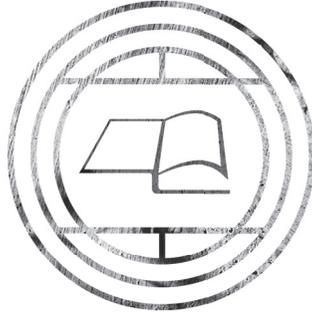


TONY MERIDA



The
**Christ-
Centered**
Expositor

A Field Guide for
Word-Driven
Disciple Makers

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To Imago Dei Church,
my brothers and sisters
whom I love and serve,
my joy and crown.
Stand firm in the Lord, beloved.

CONTENTS

Foreword by Bryan Chapell		xi
Acknowledgments		xv
Preface		xvii
Chapter 1	The Making of an Effective Expositor	1
	PART 1: THE EXPOSITOR'S HEART	
Chapter 2	Watch Your Life and Doctrine	25
Chapter 3	Love the Christ-Centered Scriptures	41
Chapter 4	Proclaim Christ from the Scriptures	59
Chapter 5	Rely on the Spirit's Power	81
Chapter 6	Cultivate a Vibrant Prayer Life	97
Chapter 7	Preach and Teach for God's Glory	115
	PART 2: THE EXPOSITOR'S MESSAGE	
Chapter 8	Step 1: Study the Text	133
Chapter 9	Step 2: Unify the Redemptive Theme	151
Chapter 10	Step 3: Construct an Outline	163
Chapter 11	Step 4: Develop the Functional Elements	175
Chapter 12	Step 5: Add an Introduction and a Conclusion	199
Chapter 13	Deliver the Word	211
Chapter 14	Contextualize the Message	227
Conclusion		243
	APPENDIXES	
A Historical Sketch of Preaching		245
Advice on Doing Exposition in Non-Pulpit Contexts		261
Sermon Outline Sheet		269
Sermon Evaluation Form		271
Selected Bibliography		275
Name Index		287
Subject Index		289
Scripture Index		293

FOREWORD

WHY SHOULD A PREACHER'S exposition of Scripture be "Christ-centered," as Pastor Tony Merida advocates in this wonderful text?

In part, the answer must be that Jesus teaches us to expound Scripture with his ministry in constant view. The Gospel of Luke tells us that after Jesus rose from the dead and was walking with his disciples on the road to Emmaus, he explained the Bible this way: "And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself" (Luke 24:27 ESV).

Does this mean that Jesus used some magical formula or secret decoder ring to show how every verse in the Bible makes some mention of him? Sometimes we hear well-meaning people try to explain the Bible this way.

Such interpreters may tell us things like the wood of Noah's ark symbolizes the wood of the cross. Or they may stretch a bit further and suggest that the wood of the ark was made of "gopher" wood, and that is supposed to remind us of the resurrection—since gophers live in the ground and Jesus came up out of the ground.

Hopefully we recognize that such fanciful explanations are more about what is in the imagination of the interpreter than what is actually being communicated in the pages of Scripture. Such imaginative explanations could make the Bible mean anything we want it to mean (e.g., the wood could also symbolize the wood of the manger, or the wood Jesus used for his carpentry, or the wood of the boat from which he stilled the storm).

Jesus was not playing such imagination games when he told his disciples that all the Scriptures revealed him. He was teaching that he was the fulfillment of all the promises the Scriptures had made and the full revelation of the grace that God had been beaconing throughout the biblical record.

Prior to Jesus, the Scriptures had been progressively and consistently revealing the nature of the grace of God that would culminate

in Jesus. Throughout the Bible, God had provided for people who could not provide for themselves (food for the hungry, strength for the weak, rest for the weary, forgiveness for the flawed, faithfulness to the unfaithful, freedom for slaves, sacrifices for the sinful, etc.). By all of these means, God's people were learning about the character and care of God that would be fully revealed in Christ. He is the culmination of the grace God's Word had been unfolding since the dawn of humanity.

When Jesus said that all the Scriptures spoke of him, he was not requiring us to make him magically appear in every Old Testament mud puddle or camel track by some acrobatic leap of verbal or symbolic gymnastics. Not every verse in the Bible mentions Jesus, but every passage does reveal aspects of God's character and care that relate to his saving work. Thus, for us to try to interpret a passage of Scripture and *only* speak of the commands that we should do or the doctrines that we should know actually misses the gospel truth Jesus said the passage contains.

Finding that gospel truth is not only required so that we will get the right and full meaning of the text. Consider what happens if *all* we do is teach a passage's moral instructions or doctrinal information. If that is all we do, then we are saying this passage is *only* about increasing the quality of our human performance or competence. The message basically gets entirely focused on broken humans doing better—straightening up and flying right.

There are only two possibly human responses to messages that entirely focus on us doing better. One possible response is *pride*. Like the rich young ruler of Mark 10, we could conclude, "I have done all that God requires." The problem with this conclusion is that our best works are like "filthy rags" to God (Isa 64:6) and, according to Jesus, when we have done all that we should do, we are still "unworthy" servants (Luke 17:10).

The other possible human response to a message that focuses entirely on increasing human performance or competence is *despair*. When we actually face the holiness that God requires in the context of our own human brokenness, we will inevitably despair that heaven will ever receive or bless us (Isa 6:5).

The Bible, of course, is not moving us toward pride or despair but toward faith in a Savior who makes gracious provision beyond the limits of our performance or competence. When we really understand how holy are God's requirements, then we are forced

to seek help beyond our own resources to satisfy God and have a loving relationship with him. That's what the apostle Paul taught when he said that the law (the holy requirements of God) were a "schoolmaster" or "guardian" to lead us to Christ (Gal 3:24).

Paul would never want us to believe that the moral and doctrinal standards of Scripture don't apply to our lives, but neither would he want anyone to teach that our path to God is made by the perfections of our obedience. Jesus makes our path to God. When we put our faith in him, he provides the holiness that God requires.

Christ's perfect life and sacrificial death were provided for us so that we would have his righteousness in our place (2 Cor 5:21). Love for him and dependence on the enabling power of his Spirit are required for us to have the proper motivation and enablement to serve him—not only at the moment of our justification but for every step of our sanctification.

So, when we are interpreting a text from the Old or New Testament, we need to do more than show the duty others should do or the doctrine they should know. We also need to explain how the Scriptures are pointing us to dependence on our Lord for the grace that makes us his own and enables us to do as he requires.

We must take care to remember that apart from Christ we can do nothing (John 15:5). Such biblical mindfulness will encourage us to excavate the aspects of grace glistening throughout Scriptures that point us to the character and care of our Savior. Such Christ-centered exposition will lead God's people to heart responses of devotion and praise—not to gain God's affection but to return love to him who has been so gracious to us.

