

More Encouraging
Stories to Help You

KEEP ON KEEPING ON

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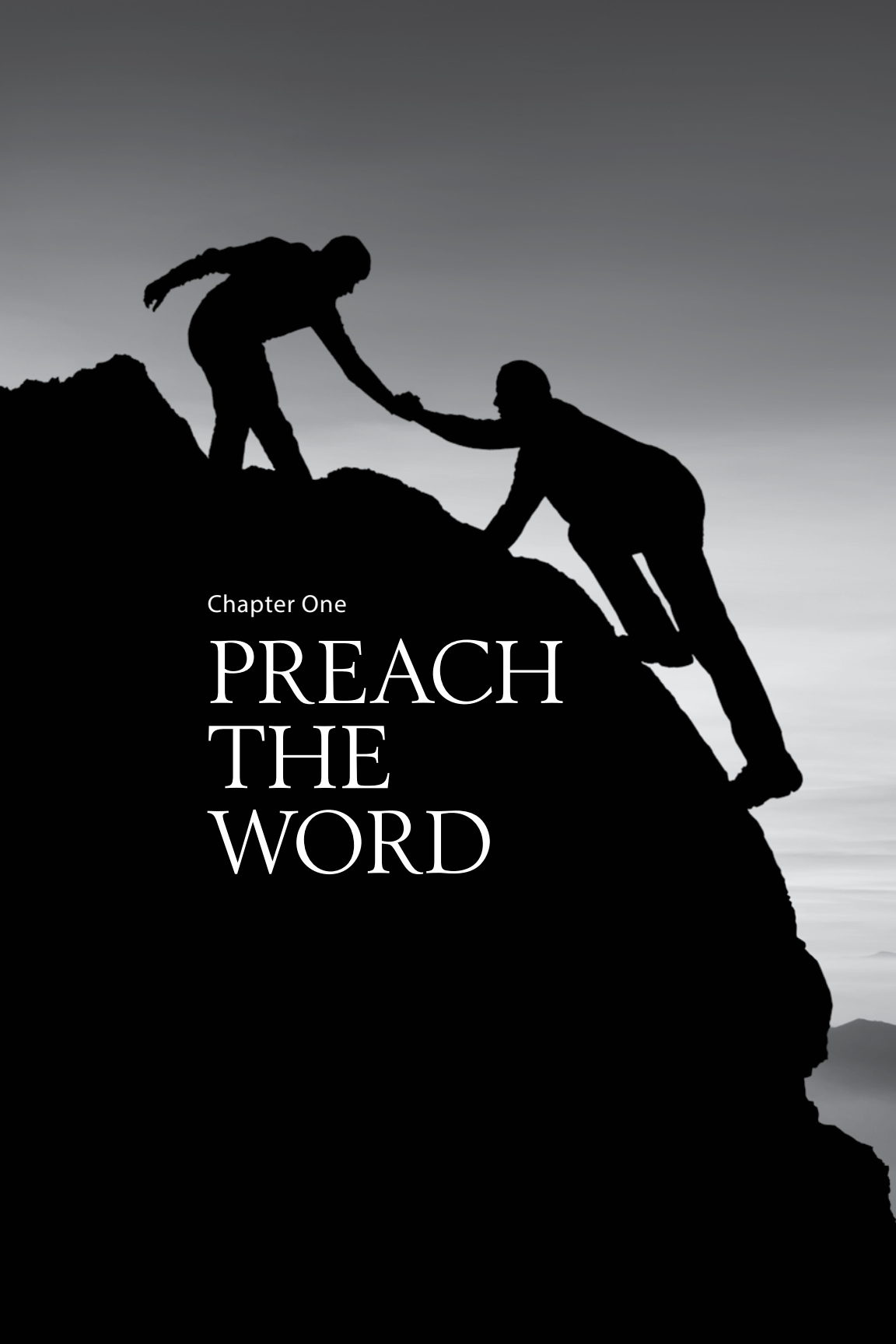
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A black and white silhouette illustration of two people climbing a mountain peak. One person is on the left, leaning forward and reaching out with their right hand to assist the second person. The second person is on the right, leaning back and reaching out with their left hand to grasp the first person's hand. The background is a light, hazy sky, suggesting a sunrise or sunset. The overall mood is one of teamwork and overcoming challenges.

Chapter One

PREACH THE WORD



During my ministry, I have prepared and preached many hundreds of sermons—to college students, church members in the pew, church administrators, and the general public. But of those many sermons, only one continues to get the same response. Over and over again, listeners have told me, “Pastor, that message came at a critical time in my life, and what a difference it made!” That sermon is titled “Keep On Keeping On.”

