

THE HOW'S AND WHY'S OF USING AN  
**ANNUAL PREACHING CALENDAR**

by Dave DeSelm



**Dave DeSelm**  
MINISTRIES

[WWW.DAVEDESELMMINISTRIES.ORG](http://WWW.DAVEDESELMMINISTRIES.ORG)

# CONTENTS

<b>WHY USE AN ANNUAL PREACHING CALENDAR</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>ARGUMENTS AGAINST USING A PREACHING CALENDAR</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>THE BENEFITS OF USING A PREACHING CALENDAR</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>HOW TO USE AN ANNUAL PREACHING CALENDAR</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>PREACHING CALENDAR TEMPLATE INSTRUCTIONS</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>ANNUAL PREACHING CALENDAR TEMPLATE</b>	<b>14</b>

© 2019, Dave DeSelm Ministries, Inc, Fort Wayne, IN  
[www.DaveDeSelmMinistries.org](http://www.DaveDeSelmMinistries.org)

## **DAVE DESELM**

Dave DeSelm is the Executive Director of Dave DeSelm Ministries, a non-profit committed to resourcing everyday pastors to equip everyday people to become every day disciples. He brings over 40 years of pastoral leadership experience into the blogs, devotionals, and coaching offered to pastors and leaders. Dave and his wife, Gwen, have three grown children and seven grandchildren.





Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching. Do not neglect your gift, which was given you through a prophetic message when the body of elders laid their hands on you. Be diligent in these matters; give yourself wholly to them, so that everyone may see your progress. Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers.

1 Timothy 4:13-18



## WHY USE AN ANNUAL PREACHING CALENDAR

As communicators, perhaps the biggest challenge we face is the fact that Sundays come around with amazing regularity! Like it or not, you're back up to bat just seven days later and people are expecting a hit.

Yet – and we've all faced it – due to mandated meetings, overbooked appointments, or unplanned crises your week has gotten away from you. Now it's Friday (or worse yet, Saturday) and you need a message for the weekend. In fact, you need an idea for a message!

Chances are you pulled it off, but how amazing would it feel to get ahead – to know what you were going to preach in 4 weeks, 12 weeks, 4 months, or even 12 months? What if you were able to be strategic about what you communicated and when you communicated it? What if you took Sundays off at the right times, and preached your best sermons on your biggest weekends?

It's possible! But it will take advance planning. And it will take a practical tool to capture those ideas. A preaching calendar can offer that.

I know. For many years I used one and found it invaluable.



When summer would roll around, and most of my congregation began thinking about slowing down and taking vacations, I would carve out some time to begin working on the next year's annual preaching calendar (APC).

Far more than a time-saver, it proved to be a game-changer in my sermon planning.

Now, I can almost hear the "yeah, but's" coming from some pastors. "Yeah, but I don't like feeling restricted. I like to go with the flow." Or "Yeah, but I don't know what my people are going to need 9 months from now."

So, before we get to some of the benefits of using a calendar, let's talk about a couple of the arguments that have been raised against using a preaching calendar.

## **ARGUMENTS AGAINST USING A PREACHING CALENDAR**

### **1. A preaching calendar restricts the movement of the Holy Spirit.**

The greatest resistance to using an annual preaching calendar is the question of the leadership of the Holy Spirit. How can the Holy Spirit lead if you plan everything ahead of time?

Throughout scripture you see instances of God moving, appearing as if the Holy Spirit was inspiring a last second decision. For instance, consider the story of Acts 16:6-10.

Paul had a plan in mind. He wanted to take the gospel deeper into Asia Minor (modern day Turkey). And yet, the Holy Spirit stopped the group at every point. Go one way; nope. Go another; nope. Finally, explicit confirmation.

We're not sure how the Holy Spirit directed Paul at the beginning of the journey (Was it a nudge or an audible voice?) but eventually the apostle saw a vision.

On the other hand, you have examples of long-term plans put into motion long before the moment of need arose. Other aspects of Paul's journeys for example, were a function of planning well in advance (see Acts 15:36)

This issue is really based in your theology. If your theological conclusion is that the Holy Spirit only sees the future as you do - clouded, speculative, and uncertain - your APC will be your work and your effort.

But if you believe the Spirit sees the future as the eternal God does, and leads, teaches and presses you into it, then you will recognize His leadership in your entire preaching process.

If that is the case (and I believe it is), using an APC doesn't limit the Holy Spirit. Rather, it more firmly places you in a position where you depend more deeply on Him and submit more willingly to His leading.