Bryan Chapell

Senior pastor, Grace Presbyterian Church; president emeritus, Covenant Theological Seminary; distinguished professor of preaching, Knox Theological Seminary and Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary

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THIS WORK IS THE fruit of many colaborers in the gospel. I am indebted to Dr. Jim Shaddix, my mentor and friend, who emphasized the difference between “good stuff” and “God stuff” in preaching. His faithful exposition, classroom instruction, and prayerful support continue to shape me. He not only taught me about the sufficiency of Scripture but also illustrated it by his life and ministry.

I must also say thank you to other professors and pastoral models: to Dr. Charlie Ray, thank you for teaching me the value and use of the original languages; to Dr. Stan Norman, thank you for teaching me the importance of theology; to Dr. John Piper, thank you for inspiring and instructing me through your writings and ministry; to Dr. Bryan Chapell, thank you for your emphasis on Christ-centered expository preaching; to Dr. Timothy Keller, thank you for helping me think about preaching Christ to the unbeliever and the believer in the modern world.

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To my bride, Kimberly, where would I be without you? You are my dear companion in life and ministry. My love and admiration for you grow by the day. Thank you for your faithfulness and grace. You are an amazing wife and mother.

To my children, James, Joshua, Angela, Jana, and Victoria, I pray that you will grow up to love the Scriptures and will make disciples among all nations. I love being your dad.

Most of all, I must thank my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Thank you for the cross and the empty tomb. Apart from you, I have no hope and nothing to preach. I pray that you will receive this little book as an offering of my worship to you, my King.

PREFACE

THE BELIEVER'S TASK OF making disciples among all nations involves *teaching* (Matt 28:18–20). If you take our Lord's commission seriously, then this book is for you. If you have (or aspire to have) an official teaching position in the church, then this book is especially for you.

There is more to the church than teaching, but the church's ministry is built on the understanding and application of Scripture. We know we should pray, but where do we learn to pray? The Bible. We know we should sing, take communion, care for one another, give generously, evangelize the world, care for orphans, and do a host of other things as a church, but where do we learn these things? The Bible. Husbands are to love their wives, but from where should we derive our view of marriage and family? The Bible. A healthy church is filled with healthy teaching.

In Acts 2, Peter stands up on the day of Pentecost and answers the question of a perplexed crowd, "What does this mean?" (Acts 2:12 ESV). He tells the crowd that Pentecost means that prophecy has been fulfilled (2:16; Joel 2:28–32); that the last Days have dawned (Acts 2:17); that all believers are "prophets" (2:17); and that Jesus has ascended to the throne (2:22–36). There is much to learn from Peter's sermon, but his point about all believers being "prophets" is quite important for supporting the view that while God appoints some men to the office of a pastor, *every believer* is called to teach in some capacity.

In the book of Numbers, Moses was exhausted from leadership, and so elders were appointed, filled with the Spirit, and they prophesied. When some were disturbed by this, and complained to Moses, then Moses said, "If only all the LORD's people were prophets and the LORD would place His Spirit on them!" (Num 11:29). What Moses longed for and Joel prophesied about, Peter says has arrived with the pouring out of the Spirit.

Of course, Peter is not saying that every believer has the “gift of prophecy” (1 Cor 12:10), but he does mean that every believer shares (in a general sense) the privilege and responsibility of Old Testament prophets. What did this involve? Prophets were able *to know God intimately* and were commissioned *to speak God’s Word faithfully*. We too can know God truly and fully through Jesus Christ. And we can grow in this knowledge through the revealed Word of God. And we are commissioned to speak God’s Word faithfully—both to believers and unbelievers.

The book of Acts recounts the story of the Word of God increasing and multiplying across geographical and cultural barriers by the power of the Holy Spirit (2:42; 6:7; 11:24; 12:24; 13:49; 16:5; 19:20; 28:30–31). Luke says that God’s people taught others about Jesus, who is the hero of the Bible, in all sorts of contexts: “And every day, in the temple, and from house to house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ” (Acts 5:42 ESV). In many cases, it was the “nonprofessional” Christians proclaiming the Word. For instance, in Acts 8:4, Luke writes, “Now those who were scattered [the nonapostles] went about preaching the Word” (ESV).

While it is most certainly true that God has gifted some in the church with a unique ability to teach and preach (Rom 12:7; Eph 4:11; 1 Tim 3:1–7; Titus 1:5–9; Heb 13:7; 1 Pet 4:10–11), all believers share this responsibility in different ways. To the Colossian believers, Paul says, “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, *teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom*” (Col 3:16a ESV, my emphasis). He told the Romans, “[Y]ou yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge and *able to instruct one another*” (Rom 15:14b ESV, my emphasis). Peter urged believers to be ready to teach unbelievers saying, “But in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you” (1 Pet 3:15 ESV; see Col 4:5).

All this means that every believer must read, ponder, and love the Scriptures and be skillful at teaching and applying the message to others. If you are a disciple of Christ, then you should listen to sermons not merely as a “receiver” but as a “reproducer.” Listen to learn and apply the text to yourself first, but also listen to teach others (such as your friends, neighbors, small group, or family members). When you study the Bible, do not merely study for

information's sake, but study to know God personally and deeply, and study that you may instruct others.

Some believers will have a unique role in the church that involves the weekly labor of sermon preparation and delivery, and of course, they must take their task with the utmost seriousness (Acts 20:17–35; Heb 13:7, 17; Jas 3:1). We will give an account for how we have taught God's Word. We should tremble at this task.

So, here goes. Even though I have a bias toward those who are in the pulpit weekly, I hope to address both the heart and the message of all Word-driven disciple makers. If you are familiar with the original version of this book, entitled *Faithful Preaching*, you will find the same basic theology and methodology. Hopefully this new version is organized better; the newer sections make things clearer, and various concepts are emphasized more appropriately.

My prayer is that we all teach the Word of Christ more faithfully and effectively, and that we will treasure the Christ of the Word more deeply.

1

THE MAKING OF AN EFFECTIVE EXPOSITOR

Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching . . . Practice these things, immerse yourself in them, so that all may see your progress.

—1 Timothy 4:13, 15 (ESV)

Part of me wishes to avoid proving the sordid truth: That preaching today is ordinarily poor. But I have come to recognize that many, many individuals have never been under a steady diet of competent preaching.¹

—T. David Gordon

MY BIBLE EXPOSITION STUDENTS enter the room on the first day of the semester with a host of questions. Some of them aspire to the office of pastor, while others want to make disciples among unreached people groups, and still others are unsure how the Lord will use them to minister the Word. But they all come with questions. I assume because you are reading this book, you have an

¹T. David Gordon, *Why Johnny Can't Preach* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2009), 17.

inquiring mind too. Let us begin with some basic questions and foundations for proclaiming the Word.