The greatest problem in people’s lives that I have observed over the years is discouragement—people giving up! Life is difficult. You will lose loved ones; you will have setbacks and disappointments; friends will let you down. The message of that sermon is simple: keep on keeping on with Jesus!

The temptation to give up haunted me in my early years of marriage, ministry, and life in general. Then God, through the Holy Spirit, let me have a glimpse of Jesus and the pain, rejection, and betrayal He suffered. But even though that rejection nailed Him to a cross, Jesus never quit. He refused to give up on His mission to save everyone who would accept Him.

The version of “Keep On Keeping On” that you will be

reading in this book was preached a number of years ago at the Florida camp meeting. In the audience that night was Medal of Honor recipient Desmond Doss. I couldn't help thinking about how Doss was persecuted for his faith by some of the same men he saved at Hacksaw Ridge! He was determined to keep on keeping on until every injured soldier was rescued.

I have had the privilege to sit at the feet, so to speak, of some great teachers and preachers—Fordyce Detamore, Dick Barron (who was later killed in a tragic plane crash), H. M. S. Richards Sr. and Jr., Don Jacobson, E. E. Cleveland, C. D. Brooks, and Charles Bradford, to name a few! I've had great teachers such as M. D. Lewis, Ivan Blazen, E. R. Thiele, Edward Heppenstal, and others. While I was at the seminary, Dr. Edward Banks challenged us to study some of the outstanding Protestant ministers, not for their theology but for their ability to communicate through preaching. We studied the sermons of Billy Graham, Norman Vincent Peale, Charles Swindoll, W. A. Criswell, John MacArthur, and Lloyd John Ogilvie. I was blessed by some more than others, and was often confounded by the fact that these sincere men of God could not understand the fourth commandment the way Seventh-day Adventists do!

My most exciting years of preaching were the seven years during which I had the privilege of being the senior pastor of the Arlington, Texas, Seventh-day Adventist church. For five of those years, I was joined by Henry Barron, my mentor and friend. I pastored there for one dollar per year!

During most of those years, I was also vice president of L. H. Coleman's stewardship organization. My normal schedule was to go into my study on Sunday morning to

copy chapters from books on the subject I was preparing for next Sabbath's sermon. I would build a file folder with chapters on that subject. Also, in that file folder, I would put several sheets of paper on which I jotted down thoughts while I studied. Then on Monday, I would usually fly to a location where I would be working with local church leadership, training and organizing individuals into teams to inspire their fellow church members to support the Coleman Stewardship Program.

When I had a few minutes, I would study. On Thursday, I would fly back to Dallas, finalizing my sermon notes on the flight. Friday morning, I would give my notes to Kathy Smith, the secretary at Coleman Stewardship, who would type them for me.

Friday night and Sabbath morning, I would immerse myself in the message, jotting a few keywords in the margin of my Bible. Then I would leave the notes in my briefcase, trusting the Holy Spirit to bring to my lips the words I should present.

I started preaching without notes quite by accident during my first pastorate—or perhaps by divine intervention. As an intern pastor, I held a Week of Prayer at Pioneer Valley Academy in Massachusetts. I was young and connected with the kids. They invited me to come back and be the Friday night speaker at their graduation—the first graduating class in the new school's history.

I studied hard all week and wrote my sermon out in a manuscript. I typed it myself and put it in a folder. When I arrived at the school a few minutes before the service was to begin, I reached into the back seat of the car for the folder—and it wasn't there! I was scared to death anyway,

but now I was sick. I ran to the bathroom. In the stall, I jotted down a few keywords. There was no time left, so I went on the platform. In the audience were two men from the General Conference who had children graduating that day. One of them should have been speaking, but here I was—without a sermon!

Do you know what happened? The Holy Spirit brought every point to my mind! I had the freedom to connect with the audience, and God blessed abundantly.

The president of the local conference, Elder Merle Mills, was sitting next to me, and I tried to hide the fact that I didn't have notes! Later I heard that he had remarked about how impressed he was that a young preacher would preach without notes.

It takes a lot more preparation time to preach without notes. But the freedom to truly communicate the message makes it worth the time it takes.

It also takes a lot of help for us to get a book into a readable condition. My wife, Camille, and now adult children, Jim Jr., Maryann, John, and Amy, have always been so encouraging and supportive. Kathy Smith has always been there to type the manuscripts. Her ability to decipher my handwriting amazes me. Dale Galusha, Pacific Press president, has encouraged me to write and has been there since my first book. Russ Holt, the most talented re-write genius, smoothes out my rough sentences but still makes it sound like me. Thank you, Russ, and of course, there are many others.

So many of these messages were inspired by other preachers of the Word. If I haven't given proper credit, I apologize.

Preach the Word, and keep on keeping on!