That being said, we are never to be slaves to our preaching calendar. We must always be paying attention to what the Spirit is saying to us and the needs of the moment. ("In their hearts humans plan their course, but the LORD establishes their steps." (Psalm 16:9)

## **2. A preaching calendar doesn't allow the freedom to address the needs of a given week.**

When you've spent years planning your sermons one way, a major change - such as introducing a preaching calendar - can feel like shackles on your entire process. I often hear the complaint, "Planning a year out feels too restrictive and limits my freedom in sermon choices."

This feeling speaks more to the fact that we are, by nature, creatures of habit and many of us thrive in routine. Putting some loose constraints on my sermon topics focuses my creativity and saves me from endless topic hunting.

Moreover, the One who helped you in your planning is fully aware of what will surface by way of congregational need in the future. And He can guide you accordingly.

Countless times a sermon scheduled months in advance has spoken precisely to the issues men and women in the church were facing the day it was preached - even regarding newly emerging issues.

I'm fully persuaded that the benefits of a preaching calendar far outweigh the arguments against it. Here are some that I have discovered.

**“Preach the word, be urgent in season and out of season; convince, rebuke, and exhort, being unfailing in patience and teaching.” 2 Timothy 4:1-2**

## THE BENEFITS OF USING A PREACHING CALENDAR

### 1. Enhanced leadership

An APC provides you with clear leadership path for the church year. As pastor you are also the primary vision-caster.

Your sermons will flesh out that vision. Using a preaching calendar will allow you to have scope and sequence to your vision.

### 2. Better teaching

It sounds cliché, but preaching from a sermon calendar is going to help you teach better. Lead time is one of a preacher's best friends.

Imagine knowing you will be preaching about forgiveness in three months instead of three days. Every time you read in the news or in a blog a story about forgiveness you can add that to file system for future retrieval.

The fact is, the longer you have to let your sermon series marinate, the more flavor they will have. Every experience until then is something else added to the recipe.

The result is a tastier offering. You don't get this benefit writing your sermons week to week.

One more thought here. Waiting to start message planning the week that message will be taught rushes the preparation, the teaching, and the process of seeking God's will.

As a result, pastors will preach what they know out of familiarity. Not planning leads to repeating the same subjects over and over again – and not realizing it.

You need time to learn, pray, reflect, and meditate on God's Word so that you can be intentional with how you teach a topic – not simply teaching the points you already know.

### 3. Greater balance

If you are wondering how a preaching calendar could make a positive impact in your messages, we have a very simple exercise to help you make that determination.

Go back through the last 12 months of your messages and write the topic of each message, what scripture references you used, and then add up the number of messages you preached on each topic.

What you may discover is that you tend to lean in one particular direction. Perhaps that direction is teaching mostly from the Gospels or Epistles versus the narrative passages found in the Old Testament.

Or you find that your messages are more “vertical” (our relationship with God) than “horizontal” (our relationship with others.)

Or you see that while some topics are “regulars” (praying, giving, evangelism, others are missing (living missionally, relational integrity, sexual purity).

The ability to plan in advance and then to view your scope and sequence as a whole can do wonders for your sermonic balance.

### 4. Reduced anxiety

There are always two Sundays in a pastor's week: the one you are getting over and the one you are getting ready for. And, as I noted earlier, these Sundays come around with striking regularity!

An APC removes the haunting anxiety about what to preach next, because your plan is already in place. Moreover, you will have had plenty of time to think long-range and not merely short-term in what you will be teaching.

### 5. Further collaboration

A sermon calendar not only benefits you, it also

is a tremendous benefit to the people on your team. When you know where you are headed you can more easily communicate to those who plan worship services.

There will also be an opportunity for idea sharing well in advance. Thus, they can more confidently select ingredients for the worship service (music, videos, graphics, etc.) that will work with the message to create a cohesive worship experience.

Working ahead also allows for church-wide collaboration.

- Sunday School classes can choose to coordinate what they study with sermon series
- Children and youth departments all know what direction the church is heading in and can look for ways to participate in that focus.
- All-church campaigns (such as 40 Days of Prayer or Advent) give small groups the opportunity to dig deeper.

### 6. Compelling Invitations

It becomes easier to invite others and promote your sermon series when you've known, months in advance, what you'll be preaching.

For instance, on Easter Sunday, invite attendees to your next week's message with something more than, “Please join us. We would love to see you again.”

Rather, invite them to a specific series that addresses a felt need many visitors might have. You could perhaps even include a well-crafted insert in the bulletin describing what's coming next.

With those benefits in mind, let me offer you a few tips in working on your APC.





