Our culture has so butchered the word "awesome" that we are left looking for a word to describe how our God-infused preaching ministry is supposed to look and feel. The God I read of in scripture is excessive, extravagant, and amazing; the results of our proclamation of his word should be as well.

I must ask myself at times if I am asking God to conform to my self-imposed limitations in ministry. Have I defined his wants desires and boundaries to move in his church? Have doctrinal fences been constructed to keep the divine out of certain arenas of ministry? The problem with this is that he is a gentleman, and he too often respects our manmade restrictions. When we each interact with God in private or in public, I sometimes wonder whether we interact with the Lord we see in scripture or our minimized version imposed upon us in some well-intended way.

As we each grow in Christ, I hope we move towards knowing more of the scriptural Lord. I would hate to think I and those I lead are interacting with only 65%

¹ Tim Elmore, *Habitudes: Images That Form Leadership Habits & Attitudes* (Atlanta, GA: Growing Leaders, Inc.), 13.

of the New Testament God that makes himself 100% knowable and accessible. Who wants a preaching ministry based on a static understanding of Christ? The Apostle Paul wrote, “I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead (Phil. 3:10-11).

Are preachers like contractors at times, constructing boxes for ministry from blueprints that others have handed to us? If we were to receive a truth serum, would we not agree on some level that we are asking God to conform to our fear-based definitions of ministry? Conversely, he is asking us to preach a “mysterious gospel” that keeps us from “conforming to the patterns of this world” (Eph. 6:19, Rom. 12:2). Are we not working against him in some way, though we intended to do nothing but the opposite?

To this end, let’s get going. We may have much to discover to enhance and expand our ministries. We may be, in part fulfilling the role of a puppeteer rather than the pulpiteers we are called to be. Let’s grow together.

We have a God who delights in impossibilities.
—*Billy Sunday*

