

**BUT WE  
PREACH  
CHRIST  
CRUCIFIED**

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*Preachers On Preaching*



**FOR THE CHURCH**  
Gospel-Centered Resources  
from *Midwestern Seminary*  
**FTC.CO**

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# PREFACE

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*Jason K. Allen*

Preaching is the primary task of every pastor and the indispensable ingredient of every healthy church. From the prophets of old to 21st century pastors, God has chosen preaching as His primary means to call out his children and to nourish his people.

Not just any kind of preaching will do, however. Too many churches are subjected to shallow sermons delivered by shallow men. Sermons that are void of Scripture—and the Christ of Scripture—are powerless to save or sanctify. Such undernourished churches need to be fed Christ-centered, Bible-saturated sermons. As this is the case, they will know greater ministry vigor and gospel health.

To this end, Jared Wilson and the For the Church editorial team, have compiled *But We Preach Christ Crucified: Preachers on Preaching*. The chosen theme for this e-book—Preaching—is not accidental or arbitrary. It is convictional. Strong churches enjoy strong pulpits, and, for Midwestern Seminary, to be for the church is to be for the pulpit.

Under Wilson's skillful editorial eye, this collection of essays speaks to most every aspect of sermon preparation and delivery.

It touches on the aspirational and the attitudinal, as well as the textual and theological. The essays are penned by accomplished practitioners, who embody the best of what preaching is to be.

Midwestern Seminary unapologetically gives its best energies to strengthening the preaching and teaching ministries of our students and the churches we serve. *But We Preach Christ Crucified: Preachers on Preaching* is a central expression and resource of that commitment.

May this e-book from Midwestern Seminary and our For the Church team serve to encourage you in your preaching ministry and to strengthen the church of the Lord Jesus Christ.

# INTRODUCTION

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## *Editorial Council, For The Church*

It was not big ideas or big personalities that drove the explosive growth of the early church. No, it was the gospel. The good news of the finished work of Jesus Christ's life, death, and resurrection was set loose in Holy Spiritual power to rescue sinners from the domain of darkness, unite them to Christ through the believer's faith, and secure them for eternity in the kingdom of God. It was this news that the apostles heralded, and it was this news that they quickly recognized was a force from heaven.

And almost as remarkable as the reality that the gospel is itself power is the reality that God has entrusted it to ordinary men as its stewards. Paul declared this whole concept foolishness from top to bottom! That life would come through Christ's cross seems absurd to those who are perishing, to those enslaved to the passions of the flesh. And it is the foolishness of preaching that may set them free to smell the aroma of life in this scandalous message.

The same is true today. The gospel is no less powerful and it is no less preeminent. What the evangelical church needs today are men willing to stake their ministries—as their very lives—on the “foolishness” of the gospel. This is what the lost world needs

too—not essentially spiritual entrepreneurs, “big idea” men, or religious visionaries, but humble men of God full of gospel fire and willing to confront sin and confound worldly wisdom with the biblical proclamation of the glory of Jesus Christ.

In this little booklet, you will find a variety of perspectives on the purpose and practice of preaching. You will find practical application and philosophical ruminations. You will find theology and theory. You will find history probed and humanity bared. But across the board, what you will chiefly find is the steadfast spirit of the gospel preacher who stands with the Apostle Paul when he makes this crucial contrast:

*For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles.*

*(1 Cor. 1:22-23)*

This is what our churches and our ministry contexts and our mission fields need today: preachers who have lashed themselves to the mast of the gospel. Let others have their therapeutic chit-chat and their spiritual ruminations. Some people may find these things pertinent. “But we preach Christ crucified.”

Whether you are a pastor or a lay leader, whatever your ministry in and through the church, I hope you will find this volume on preaching helpful to your mission—but more than that, I hope you will find it helpful to your heart.

## 4 Marks of Faithful

# PREACHING

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**Jason K. Allen**

*I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths. But you, be sober in all things, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry. -- 2 Timothy 4:1-5*

I still remember the first time these verses laid hold of my heart. It was February of 1998, and a few college friends and myself hopped in a little car and drove north from Mobile, Alabama to Birmingham, to the campus of Samford University. John Piper was slated to preach the Conger Lectures there.

I remember walking into the majestic chapel at Beeson Divinity School on the Samford campus, and I just sat there and took it all in. It was a magnificent experience. And then John Piper preached 2 Timothy

4:1-5. I do not know if I had ever heard anyone preach this passage before, but if I had, they had not come to my mind since I had been wrestling with a call to ministry.