## TIPS FOR USING AN ANNUAL PREACHING CALENDAR

### 1. Use a template.

A preaching calendar template is valuable for at least two reasons.

- **ALLOWS FOR ORGANIZATION.** You will be able to work at the scope and sequence of your sermon series.
- **PROVIDES VISUALIZATION.** It allows you to see how the series lays out on paper rather simply than in your head.

### 2. Leverage the holidays.

Holidays are special events in the life of the church and should not be ignored. So, put them into your calendar early on and work around them.

Such holidays include:

- Christmas (Advent)
- Easter (Lent)
- Mother's Day
- Father's Day
- Valentine's Day

### 3. Optimize key seasons.

A preaching calendar helps you think in terms of "seasons" instead of weeks. Taking advantage of key seasons can help you schedule your talks at the most strategic times.

For example:

- **FALL** - As families return from summer vacations and school begins, your Sunday attendance will arguably be at it's highest for the year. As well, folks will be in an anticipative mood. Take advantage of both of these and launch key teaching series and visionary initiatives.
- **NEW YEAR:** This is the natural time when people make resolutions. Leverage this with a key teaching series.
- **POST EASTER** is also a key time. You can take advantage of the largest Sunday crowd of the year and provide

encouragement for them to return.

#### 4. Build in breaks.

As I put together my preaching calendar, after marking the weeks with the most impact when I must preach, the second thing I do is to mark the weeks when I will not preach.

This will include not only vacation times, but strategic seasonal breaks and opportunities to minister in other venues.

As well, consider when it would be important to share the pulpit with other staff members or outside speakers.

By using a preaching calendar, I know before the year starts what Sundays I will have off (my goal was to have 10-12 Sundays out of the pulpit per year). I will still be in attendance some of those days, but I can be strategic about when and why by looking at the year as a whole instead of week to week.

#### 5. Consider the summer.

Summertime is always a difficult season for several reasons. First of all, people will come and go due to vacations and family events. Second, you as pastor will also probably be taking some time off.

Plan your calendar accordingly by doing the following:

- **RECOGNIZE INCONSISTENCY.** It's a reality that you can't do anything about. This is probably not the best time to plan a highly visionary or strategic teaching series.
- **USE "STAND ALONES."** You can still have a solid sermon series if each installment is self-contained. For example, "The Parables of Jesus" or "Summer in the Psalms" could be good topics. As well, if you use other staff members or guest speakers to fill the pulpit during this season, they can be part of such series more easily.

#### 6. Stay balanced.

As noted earlier, it's very easy to become blinded to your preaching preferences. I've found that the following filters help one stay in balance.

- **VERTICAL vs. HORIZONTAL** - Our relationship with God as well as our relationship with others.
- **OLD TESTAMENT vs. NEW TESTAMENT** - Am I preaching on "the whole counsel of God"?
- **NARRATIVE vs. DIDACTIC** - Am I balancing the stories in Scripture with the teachings from Scripture?
- **EXHORTATION vs. ENCOURAGEMENT** - Am I always challenging people with what they should do or am I also reminding people of who they are?

#### 7. Remain flexible.

Though you may have faithfully prayed over and diligently planned your teaching series, you need to remember that such preparation took place in the present. You had no idea what will happen in the future.

I have discovered that I need to be sensitive to at least two possibilities.

- **WORLD EVENTS.** When significant international, national, or even local crises hit (think 9/11), you dare not avoid them. There are times when the right call is to jettison the sermon (and whole service theme) and lead the church in response to the crisis.
- **CHURCH NEEDS.** A calamity or a tragedy might well be on everyone's mind. Don't ignore it. Address it.

In summary, keep in mind that an annual preaching calendar is meant to be your servant, not your master. You still have the privilege of making the final call for your preaching.

But, as a servant, it can help you immensely if you give it a chance.

**“...Let the one  
who has my word  
speak it faithfully...”**

JEREMIAH 23:28



## PREACHING CALENDAR TEMPLATE INSTRUCTIONS

Hopefully by now you've seen the value of using an Annual Preaching Calendar. Now comes the hard part. Doing it!

I want to make it a little easier for you, so I've created this Annual Preaching Calendar template to get you started. It is available for download [HERE](#) and comes in Excel, Numbers, and Word formats. Pick your favorite program and start personalizing it!

I've gotten you started by filling in dates and suggested categories to consider as you plan. Let me walk you through it.

### **Date**

You'll note that this calendar starts in September and runs through August rather than January through December. The reason for that is that I found it more practical for the church ministry year to run in parallel to the school year. The fall is a natural time for new ministries to start and fresh vision to be cast. Of course, you can begin your calendar whenever best suits your ministry context.

