Voices: How pastors and churches can respond to ChatGPT

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"Church leaders must be careful to ensure that the use of ChatGPT complies with legal and regulatory requirements, is transparent, and considers privacy concerns," wrote [Duke Taber](#)—a pastor in Mesquite, Nev.

Actually, Taber didn't write that. At the end of the article, Taber includes the following disclosure: "This paper was written by ChatGPT with editorial oversight and guidance by Duke Taber."

A [recent Associated Press article](#) reports that among clergy, the consensus is AI "can't replicate the passion of actual preaching."

Hershael York, a pastor in Kentucky and professor of Christian preaching and dean of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary's School of Theology, told David Crary of Associated Press he believes "lazy pastors might be tempted to use AI" to write sermons, "but not the great shepherds, the ones who love preaching, who love their people."

Responding to challenges of AI

While many see benefits to using ChatGPT in ministry, I see some challenges.

Busyness is part of our lives, and pastors could become more likely to depend on this time-reducing application than searching out the word of God through prayer and dependence upon the Holy Spirit. Pastors could rely more on artificial intelligence than the Bible or other credible biblical

materials.

For the congregants, why bother to listen to a sermon that might have been written by AI? If I don't sense the Holy Spirit's part in my pastor's preparation, I would be tempted to avoid listening, and rightly so. I want to hear from God through my pastor. Many congregants might decide not to attend church at all.

Using AI for any form of teaching—such as blogs, devotionals and Bible studies—could create a distrust of church literature. People could become distrustful of reading Christian books, magazines and articles, and listening to Christian podcasts, not knowing if the source is human.

In response, new policies and rules need to be written regarding using artificial intelligence of any sort in a sermon, for Bible study preparation or for Christian teaching. Also, training is needed on the acceptability—or the lack thereof—of pastoral staff and volunteers using AI.

Teaching biblical integrity

AI creates a challenge to integrity. Many believers do not have a solid handle on biblical integrity. This must be taught. Churches and Christian schools should provide ways to instill integrity in their members and students.

For example, just as first-semester college students are required to attend a seminar by the library staff on how to use the library and its features, what would happen if Christian institutions required students to participate in a workshop on Christian integrity?

Churches and Christian schools should begin with the question, "What is God's will?" Specifically, what is God's will regarding honesty, working hard, character, discerning godly behavior, yielding oneself to Christ, being

honorable, having peace, being controlled by the Holy Spirit, renewing our minds daily and living victoriously in Christ?

Maybe the solution to all this is to stop relying so much on technology and depend more on God's word to guide our writings and sermons.

While we may reminisce about the good old days—sitting on the front porch of our homes, playing kickball outside and listening to our 45 RPM records—AI technology is here to stay. We must adjust and adapt to it.

The University of Texas offers a [certificate](#) in industry-valued AI and machine-learning skills. Certification programs at some point may become degree plans, if they haven't already.

As we respond to AI, we must slow down, intentionally process our life, spend time in prayer, study God's word and seek guidance from him.

Maybe—even possibly—artificial intelligence is an opportunity for believers to build new character traits and become more Christlike in their behavior and thoughts. That's something to think about.

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