And I remember being enraptured, but not so much by the spokesperson — though Piper is of course a powerful preacher — as by the force of these verses that spoke to me that day. There is a sense in which that was the first time I began to understand more clearly what a call to preaching and ministry would mean. It would mean that I would fall in this great line of godly preachers for 2,000 years who have sought to preach The Word. It would mean that I would give my life to a task of preaching not knowing where that would take me, what that context would be, what that ministry would be like. I began to understand more clearly that, for me, saying yes to ministry would be saying yes to preach. It invigorated me, enlivened me, and exhilarated me to begin to see the weighty sense of the calling to preach The Word.

As President of Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, I can say that we aspire to do many things well as an institution, but that which we most urgently aspire to do well is to train a generation of preachers who will preach The Word. It is the irreducible, indispensable task of the ministry to preach and teach The Word. I want you to see what I came to see in this text, four general marks of faithful preaching. The first is quite straightforward:

## **1 PREACH BIBLICALLY**

This exhortation is situated front and center in these five verses and front and center in the book of 2 Timothy as a whole. “Preach biblically.” It is stated plainly in the beginning three words of verse two — “preach The Word” — but it is embedded throughout the entire passage.

The words of Scripture themselves—all of the words—are inspired, and thus inerrant, and thus authoritative for us. So we see throughout this book the setting forth of the primacy of Scripture, the authority of Scripture, and how Timothy’s ministry must be built upon it. If you are not convinced of Scripture and its truthfulness, authority, relevance, and power, you will be disinclined to preach The Word. You may look to it for sermon points because that is what evangelical preachers are told to do, but you will never let The Word be *the* point and points of your sermon. There has to be a correlation between our stated belief in God’s Word and our commitment to preaching it.

I understand the liberal preacher who does not believe the Bible and therefore does not do much preaching from the Bible. I actually “get” that and think it is intellectually consistent. I think it is horrible and ruinous to the church, but at least that person is being intellectually consistent. I do not, however, get the person who states to be an evangelical, who affirms belief in the Bible, but then is careless, negligent, or reluctant to preach it with full-throated force.

I recall an article I read a number of years ago by Milton Friedman, a very famous economist. He taught at the Chicago business school and other places. He wrote an article in the context of the late 1970’s or 80’s when the nation was going through economic stagnation. There was high inflation, high unemployment, low wage growth, and a coalescence of different economic factors that created a climate of misery for many. Friedman said that a nation’s economy could be big and massive, but it can be brought to a standstill by something that is relatively small. He used an automobile analogy. He said, “You can have a \$30,000 car, but if the \$30 battery is dead, not only will it not function properly, it will not function at all. It will not move or seek to turn over if the battery is dead.”

In this analogy, Friedman said that it is sort of like a nation's economy. You can have a massive economy, but if one relatively small element is missing, it will bring great challenge to the whole project. I think this is quite analogous to a lot of preaching that passes for Christian today. I hear a lot of sermons that have \$30,000 homiletical polish, are full of \$30,000 illustrations and \$30,000 presentation skills, but if there's only \$30 worth of biblical text in it—or none!—it doesn't matter. That sermon itself is lifeless and dead.

## 2 PREACH AUTHORITATIVELY

The idea of the sermon being an authoritative act is contained first and foremost in the word *preach* itself. To preach is to herald, to proclaim. I would argue that any true sermon, any true act of preaching is to be an authoritative act. By this, I don't mean that the pastor is "pulling rank" on a church; rather, he is speaking boldly from a prophetic authority grounded in the authority of Scripture. Preaching is not to get up and subtly back into a few recommendations derived from the Bible. Preaching is to get up and to speak authoritatively to that which the Bible speaks authoritatively. It is to transmit an authoritative message. Paul says, "Be ready in season and out of season." In other words, regardless of the receptivity or lack of receptivity of your culture, context, or those who hear you, preach The Word. But I think he is also saying to preach the word whether or not it is in season or out of season *with your own life*. There are times when perhaps personal discouragement, personal fatigue, personal embarrassment of a passage or particular truth claim, or some other distressing dynamic may make a preacher less inclined to speak the word forcefully, but again, Paul charges us to preach according to the grain of the Scriptures. If they are forceful, we are to be forceful. Who are we to round edges that God has made straight?