WHAT MAKES A GREAT PREACHER/TEACHER?

“If I take this class, will it make me a great preacher?” On the first day of class, I tell students upfront that I cannot manufacture expositors. I wish I could. Why do I say this? For this reason: much of great preaching and teaching rests on the individual’s personal life and with the sovereign Spirit of God. One has to take personal responsibility for spiritual and theological depth, and for personal and ministry growth, and one must acknowledge that God sovereignly works in people’s lives by his own pleasure and for his own glory.

To highlight this reality, allow me to offer nine ingredients that contribute to the making of a great expositor. Examine your own heart as you read through this list.

1: Love for the Word of Christ and the Christ of the Word. Good preaching and teaching are an overflow of love for the Savior. It is actually possible to preach a Christ-centered message without having a Christ-centered heart. Guard against this. Good preaching and teaching come through a person who treasures the Christ of the Word. Let the Word drive you to the pulpit; do not let the pulpit (only) drive you to the Word.² Avoid studying only to preach sermons. Beware of becoming “The Sermonator,” mechanically churning out sermons weekly but failing to meet with the risen Christ personally. Be renewed in the gospel personally. Sit under your own preaching. Let the Word pass through you before it passes from you.

After giving a few answers to the question “Where and how did you learn to preach?,” preaching giant John Piper said, “I don’t think there is much you can do to become a preacher except know your Bible and be unbelievably excited about what’s there. And love people a lot.”³ Heed this counsel. Be personally enamored by the Savior, and then out of love for the bride, lead them down the aisle to the Groom.

²Tim Keller, *Preaching* (New York: Viking, 2015), 205.

³“Where and How Did You Learn to Preach?,” Desiring God Ministries, accessed February 5, 2015, <http://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/where-and-how-did-you-learn-to-preach>.

2: *Love People.* Those who feed the flock must love the flock. Preparing messages is often lonely, and it is always tiring. Remember why you do it! Jesus loves his church, and we are called to love who Jesus loves. Avoid being a machine gun behind the podium, just firing content at people. Preach from a heart of love. The goal is not only to get through a message but also to get through to the hearts of people. Make sure when you are speaking to unbelievers that you do so with the compassion of the Father, who invites both hedonistic prodigals and moralistic Pharisees to enjoy his transforming grace. Do not replace truthfulness with “tolerance” but speak the truth in love. Bryan Chapell said that as an early preacher he wrote at the top of his notes “Love the people” as a reminder of this important point.⁴

3: *Gifts.* I cannot hand out teaching gifts to people. To quote the instructor from the movie *Chariots of Fire*, “I can’t put in what God has left out!” God in his sovereign grace has equipped people with unique gifts for building up the body. Teaching may or may not be your primary gift. That is OK. We need all types of people to serve the body faithfully. Rest in the grace of God. Use the gifts and abilities that he has given you.

4: *Experience.* With the exception of giving students a few reps in sermon delivery class, I cannot give anyone experience. To grow as an expositor, you need to find ways to preach and teach a lot. Your early sermons may be like your first days riding a bike. You and the bike will get scratched up a bit, but keep riding. Most do not start out as proficient riders. And even the best preachers have improved from their early days. Take every opportunity you have to teach the Bible to people. Churches are not the only places where you can expound the Bible. Visit prisons, nursing homes, or shelters. Take a young person out for lunch weekly and teach him the Bible. It will bless him, and it will improve your skills.

5: *A Mentor.* I try to mentor nine or ten guys in our pastoral training program. I was blessed to have an incredible mentor in Jim Shaddix. If you do not have such a mentor, then be not dismayed. You can benefit from three types of mentors: life-on-life mentors, a mentor from a distance, and a deceased mentor. If you do not have a life-on-life mentor yet, start with the other two. Watch someone from a distance closely via technology. Not only can you watch

⁴ “Why Expository Preaching?,” The Gospel Coalition, accessed February 5, 2015, <http://resources.thegospelcoalition.org/library/why-expository-preaching>.

sermons online, but you may also communicate to them directly through various devices. (I have a faculty colleague who video chats with his mentor monthly.) By a “deceased mentor” I mean someone like Spurgeon, Luther, Calvin, Knox, or someone who faithfully taught God’s Word and walked with Jesus. Read and study about them. Ideally, the perfect combination is all three. The Lord may allow you to have multiple mentors (of all types), and if so, thank him for such a privilege.

6: *Models*. Related to the previous point, when it comes to preaching and teaching, you can learn a lot by watching how someone goes about his craft. A mentor may or may not be a great model for exposition. You will do well to have many skilled models of exposition in your life. Danny Akin’s words are correct: “Great preachers listen to great preachers.”⁵ You should not copy another’s style (unless you want to look silly), but it is wise to watch and learn from faithful examples.

Here are a few of my models. D. A. Carson is my favorite Christ-centered expositor. I love to watch him dissect a particular text in context then fan out and show how it fits within the redemptive storyline of the Bible.⁶ Akin does a tremendous job outlining passages in a book of the Bible. Alistair Begg, Mark Dever, Dick Lucas, Jim Shaddix, and Sinclair Ferguson have been wonderful models for weekly pastoral preaching. Tim Keller has impacted me more than anyone in the past five years. His ability to speak the gospel to the unbelieving skeptic, while doing substantive biblical preaching, is remarkable.

7: *Holiness and Prayer*. You must have a *lifestyle* that reflects a love for Scripture. People need to see the pastor/teacher exemplifying his teaching. You must accept responsibility for pursuing God and exemplifying Christ. You cannot separate your life and your ministry; the two are tied together. Lack of character will make you both *unfaithful* and *ineffective*. Involved in this pursuit is the need to cultivate a vibrant prayer life. Faithful preachers are faithful prayers. They commune with God regularly. I will say more about these things in chapters 2 and 6.

⁵ Quoted in a PhD seminar at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary (SEBTS) that we co-teach.

⁶ For example, watch this sermon on “The Temptation of Joseph,” preached from Genesis 39 at Champion Forest Baptist Church on April 28, 2013; accessed February 5, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oS0iVA5UtN4>.

8: *Instruction*. Here is where I try to be of most help to aspiring preachers in class (and with this book). You need to learn things such as how to exegete a passage of Scripture, how to incorporate biblical theology into expository preaching, how to apply the text in a gospel-centered manner instead of a moralistic manner, how to preach Christ from the Old Testament, how to prepare a sermon manuscript, and how to excel in other hermeneutical and homiletical skills. This book will provide some homiletical instruction that will hopefully be helpful to your Word-driven ministry. But this is an introductory book, so I encourage you to read other works, such as Bryan Chapell's *Christ-Centered Preaching*, John Stott's *Between Two Worlds*, and others referenced in the following chapters.