### **Series Title**

Don't feel the pressure to come up with a creative title for your series in your initial planning and study. Just come up with a

working title that gives you general direction. You can always come back later to nail down the title. For example, if you were going to use themes from the book of Proverbs during the summer, you could simply fill in the Series Title box with "Proverbs." You can tweak this later on, as I did, for example, landing on the series title "Words to the Wise."

### Sermon Title

This column might not be filled out until late in the planning process, even a few weeks before the preaching event. Though a working title might be helpful, there's no need to land on a title for your talk until you do more specific study on the topic.

### Big Idea

The Big Idea is basically your sermon in a sentence. What is the main point or take away you want people to get from this sermon? What is the truth you want your people to hear and put into practice?

Again, this is something that can be refined as you get deeper into your preparation. But early in your study and planning, it is helpful to have a single sentence description of the theme of each sermon in a series.

For example, in a 4-part series on *Forgiveness*, the various Big Ideas might be "Why forgiveness matters," "What forgiveness isn't," "How to forgive," and "Maintaining a lifestyle of forgiveness." These Big Ideas may also give direction to your sermon titles.

### Scripture

For a textual series (moving through a book of the Bible) here is the place to lay out the scriptural scope and sequence. For a topical series (addressing a specific subject), note a few key passages for each message here.

### Ideas, Notes

This column allows space for noting ideas for creative elements that might fit in a given

week, such as illustrations, videos, or personal testimonies. Using an annual preaching calendar puts the topics and scriptures you will be preaching on the radar screen of your mind. Because they are, you will likely find ideas, songs, stories, and quotes that will ping in your attention. This column of the Preaching Calendar is a great place to record those ideas for retrieval at study time.

### Speaker

Place your own initials in this box when you plan on being in the pulpit. Note the names of other communicators as appropriate. By planning well in advance on a series, you will find that you are able to schedule speakers according to their strength or expertise. Preaching a series on *Family Matters*? Your youth pastor may be a great voice to bring in one Sunday. Facing a challenging topic, like spiritual warfare? Knowing that months in advance can allow you to seek out a guest speaker who can bring a depth of knowledge and experience your people can benefit from. And don't forget! Booking outside speakers usually requires several weeks or months lead time.

### Special Considerations

Use this column to note other functions that will take up service time or affect the teaching. For example: baptisms (entire service or a portion?), child dedications, interviews with missionaries, prayer over mission teams, etc. This is also the place to note holidays as well as the weeks you are going to be on vacation or ministering elsewhere.

On the following page is a sample of the DDM Annual Preaching Calendar. You can download this free template by clicking the links below or going to [www.DaveDeSelmMinistries.org/preachingcalendar](http://www.DaveDeSelmMinistries.org/preachingcalendar). Feel free to customize the template to meet your needs or preferences.

- [Preaching Calendar Excel](#)
- [Preaching Calendar Numbers](#)
- [Preaching Calendar Word](#)

## Annual Preaching Calendar 2019-20

Date	Series Title	Sermon Title	Big Idea	Scripture	Ideas, Notes	Speaker	Special Considerations
<b>SEPTEMBER</b>							
9/1							
9/8							
9/15							
9/22							
9/29							
<b>OCTOBER</b>							
10/6							
10/13							
10/20							
10/27							
<b>NOVEMBER</b>							
11/3							
11/10							
11/17							
11/24							
<b>DECEMBER</b>							
12/1							
12/8							
12/15							
12/22							
12/29							
<b>JANUARY</b>							
1/5							
1/12							
1/19							
1/26							
<b>FEBRUARY</b>							
2/2							
2/9							
2/16							
2/23							
<b>MARCH</b>							
3/1							
3/8							
3/15							
3/22							
3/29							
<b>APRIL</b>							
4/5							
4/12							
4/19							
4/26							

Date	Series Title	Sermon Title	Big Idea	Scripture	Ideas, Notes	Speaker	Special Considerations
<b>MAY</b>							
5/3							
5/10							
5/17							
5/24							
5/31							
<b>JUNE</b>							
6/7							
6/14							
6/21							
6/28							
<b>JULY</b>							
7/5							
7/12							
7/19							
7/26							
<b>AUGUST</b>							
8/2							
8/9							
8/16							
8/23							
8/30							

[www.DaveDeSelmMinistries.org/preachingcalendar](http://www.DaveDeSelmMinistries.org/preachingcalendar)

- *Preaching Calendar Excel*
- *Preaching Calendar Numbers*
- *Preaching Calendar Word*



**Dave DeSelm**  
MINISTRIES