Notice that he says preaching the word can look like reproving, rebuking, and exhorting. *To reprove* is a negative corrective word. It is the same word that shows up in verse 16 where Paul says, “Scripture is given to us by God and is profitable for teaching and for reproof.” It carries the idea of challenging errant thinking and false doctrine. It is not only to reprove, but also to rebuke. That is a reference to the heart, I think. It is bringing a person under the conviction of sin. We are to speak the Scripture with such clarity and force that we are challenging the thinking and life of our people. That is authoritative preaching—reproving, rebuking and exhorting. It is to come alongside and encourage.

But here is where it takes some extra effort on the part of preachers, *especially* those of us who say we are most committed to expository, verse-by-verse preaching. If we are not careful, our sermons can begin to sound like a rambling commentary on the Bible. Our preaching has to be more than a verse-by-verse commentary. Yes, preaching explains the text and should explain it clearly, cogently, and directly. But it is not only to explain a meaning and leave it hanging out there. It is to explain a meaning and to bring it to bear in the lives of our hearers. It is to actually bring it home, to bring it near to us, and to let it shape our lives and actions. You see, you can be up to your eyeballs in Bible studies and biblical content, but if you do not bring it to bear, that shows a stunning lack of courage in the pulpit. Great preaching has a way of moving from the third person, and even the third person plural to the second person. It is appropriate at times to get from the “they” and the “we” to the “you.” That is what preaching is to do.

### 3 PREACH PASTORALLY

“Reprove, rebuke and exhort,” Paul instructs, but notice *how* at the end

of verse two: "...with great patience and instruction." Verse 3 says, "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accord with their own desires. They will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths."

Again, sandwiched around verse 2 and verse 1 is this statement of the neediness of the church and the decadence of the culture. The people need authoritative, bold, direct preaching. But notice the corrective is not merely one of bold and authoritative preaching; it is to come from a shepherd's heart. Paul is saying here that the antidote to both immature Christianity and hedonistic worldliness is not merely to scorch the ears of our hearers. The antidote is to preach the word forcefully as one broken heart to another, as one bleeding heart to another. It is to preach *pastorally*.

Consider 2 Timothy 2:24-26 where Paul writes:

*The Lord's bondservant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of truth, and they may more to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will.*

Here is the reality: if God has entrusted you to a flock, they are not your enemy; they are your people. Though they may be obstinate and difficult at times, they still are not your adversary; they are your

church. You are to preach boldly, yes, but preach pastorally as you do.

Preach pastorally with an affection for your people. Moreover, preach thinking about your people specifically. Ask yourself, “How will this sermon apply to the 80-year-old widow? How will it encourage the college student struggling with grades? How will it encourage the single mother with three young children trying to make ends meet? What does this have to say to the middle-age man just diagnosed with cancer? What does it have to say to the married couple whose marriage is in turbulent times?” Preach with a heart for your church. Preach pastorally.

4

#### PREACH PERSISTENTLY

Verse 3 says,

*“For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires.”*

Regardless of how a particular church identifies its pastor, however that fellow is hired, we are reminded here of the reality that the church bears responsibility for who they bring to be their minister. A bad church, one that is not sound in doctrine and one that is wanting to have its ears tickled, will get someone who will do just that. The propensity of such a church is to turn away their ears from the truth, to turn aside to myths. “But you, be sober in all things, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist.” And especially consider verse 5, “You fulfill your ministry.”

Ministers of God, please understand that preaching is not merely a season of your life that you do for a paycheck; it is *who you are*. It is in your DNA; God has made you for this. You may have different ministry stations and seasons of life. You may even retire vocationally in a sense, but there is also a sense in which as long as you breathe, you are a preacher. You are to preach in such a way that you fulfill your ministry. This takes sobriety and an alertness to the needs of the people of God. It takes a willingness to endure hardship, to conduct that ministry, in a way, as an evangelist. Then, the final 3 words say to “fulfill your ministry,” in season or out, in joyful receptivity or not. In the light of chapter three and the great decadence of humanity and the needs of the church, and especially in light of the power of Scripture, your call is to preach the word and your call is to keep preaching the word.

During the early season of our dating and newly married life, my wife Karen and I got to know Stephen and Heather Olford. We were in our early twenties and they were in their early eighties, and they were very kind to us. We got to go see them on a couple of occasions in Memphis, and Dr. Olford took a very kind interest in me. Dr. Olford died at the age of 86, and he literally preached and ministered until he died. I remember one time he said, “Jason, a lot of people look at me and think I should be living in Florida playing shuffle board, but my Master has not called me to do that. He has called me to be faithful until the end.”