9: *The Sovereign Spirit of God*. Much in the preaching and teaching event is "mysterious." I cannot explain all the spiritual dynamics involved in delivering the Word. God has blessed all sorts of Word-driven disciple makers through the years for his own reasons, by his own power. The wind blows where he wants it to blow. God does miraculous things with weak vessels who may or may not be polished in the pulpit. Praise his holy name.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY ABOUT PREACHING AND TEACHING?

Before discussing biblical preachers, it is important to note that God himself was the "first preacher." Dever writes, "From the first page of the Bible, words are enormously important to the God who made the universe."⁷ Throughout the pages of the Bible, we see that one feature that sets God apart from idols is the fact that *God speaks* (Ps 115:4–5).

As we read on, we see how God used people to speak his Word in order to reveal his truth and give life. When Jesus (the Word made flesh) began his earthly ministry, he did so by preaching (Matt 4:12–17). In the pages of the New Testament, we read of how God built his church by his Word (e.g., Acts 2:14–47). Declaring the Word is tied to the very nature and purpose of our great Creator and Redeemer.

Preachers in the biblical period were characterized by two primary factors: *calling* and *content*. Regarding *calling*, God set apart prophets, apostles, and preachers for the particular task of declaring

⁷Mark Dever and Greg Gilbert, *Preach* (Nashville: B&H, 2012), 13.

his Word publicly. On the other hand, God did not send false prophets who failed to proclaim the Word of God. In Jeremiah 23, God rebuked the false prophets, saying, “I did not send these prophets, yet they ran with a message. I did not speak to them, yet they prophesied” (v. 21). Surely this is one of the reasons why the special callings of the true prophets are included in the Old Testament. God’s calling was important. It showed the people the difference between the two kinds of prophets. False prophets did not receive the vision of an Isaiah or experience the calling of a young Jeremiah or Samuel. Similarly, Paul often described his apostolic calling in order to set himself apart from the false apostles of the day (Gal 1:6–17). Old Testament scholar C. Hassell Bullock commented, “We cannot ignore the basic fact that the prophets found their legitimacy and valid credentials first of all in Yahweh’s call.”⁸

In addition, the *content* of the prophets set them apart from false prophets. God told Moses to proclaim the law of God (Exod 20:22). As the prophet Samuel grew, “the Lord was with him and let none of his words fall to the ground” (1 Sam 3:19 ESV). Ezra stood up and read “the book of the law” after God’s people gathered together after exile (Neh 8:1). The Holy One commissioned Isaiah for the purpose of proclaiming his message to hard-hearted people (Isa 6:9–13). God put his words in Jeremiah’s mouth for the purpose of proclamation (Jer 1:7–9). God told Ezekiel to say, “Thus says the Lord God” (Ezek 2:4 ESV). True prophets preached God’s Word alone, and their message proved true in time (Deut 18:21–22).⁹

Similarly, true preachers in the New Testament continued the pattern of the Old Testament prophets by proclaiming divine truth, as commanded by the Lord. God appointed John the Baptist to prepare the way of the Lord by “preaching in the wilderness” (Matt 3:1); and as mentioned, Jesus began his earthly ministry by preaching and continued to preach and teach until his death—then after his resurrection as well (e.g., Luke 4:14–22, 43–44; 24:25–49)! In

⁸C. H. Bullock, *An Introduction to the Old Testament Prophetic Books*, updated (Chicago: Moody, 2007), 20.

⁹Of course, prophets are different from current preachers in the sense that they made future predictions. Nevertheless, they were preachers. Bullock said, “Although it can accurately be said that the prophets were basically preachers—that is, they spoke to their own times and situations, interpreting current events of history in light of God’s will for Israel—the predictive element was a distinctive part of their message.” *Ibid.*, 16.

Acts, the apostle Peter preached “the first Christian sermon” by expounding and applying the Old Testament (and one-fourth of the book of Acts is sermonic material!). Paul preached his first recorded sermon by expounding on the Old Testament story (Acts 13:17–41). He spent many days teaching the Word in places like Corinth and Ephesus. He exhorted Timothy to devote himself “to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching” (1 Tim 4:13 ESV). Paul sent Titus to Crete and commissioned him to “teach what accords with sound doctrine” (Titus 2:1 ESV). Peter stated that those who are gifted to speak should declare “the oracles of God” (1 Pet 4:11). And the book of Hebrews is essentially a sermon, which the author calls “a word of exhortation” written for a group of believers (Heb 13:22 ESV).

The metaphors for God’s messengers in the New Testament illustrate the preacher’s responsibility to the Word. God calls the messenger a “sower” (*ho speiroun*) who sows the seed of the Word; a “steward” (*oikonomos*) who is entrusted with the mysteries of God; a “herald” (*keryx*) who proclaims the news of God; an “ambassador” (*presbus*) who represents God; a “shepherd” (*poimen*) who feeds and protects the flock of God; and a “workman” (*ergateus*) who rightly divides the truth of God. Concerning these images, John Stott stated, “It is impressive that in all these New Testament metaphors the preacher is a servant under someone else’s authority, and the communicator of someone else’s word.”¹⁰ Do not forsake your responsibility. Keep sowing, stewarding, heralding, representing, feeding, and rightly dividing God’s Word.

Alistair Begg described the role of the preacher in a vivid way. The church where he attended as a boy had the type of sanctuary that required the pastor to ascend several steps before reaching a cone-shaped pulpit, located high above the people. Prior to his ascension, about three minutes prior to commencement, the parish official (beadle) went up first, carrying a large Bible. The beadle opened the Bible to the text for the day and then descended. The pastor then walked up into the pulpit. After this, the beadle ascended a final time to shut the door. This process illustrated something quite important: apart from the Scriptures, the preacher basically had nothing to say. However, if the preacher had Scriptures

¹⁰ John Stott, *Between Two Worlds* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 137. See Matt 13:1–23; 1 Cor 4:1; 2 Cor 5:20; 2 Tim 2:15; 4:2; 1 Pet 5:2.

before him, then he should not come down until he preached the text! And the people sitting below should submit to the authority of the text.¹¹

The fact that true preaching involves the giving of a particular message makes sense when you realize that the gospel is *news*. What do you do with news? You speak it! The frequently quoted remark allegedly uttered by Francis of Assisi, “Preach the gospel at all times and if necessary, use words,” sounds good, but it is nonsense. No television news anchor will say, “Tonight, I’m going to give you the news, and if necessary, I’ll use words.”¹² The gospel is news, and it therefore requires the act of speaking. It is better to say, “Preach the gospel at all times, and if necessary, use a microphone!” The New Testament is filled with references about the importance of *announcing* the good news (see Mark 1:37–38; 3:14; Luke 4:18–19; Rom 1:15; 10:14; 1 Cor 1:18–2:5; 9:16; 15:1–8).