Recognizing, again, that there are different seasons of life and different ministry stations, preachers are to understand that God has set them apart. Knowing this should not induce swagger; it should induce submission. God has set us apart as gospel preachers to preach the word. We best be about that work as long as he gives us the capability to do so.

Brothers, preach the word. Martyn Lloyd-Jones was right: the highest and most glorious calling known to man is the call to be a preacher. And if he has called you to preach, never stoop to do anything else.

# *We Need Fools in* **THE PULPIT**

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***David Prince***

Following Jesus' example and teaching, the apostles interpreted the meaning, significance, and application of the entire Bible in light of Jesus' person and work. Their preaching was the preeminent display of this hermeneutical commitment. When the apostle Paul declared, "For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified," he was not suggesting that the cross of Christ was the only thought that ever entered his mind, nor was he saying that he simply tacked on some commentary about Jesus' death to every dialogue (1 Cor. 2:2). Paul was contending that the power and wisdom of God on display in the cross and resurrection of Christ served as the only proper frame of reference for every single thought.

In his *The Cross and Christian Ministry*, D.A. Carson explains,

*"[Paul] cannot long talk about Christian joy, or Christian ethics, or Christian fellowship, or the Christian doctrine of God, or anything else, without finally tying it to the cross. Paul is gospel-centered; he is cross-centered" (38).*

It was Paul's commitment to preaching Christ crucified that was considered foolish by the sophists and those in the church at Corinth who were influenced by them to prize intellectual sophistication and rhetorical eloquence above all.

Paul is not commending a nuanced suggestion about one possible style of Christian preaching. Rather, he is commending a Christ-centered mindset and lifestyle that should drive every aspect of a pastor's life and pulpit ministry. Paul notes that he did not preach "with lofty speech or wisdom" or "in plausible words of wisdom"; instead, he came to them "in weakness and in fear and much trembling" (1 Cor. 2:1-4). He sought to distance his preaching ministry, not from oratorical skill, but from the sophist rhetorical pomp, which considered a bloody crucified Messiah to be scandalous and moronic ("but we preach Christ crucified, a skandalon to Jews and morian to Gentiles" 1 Cor. 1:23). Teachers influenced by the sophists thought they were too enlightened and sophisticated for such a crude and grotesque message. They sought to accommodate the spirit of the age as they provided positive and inspiring messages about virtuous and successful living. Paul, they contended, was a foolish backwoods preacher.

David E. Garland observes, "Paul's reminiscence that he resolved to know nothing among them except Jesus Christ, and him crucified, does not promote anti-intellectualism but explains his *modus operandi*" (1 Corinthians, Baker Exegetical Commentary, 84). Paul was a gifted rhetorician and logician whom listening crowds identified as Hermes, the Greek god of communication, "because he was the chief speaker" (Acts 14:12). Though a man named Eutychus is recorded as having fallen asleep during Paul's preaching, the point of the account is Eutychus' resurrection and not that Paul was a boring preacher. The fact listeners were still there "until midnight" provides an argument for

Paul's eloquence and not a case against it (Acts 20:7-9).

Paul avoided that form of rhetorical eloquence that would minimize the content and centrality of the gospel because Christ crucified was considered a message of folly in the world (1 Cor. 1:18). When Paul's opponents said, "his bodily presence is weak, and his speech of no account," (2 Cor. 10:10) they were responding to his appearance and content of his direct, cross-centered message rather than to the skill of his preaching. The cruciform wisdom of power through weakness proclaimed by Paul was a repudiation of the wisdom and spirit of the age and was utterly despised. In crucifixion, a person was lifted up as a parody, a mocking kingship and exaltation (Mark 15:17-32). The resurrection of the crucified Christ mocks their mockery of Jesus. The one parodied as Messiah is Messiah. Paul was perfectly content to be called an unsophisticated fool for Christ's sake (1 Cor. 4:10) because the only way to avoid the charge would be to downplay the centrality of Christ crucified.

Paul was a student of the Scriptures long before he encountered Jesus on the Damascus road (Acts 9:3). He grew up in Jerusalem and was trained in the Scriptures by Gamaliel, a leading rabbi, achieving a reputation as an excellent student (Acts 22:3, Gal 1:14). Paul would have had vast amounts of the Old Testament committed to memory. His study of the Scripture had led him to follow in the footsteps of his father as a Pharisee, one who oversaw the incarceration and execution of Christians (Acts 23:6, 26:9-11; Phil 3:5). What changed in Paul's understanding of Scripture to cause him to move from being a persecutor of Christians to one who declared, "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain" (Phil 1:21)?