Preaching has fallen on hard times because of the antiauthoritarian mood of our day. When preachers appear on television shows or movies, they are rarely portrayed in a respectful way. Some churches do not even like to use the word *preach*. Many claim, “Preaching doesn’t work.” But none of these realities should keep us from embracing the centrality of heralding the Word.

The fact is every generation bristles at the idea of submission to God’s Word. Yet God’s plan has not changed, and neither should ours. The number of biblical examples that illustrate the importance of the preached Word is stunning. After commenting on the book of Deuteronomy, which is essentially a book of Moses’s sermons, Christopher Ash says, “True prophets were preachers of the written covenant. God did not just give them a book. He gave them preachers of the book so that face-to-face they could be taught, challenged, rebuked and exhorted to repentance and faith.”¹³ Similarly, after describing the God-breathed Scriptures in 2 Timothy 3:14–17, Paul tells Timothy to “preach the word” (4:2 ESV).

So preach *the Bible*. When God’s Word is truly proclaimed, the voice of God is truly heard. Believe this, and go deliver it to your generation.

¹¹ Alistair Begg, *Preaching for God’s Glory* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1999), 9.

¹² I heard D. A. Carson use this illustration at a chapel service at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary.

¹³ Christopher Ash, *The Priority of Preaching*, repr. (London: Proclamation Trust Media, 2010), .

DEFINITIONS AND DISTINCTIONS

Preaching, then, is about making God's Word known publicly to a particular audience. More specifically, faithful preaching involves *explaining what God has said in his Word, declaring what God has done in his Son, and applying this message to the hearts of people*. The best approach for accomplishing this agenda is expository preaching.

Ranting is not preaching; ranting is dangerous. Today we have "new school" ranting. "Old school" ranting involved a preacher lifting a verse from a passage and building a sermon around this verse or phrase. It was/is often filled with decent theology and delivered artistically, but these sermons tend to ignore the context of the passage and be presented to congregations with an anti-intellectual spirit.

A "new school" ranting sermon looks like this: Deal with a passage about John the Baptist for a bit and then do a thirty-minute rant on biblical manhood, regardless of the fact that the text is not about biblical manhood. New school ranters often say things that are helpful, and even Bible-based, but ranting is not exposition. Expository proclamation requires you to keep your focus on the text. It means rooting your application in the text. Say what God has said, and declare what God has done.

Ranting is dangerous for many reasons. In fact it is the same method prosperity preachers use. They lift a verse or idea out of a text without considering the context then go on about a self-serving agenda. Avoid this method. When you rant, you can easily depart from the meaning of a text. You also lose authority, feed carnality, perpetuate celebrity culture, and confuse people about what God did and did not say. Preach the Word, not your opinions and hobby-horses, so that people put their faith in Christ, not in man's wisdom.

What Is the Difference Between Preaching and Teaching?

We should recognize that there are many similarities between *teaching* and *preaching*. Scholar Sidney Greidanus notes, "The New Testament uses as many as thirty-three different verbs to describe what we usually cover with the single word *preaching*."¹⁴ In one sense, preaching is telling the good news—which all believers should do (Acts 8:4). But

¹⁴ Sidney Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text*, repr. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 6.

there seems to be something unique about preaching God's Word publicly in a worship assembly (1 Tim 4:13; 2 Tim 4:1–4).¹⁵

Some think that one has gone from teaching to preaching when the speaker starts yelling! But I think the difference has more to do with *content* than with *volume*. The act of preaching involves three characteristics that are *not* always present in the act of teaching: exhortation, evangelism, and exultation.

Preaching involves *exhortation* because it calls people to respond or to act. Teaching does not always do this. Teachers may simply transfer information. Preachers urge hearers to repent and obey.

Preaching involves *evangelism* because it is tied up with the heralding of the gospel. If you do a word study for “preaching,” you will find that the gospel usually accompanies it. One may teach for two hours about how archaeologists found a particular Psalm scroll in a Qumran cave, but they would not be preaching because educating is not evangelizing. It would not be “*declaring* what God has done through his Son.”

Preaching involves *exultation* because it is an act of worship. The preacher should “exult” over the Word.¹⁶ One may teach for information, but preaching aims at adoration. True preaching is an act of worship on the part of the preacher and the receiver (e.g., Neh 8:1–8). My goal every week is not merely to transfer information but to lead people to see the glory of Christ and be changed.

When people ask me if “I’m more of a teacher or a preacher,” I say, “I’m a teaching preacher and a preaching teacher.” I cannot preach well without careful teaching. But I do not want to merely teach people stuff; I want to preach the gospel, exult in Christ, and exhort people to respond. Interestingly, Paul incorporates the charge to “teach” in the same charge to “preach the Word” (2 Tim 4:1–4). We may herald the facts of the gospel (preaching), but we have to come behind that announcement and explain it (teaching). We proclaim that the tomb is empty and the throne is occupied, so repent and believe in the King (preaching); but we have to then explain who Jesus was, why people should believe in the

¹⁵ John Piper states that in 2 Timothy 4 Paul has a worship assembly in mind. See “The Essential and Prominent Place of Preaching in Worship,” sermon online, preached at SEBTS. Accessed February 5, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P8CMrjT62Vo>. In 1 Timothy 4, Paul seems to also have a corporate gathering in view.

¹⁶ John Piper emphasizes “exultation” in various places, such as in *The Supremacy of God in Preaching*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004).

resurrection, and what repentance and faith mean (teaching). Not all teaching involves preaching, but all good preaching contains careful teaching.

What Are Some Classical Definitions of Preaching?

In the world of *homiletics*, “the science and art of preaching,” many teachers provide more descriptive definitions, calling our attention to certain nuances. Though some debate what Phillips Brooks meant, this definition is regularly given to define preaching: “Preaching is the bringing of truth through personality.”¹⁷ We certainly cannot divorce the *personality* of the preacher from the preaching event, which is why we should not try to copy others’ preaching style. We should proclaim the Word authentically. Of course, some parts of our personalities need purification by the Holy Spirit. We should not assume that “being ourselves” means that we have complete liberty to preach in any manner apart from moral boundaries. However, God has made us with unique traits and graced us with unique skills and mannerisms; therefore, we should not see preaching as conforming to one particular style.

Other teachers focus more on *content* in their definition of homiletics. V. L. Stanfield said, “Preaching is giving the Bible a voice.”¹⁸ Karl Barth stated, “Preaching must be the exposition of Holy Scripture. I have not to talk about Scripture but from it. I have not to say something, but merely repeat something.”¹⁹ Stanfield and Barth remind us that preaching is different from giving a “sermon,” a “talk,” or a “speech.” In fact, a person can deliver a sermon or talk about anything. What makes preaching unique is its divine content.

Passion has also been emphasized through the years. Extraordinary expositor D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones asserted, “Preaching is theology coming through a man who is on fire.”²⁰ Contemporary preacher John Piper called true preaching “expository exultation.”²¹ Both of these pastor-theologians remind us of the need for theological depth and fervency in the pulpit. While passion is expressed

¹⁷ Phillips Brooks, *Lectures on Preaching* (New York: E. P. Dalton; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1969), 5.

¹⁸ John A. Broadus, *On the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*, 4th ed., rev. Vernon L. Stanfield (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1979), 19.

¹⁹ Karl Barth, *Homiletics*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley and Donald E. Daniels (Louisville: WJK, 1991), 49.

²⁰ D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching and Preachers* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1971), 97.

²¹ Piper, *The Supremacy of God in Preaching*, 11.

in different ways by preachers—such as volume, gestures, tears, sincerity, or pace—it is an important element in the preaching event for conveying a sense of gravity and gladness in worship. Genuine passion is also contagious and convincing. You will look hard to find any preaching in the Bible that does not contain expressions of passion.

Jerry Vines and Jim Shaddix define preaching as “the oral communication of a biblical truth by the Holy Spirit through a human personality to a given audience with the intent of enabling a positive response.”²² Vines and Shaddix add to the personality characteristic, *the Spirit’s ministry* and a *positive response*. Certainly, we must emphasize the work of the Spirit in Christian preaching. And it is only by the Spirit that positive responses can occur. Preachers should expect God to work when his Word is accurately proclaimed.

I might add to this brief survey that true preaching is *trinitarian*. We must aim to *responsibly, passionately, and authentically declare the Christ-exalting Scriptures, by the power of the Holy Spirit, for the glory of God*. In my opinion, the approach that best fulfills this quest is *expository preaching*. John Stott went so far as to say that “all true Christian preaching is expository preaching.”²³

What Is Expository Preaching?

Many definitions of expository preaching/teaching exist. The general understanding is that the text of Scripture drives expository preaching. The Bible is at center stage. The confusion exists in answering the following particular questions about expository preaching:

1. Does expository preaching have to do with the *form* of the sermon?
2. Does expository preaching have to do with the *process* of preparing the sermon?
3. Does expository preaching have to do with the *content* of the sermon?
4. Does expository preaching have to do with the *style* of the sermon?
5. Does expository preaching include a *combination* of some of these elements?

²² Jerry Vines and Jim Shaddix, *Power in the Pulpit* (Chicago: Moody, 1999), 27.

²³ Stott, *Between Two Worlds*, 125.

Expository preaching as a sermon *form* means to preach “verse by verse” instead of preaching “verse *with* verse.” By this classification, only sermons that move through a particular passage are considered expository. Verse-with-verse preaching is known as “topical preaching,” where the preacher selects a number of verses in order to support his idea.

Expository preaching as a sermon *process* means that exposition deals with the in-depth study of the text for the purpose of communicating the message the original author intended. The process (as we will discuss later in part 2) includes looking at certain features in the text such as authorship, date, context, words, and sentence structure. The expositor is then trying to uncover the meaning of a passage, which has been covered up by time, culture, language, and our presuppositions.

Expository preaching, when understood as the *content* of the message, means the essence of the sermon is biblical—regardless of the form or style of the message. With this idea, expository preaching is simply Word-centered preaching. One may choose various texts in a sermon, but the texts that are used are to be understood in their proper context. The verses must be treated in a way that does not offend the author whom God chose to write the texts.

Expository preaching as a sermon *style* means that there is a certain way to deliver an expository sermon. Usually one has a particular preacher in mind when defining exposition in this way. Unfortunately, those who react negatively to exposition often react to poor styles of delivery by particular preachers. These critics often claim that expository preachers only give the hearers boring background information sprinkled with Greek grammar and other irrelevant excerpts from commentaries.

The clearest option to reject is exposition as a *style*. We have many contemporary examples of preachers who are being faithful to the text while maintaining their own personality. No one likes boring exposition that includes no application for real life, and no one likes cloned exposition—trying to imitate a certain preacher.

Most proponents of exposition emphasize the need for the preacher to explain and apply a particular text or texts by understanding it in context. They emphasize the need for exegetical study and biblical content. Consider the following examples:

- John Broadus: “An expository discourse may be defined as one which is occupied mainly with, or at any rate very largely, with the exposition of Scripture.”²⁴
- John Stott: “It [exposition] refers to the content of the sermon (biblical truth) rather than the style (a running commentary). To expound Scripture is to bring out of the text what is there and expose it to view.”²⁵
- Haddon Robinson: “Expository preaching is the communication of a biblical concept, derived from and transmitted through the historical, grammatical, and literary study of a passage in its context, which the Holy Spirit first applies to the personality and experience of the preacher, then through the preacher, applies to the listeners.”²⁶
- Sidney Greidanus: “Expository preaching is ‘Bible-centered preaching.’ That is, it is handling the text in such a way that its real and essential meaning as it existed in the mind of the particular writer and as it exists in the light of the over-all context of Scripture is made plain and applied to the present-day needs of the hearers.”²⁷
- John MacArthur: “Expository preaching involves presenting a passage entirely and exactly as God intended.”²⁸
- Bryan Chapell: “[Expository preaching] attempts to present and apply the truths of a specific biblical passage.”²⁹
- Mark Dever and Greg Gilbert: “Expositional preaching is preaching in which the main point of the biblical text being considered becomes the main point of the sermon being preached.”³⁰
- Vines and Shaddix: “[An expository sermon is] a discourse that expounds a passage of Scripture, organizes it around a central theme and main divisions which issue forth the given text, and then decisively applies its message to the listeners.”³¹

²⁴ John Broadus, *On the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*, new and rev. ed. Jesse Witherspoon (New York: Harper and Row, 1944), 144.

²⁵ Stott, *Between Two Worlds*, 125–26.

²⁶ Haddon Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 21.

²⁷ Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text*, 11.

²⁸ John MacArthur Jr. and The Master’s Seminary Faculty, *Rediscovering Expository Preaching* (Dallas: Word, 1982), 23–24.

²⁹ Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 30.

³⁰ Mark Dever and Greg Gilbert, *Preach* (Nashville: B&H, 2012), 36.

³¹ Vines and Shaddix, *Power in the Pulpit*, 29.