He adopted a new hermeneutic—a Christocentric hermeneutic. The respectability Paul had known as an educated and sophisticated religious man from a good family went away the moment he began to interpret

Scripture and life through the bloody lens of Christ crucified.

This new hermeneutic came as a result of the saving grace of God in his encounter with Christ on the way to Damascus. His faith in Jesus of Nazareth as the resurrected Messiah meant that if he had continued to interpret Old Testament without reference to Jesus, he would have been in rebellion (See Rom. 4, Gal. 3, 1 Cor. 10:1-13, and 2 Cor. 3:7-18).

As Craig G. Bartholomew and Michael W. Goheen write in *The Drama of Scripture*, “The newborn Christian and former Pharisee must rethink all he thought he knew. And this is Paul’s starting point: the kingdom of God, ‘the age to come,’ has arrived [in Christ]” (188). And David Dockery reminds readers:

*He was, however, well schooled in the rabbinic tradition of the Old Testament interpretation; yet he had been confronted by the exalted Lord himself, and that encounter brought about a change in his view of the Old Testament. Now he viewed the Scriptures from a pattern of redemptive history grounded in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth.”*  
(*Biblical Interpretation Then and Now*, 41).

A sophisticated church is a contradiction in terms. We are the non-nobles of a crucified Messiah (1 Cor. 1:18-2:5). The same choice Paul faced is before every preacher today. Are you willing to be a fool for Christ’s sake? Charles Haddon Spurgeon’s simple gospel sermons were called “Redolent of bad taste, vulgar, and theatrical” by the sophisticated religious elites of his day. He responded,

*“I am perhaps vulgar, but it is not intentional, save that I must and will make the people listen. My firm conviction is that we have had quite enough polite preachers, and many require a change. God has owned me among the most degraded and off-casts. Let others serve their class; these are mine, and to them I must keep.”*

We can be recognized as sophisticated and culturally enlightened, or we can determine to know nothing among anyone but Christ and him crucified—we cannot do both.

*How to Make Jesus the Hero of Every*

# SERMON

---

***Andrew Hebert***

*“I take my text and make a bee-line to the cross.”*

*- Charles Spurgeon*

My entire approach to preaching was revolutionized about three years ago when I read Tony Merida’s short book entitled *Proclaiming Jesus: Christ-centered Teaching and Preaching*. I couldn’t escape Merida’s challenge “to make the hero of the Bible (Jesus), the hero of every message you prepare.”

## **1 JESUS MUST BE THE HERO OF EVERY SERMON.**

This insight started a journey for me in which I began reading everything I could get my hands on to find out what Christ-centered preaching looked like. Of the many books I read and sermons I heard, it was a children’s book of all things that really demonstrated what it looked like to point people to Jesus in every message. I started reading Sally Lloyd-Jones’ *The Jesus Storybook Bible* to my children during our devotional time. In the process, it began to nourish my

soul as I saw Christ-centered Biblical interpretation modeled.

Knowing it needs to be done and seeing it modeled are necessary but not sufficient. The question I had yet to answer was, how do I do this myself? I mean, practically speaking, what does it look like to preach a text and point people to Jesus while faithfully handling the authorial intent of the text itself? Part of the answer, I discovered, was realizing that the intent of the Divine Author is that every text points to Jesus. Therefore, there is not a dichotomy between discovering the original intent of the text and the Christocentric focus of the text – those two tasks are one and the same. That is, the road of true Biblical exegesis will always arrive at the destination of a Jesus-centered sermon. There's a sense in which we read the Bible left to right. There's another sense in which we read it right to left.

So how do we get there? In my sermon preparation process, I have found several questions to be helpful in discovering the Christ-focus of every text:

## **2** WHERE DOES THIS PASSAGE FIT IN REDEMPTIVE HISTORY?

There is an overarching story in Scripture: Creation, Rebellion, Rescue, and Restoration. As a loving Ruler, God *created* all things for His glory and our good. Mankind *rebelled* against God's rule, incurring His rightful judgment. God, in love, sent Jesus to *rescue* His broken creation by dying to receive the penalty of God's judgment for sinful humans in our place on the cross. By rising from the dead, Jesus began the *restoration* of all things, which ultimately will be consummated in His return and the inauguration of the New Heavens and New Earth.