- D. A. Carson: “At its best, expository preaching is preaching which however dependent it may be for its content, upon text(s) at hand, draws attention to inner-canonical connections (connections within Scripture) that inexorably moves to Jesus Christ.”³²

The *form* of the sermon is the most often disputed part of expository preaching. Are only sermons that move verse by verse through passages to be considered expository? Are only sermons that move through entire books to be considered expository? Can you preach expository sermons by preaching on more than one text so long as those texts are not stripped from their original context? Some have even argued that a sermon is only expository when it is a sermon based on a particular passage longer than a few verses. Consider the following definitions:

- F. B. Meyer: “We are able to define expository preaching as the consecutive treatment of some book or extended portion of Scripture.”³³
- Andrew Blackwood: “Expository preaching means that the light for any sermon comes mainly from a Bible passage longer than two or three consecutive verses.”³⁴
- Harold Bryson: “[Expository preaching] involves the art of preaching a series of sermons either consecutively or selectively from a Bible book.”³⁵

I personally hold that the form of the message is secondary to the *process* of study and *content* of the sermon. Exposition, or Word-centered preaching, may be achieved in various ways. A person may preach a “topositional” sermon, which means the sermon addresses a particular doctrine that requires a verse-with-verse approach. This approach still holds the expositional commitment of seeking the intent of those various authors. I also believe that the preacher may select various themes through a book, such as the “I Am” statements in John. Another way of doing exposition is to overview a book, attempting to cover the major themes of a Bible book in a single

³² D. A. Carson, “The Primacy of Expository Preaching,” Bethlehem Conference for Pastors, 1995, cassette.

³³ F. B. Meyer, *Expository Preaching* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1910; repr., Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2001), 25.

³⁴ Andrew Blackwood, *Expository Preaching Today* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1975), 13.

³⁵ Harold Bryson, *Expository Preaching* (Nashville: B&H, 1995), 39.

sermon. A preacher may also do a series of sermons on a particular theme, where the series is made up of individual texts that relate to that theme, so long as these texts are treated faithfully.

In short, expository preaching is *Word-centered*, *Word-driven*, or *Word-saturated* preaching. It involves explaining what God has said in his Word, declaring what God has done in his Son, and applying this message to the hearts of people. Word-driven expositors are committed to the careful explanation and application of the biblical text.

Even though there is some liberty in the form of the sermon, I believe the best way to grow healthy disciples is by moving verse by verse through books of the Bible—simply allowing the main point of selected passages to drive the main point of your weekly sermon. While there may be times in which a pastor thinks another approach would be helpful for his people, I believe these occasions should not be the norm. Over time I believe the pastor will see the wonderful benefits of systematic exposition. I like to say that moving systematically through books is the diet of our congregation, but occasionally we go out to eat (preaching a *topositional* sermon or a thematic series).

One may also preach expositionally through books of the Bible in other contexts, such as Bible studies, Sunday school, or over coffee with two or three people. When the *Christ-Centered Exposition* commentary series was released, it was encouraging to hear about all the “non-preachers” using it. Moms, dads, small group leaders, youth ministers, military chaplains, and more have reported using these books as they seek to expound God’s Word to a given audience. Let me encourage you to be an expositional student.

My mentor, Jim Shaddix, often used an analogy of a swimming pool to explain the Word-saturated nature of exposition. He said that preachers and teachers generally use the Bible in one of three ways. One approach is that they use the Word as a *diving board*. In this method, the preacher reads the text but never returns to it. Another approach is for the preacher to use the Word as *patio furniture*, occasionally returning to the text. Expository preachers, however, use the Word as the *pool*. They take the listeners for a swim in the biblical text.³⁶ At its most basic level, expository preaching is

³⁶Jim Shaddix is my mentor, friend, and former pastor and professor. I highly recommend his two books, which support much of this book: *The Passion-Driven Sermon* (Nashville: B&H, 2003) and Vines and Shaddix, *Power in the Pulpit*.

preaching in such a way that the listeners get wet with God's Word after the sermon. Their Bibles remain open as the preacher continues to explain and apply the meaning of a particular text or texts. Of course, some sermons are not even in the vicinity of the pool! They have no text, and at this point, the hearers should go elsewhere to look for water.

MORE QUESTIONS ABOUT EXPOSITORY PREACHING

Frequently, three particular questions are raised when I discuss exposition in general and expository preaching in particular. The benefits of exposition, the dangers of exposition, and the alternatives to exposition are always questions of concern and discussion. Both the champions and critics of this approach to preaching should take these questions seriously.

What Are the Benefits of Expository Preaching?

Expository preaching is an approach that is founded on certain theological beliefs, such as the role of the preacher according to Scripture, the nature of the Scriptures, and the work of the Spirit. Therefore, many of the benefits of doing exposition are difficult to measure. However, nine practical and theological benefits are worth noting.

First, exposition calls for attention to biblical doctrine. One has to preach on every doctrinal issue if he preaches the whole counsel of God. This keeps the preacher from only dealing with his favorite subjects, and it will give the hearers theological stability.

Second, exposition, done well, is good for both audiences: believers and unbelievers. If one preaches the Scriptures in view of their redemptive history that culminates in Jesus, then the gospel will be integrated naturally into every sermon. The unbeliever will be confronted with his need for repentance and his need for hope in Christ. On the other hand, exposition will edify the believers in the church and remind them that they do not work for grace but from grace and by grace. So I am a huge fan, and hopefully a practitioner, of gospel-filled exposition. When you preach Christ-centered sermons, you are able to “evangelize as you edify and edify as you evangelize.”³⁷

³⁷Tim Keller, *Center Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 79.

Third, exposition gives authority to the message. Preachers who try to be cutting-edge or fill their sermons with endless stories lose authority. The authority of the sermon is not in the preacher's suggestions, stories, or observations. Authority comes from God's Word.

Fourth, exposition magnifies Scripture. Preachers may claim to believe in the sufficiency of God's Word, but if they do not take people for a swim in the text, they betray their beliefs. You will show your people what you believe about the Bible by how you use it. This is how you magnify the nature of Scripture with something more than repeated clichés.

Fifth, exposition is God centered, not man centered. By starting with God's Word instead of a popular idea or a perceived need, the preacher will expose the nature and truth of the triune God to people—which is their greatest need.

Sixth, exposition provides a wealth of material for preaching. By moving through the Scriptures, you will avoid reductionism; that is, picking only the topics that seem important (money, sex, and power). The Bible will provide you with more subjects to preach on than you ever dreamed. A holistic approach will produce holistic Christians.

Seventh, exposition edifies the person delivering the Word. This is the most enjoyable part of committing to exposition. By studying the text each week, you will be developed as a disciple, and you will continue to fill your soul with spiritual nourishment.

Eighth, exposition ensures the highest level of biblical knowledge for the congregation. By regularly expounding the Word of God, you will train a group of people to know the Scriptures. Further, you will not only remind them of who they are in Christ and how to glorify God, but you will also train them to think biblically. Other types of preaching may put a bandage on people's felt needs, but such will not transform their worldview unless they understand the mind of the Holy Spirit in the Word. Exposition is a primary means of transforming people by the renewal of their minds (Rom 12:2).

Finally, exposition teaches people how to study the Bible on their own. The old saying is true, "Give a man a fish and you will feed him for a day; teach him how to fish and you will feed him for a lifetime." By moving systematically through passages and books, you will teach the people how to engage the text. They will understand the importance of context, words, and biblical genres.

After doing exposition in various places, I have discovered that the people are able to predict my next point, and see how I got it. Expository preaching will produce expository preachers and expository students.

Therefore, the benefits of exposition are numerous. No other approach to preaching seems to provide such advantages. Why would we want to do anything else?

What Are the Dangers of Exposition?

In championing expository preaching, I must point out that there are several dangers to avoid. One problem is *dullness*. The Word needs to pass through us before it passes from us. If we are dull, then it probably means that we have not let the Word do its work in our own hearts first. Another danger related to this one is *irrelevance*. The goal of exposition is not information but personal transformation. The preacher must show how the text has implications for the hearers' lives.

Expositors should also watch out for *monotony*. The preacher should work hard at presenting the Word in fresh ways. Starting the sermon off the same way or using the same types of illustrations becomes predictable and frustrating to the hearer. Creativity and freshness are not bad, especially when they are part of the preacher's personality.

In addition, preachers should watch out for *detail overload*. Sometimes the hardest part of preparing expository sermons is deciding what to leave out. Good expository preaching has one dominant theme. The preacher takes this theme and supports it in order to drill this truth into the minds of the hearers. Simplicity and clarity are especially important to remember if you begin doing exposition in a church that has never heard it before.

Intellectual pride is a deadly shark to avoid as well. It comes in two ways. One way is when the preacher tries to impress the audience with his knowledge of biblical backgrounds and biblical languages. Our role is not to impress people but to present the Word plainly and clearly to them. Pride also creeps in when a preacher dogmatically preaches a difficult text, insisting that his interpretation is the only correct view. My philosophy is to present all of the views on such texts and then state my own view, giving reasons to support it. Balancing authority with humility is often difficult for preachers who cannot distinguish between first-, second-, and

third-tier doctrines. By giving options, you will help people develop a Christian mind and learn to study on their own. You will also build credibility with your hearers as you practice humble exegesis.

The final shark is quite deadly. We must avoid *Christ-less* sermons. Often expositors miss the forest of the Bible (God's redemption in Jesus) for the trees (a particular passage). According to some hermeneutical plans, one could preach through the book of Nehemiah verse by verse yet never mention Jesus—and the sermon would be classified as expository! What is wrong with this method? It has missed the greater context of the whole Bible. Every expositor should try to identify where the selected passage is located in redemptive history. Is it before the cross or after it? I am not proposing that we try to “find Jesus under every rock,” but I do want to contend that despite some discontinuity, the Bible is one Christian book. I am not advocating “extra-Jesus” but faithful exegesis and theological application, which consider both the details of a text and the broad contours of Scripture. D. A. Carson says, “The entire Bible pivots on one weekend in Jerusalem about two thousand years ago.”³⁸ We must remember this as we dive into any passage. In fact, Jesus told the disciples that the Old Testament pointed to himself (Luke 24:25–27, 44–47). No Jewish rabbi should be able to sit comfortably under our preaching from the Old Testament. Expositors should work hard at finding the redemptive connections within the text and make a grace-filled application of it.

What Are Some Alternative Approaches to Expository Preaching?

Preachers today have many alternatives to exposition. *Narrative preaching* is often the method of choice. Certainly, narrative preaching can be done expositively; that is, preaching through narrative texts without imposing an unnecessary rhetorical outline. Preachers may do exposition of narrative texts by simply following the natural parts of the story (i.e., character, plot, conflict, resolution).

Sometimes, however, those who call for narrative preaching do not mean preaching from narrative texts in a story-based way alone. They encourage preachers to tell interesting stories and give moral examples for people to follow. The problem with this type of narrative preaching is that it sometimes does more to fascinate than to change. Keeping people's attention does not mean that anyone

³⁸D. A. Carson, *Scandalous* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 11.

will be changed necessarily. It also is less likely to incite a hunger for God's Word because the sermon is primarily a story.

Many pastors have also embraced the *topical-felt-need* approach in recent years. Pastors using this method often start by doing surveys in order to find out the needs of people then preach messages that deal with these issues. These sermons are extremely practical. The points of the sermon, however, seem like suggestions. Sometimes I wonder if a Mormon, a pop psychologist, or any other moral person would have a difficult time with some of these sermons. Practical tips for daily living may not be explicitly Christian. It is not what people are getting that concerns me but, rather, what they are *not* getting; namely, the gospel and God's revelation.

Recently, the *dialogical* approach to preaching has become popular among the emergent church leaders. That does not mean they have people talk back to them during the sermon. Rather, these advocates believe that we should let everyone participate in the sermon by giving everyone a chance to stand up and speak—with virtually no boundaries. Usually, this approach comes from a rejection of truth and authority.

While dialogue is needed in some contexts (such as small groups), it fails to be true preaching. Further, it invites misguided people into the discussion. What do you do when someone stands up and reads *The Watchtower*? Practically, this method cannot accommodate for large growth either. How do you have a dialogue with two thousand people in attendance? Theologically, there also seems to be a failure to understand how the body of Christ works. The ones who have the gift of teaching and preaching should be doing it. The dialogue idea seems to suggest that church is exclusively for Sundays. People with some spiritual gifts find their context of service elsewhere, like in orphanages, the mission field, and administration.

SUMMATION

Faithful preaching involves saying what God has said in his Word, declaring what God has done in his Son, and applying this message to the hearts of people. Christ-centered exposition is the best approach for accomplishing this goal. This Word-driven ministry offers wonderful spiritual benefits to both the expositor and to the congregation. To be faithful expositors today, we must avoid

the common problems such as boredom, pride, detail overload, irrelevancy, and Christ-less messages. Effective expositors usher the people through the text passionately and authentically, pointing them to the Savior.

QUESTIONS

1. In the opening section, “What Makes a Great Preacher/Teacher?” which ingredient struck you the most and why?
2. Regarding this statement, “Preaching has fallen on hard times because of the antiauthoritarian mood of our day,” how have you seen negativity about preaching expressed?
3. What is preaching? What are some key aspects of effective preaching? How is preaching different from teaching?
4. What are some of the benefits of expository preaching?
5. What are some of the dangers of expository preaching?