As you approach any text, ask, “Where on the timeline of the story does this passage occur?” If you are dealing with the giving of the law in Exodus, you will need to explain how God’s people were to live under His rule during that period of redemptive history. Then, take your people to a passage like Hebrews 12 where Sinai and Zion are contrasted and teach your people how we are in a different period of redemptive history and relate to God differently because of Christ’s work on the cross.

### **3 IS THERE A POINT OF COMPARISON OR CONTRAST?**

If you come to a character in the text, you can ask, “How is this person similar or dissimilar to Jesus?” As you walk through the Old Testament, there are many hero-figures, but they are all flawed in some way. In that sense, they all point us to Jesus. Moses is like Jesus in some ways, but Jesus is a greater Moses. David is like Jesus in some ways, but Jesus is a greater David.

If you are preaching the Song of Solomon, there are clear comparisons to Christ throughout the text. A king invites an unworthy woman to come from outside in the field to dine with him in the house under a banner of acceptance and love. There are clear comparisons between Solomon and Jesus. There are also clear contrasts. Solomon was a very flawed “hero.” Jesus is better than Solomon. As you preach, show your people the points of comparison and contrast between the “heroes” and the “Hero.”

### **4 IS THERE AN EXPLICIT OR IMPLICIT REFERENCE TO CHRIST IN THE TEXT?**

Sometimes the easiest way to develop a Christ-centered sermon

is when there is an explicit reference to Christ in the text. For instance, Psalm 2 is a Messianic psalm with clear reference points to Jesus in the New Testament. The early church quoted Psalm 2 explicitly in Acts 4:25-28 in reference to Jesus. If the earliest believers interpreted Psalm 2 Christo-centrally, we are not being faithful to the text if we don't mention Jesus when teaching Psalm 2.

There are many Old Testament quotations and allusions in the New Testament. If the New Testament quotes an Old Testament passage in relation to Jesus (right to left), we must teach that Old Testament text with Christ as the focus (left to right).

### **IS THERE A TYPE OR FORESHADOWING IN THE TEXT?**

5

Typology can be very tricky. The danger is in overanalyzing or seeing types everywhere in the Old Testament, or in allegorizing the Old Testament. Yet, there are many legitimate pictures in the Old Testament that foreshadow Christ. Some of these are explicitly drawn out in the New Testament, such as the contrast between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant in Hebrews 9-10. The author of Hebrews refers to the “shadow” in the Old Covenant and the “realities” that are in the New Covenant.

Here are some other types in Scripture:

Many Old Testament people and events foreshadow what Jesus would eventually do. Making Jesus the hero of every sermon means that we have to train ourselves to see how the Divine Author of Scripture was pointing to Christ throughout the canon. Just like the prisoners in Plato's analogy of the cave could only see the murky shadows on the wall, sometimes it is difficult to see Christ.

*The Ark, a rescue ship that saves a few in the midst of the storm of God's judgment, foreshadows Christ who shields us from God's wrath.*

*The Passover, where God passes over His people whose homes are marked by the blood of a sacrificial lamb, foreshadows Christ who would shed His blood so that God's judgment would pass over those who are hidden in Christ.*

*The Exodus, where God delivers His people from bondage to Egypt by the hand of a deliverer, foreshadows a new Exodus, where God delivers His people from bondage to sin by the hand of the Deliverer who rescues us from the kingdom of darkness and transfers us to another kingdom.*

But if we can turn around and see the flames, we can glimpse the reality that the shadows merely reflect.

**6**

**IS THERE A PROMISE FULFILLED?**

One way of reading the Bible is by seeing a repeated pattern of promise/fulfillment. Not to oversimplify it, but you might even think about the Old Testament as one big promise and the New Testament as one big fulfillment.

There are many promises God makes to His people in the Old Testament that are fulfilled in Christ. Here are some examples:

*God promised the serpent in the garden that a descendant of Eve would one day crush his head, even though the serpent would bruise His heel (Genesis 3:15).*

*God promised Abraham that in his seed all the nations would be blessed (Genesis 12:1-3; 22:15-18).*

*God promised David that one of his descendants would rule on the throne forever (2 Samuel 7:13).*

**Who fulfilled these promises? Jesus!**

*God's People Need a Pastor, Not Just a*

# PREACHER

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*Daniel Darling*

“You need to know your people and they need to see you as their pastor. It’s important.”

Bill said this to me on the weekend before I was installed as pastor. Bill was in his late seventies at the time. I was not yet thirty. “Everyone today says that visits are a thing of the past, but I’m telling you that they are important.”

Like most young leaders, I didn’t realize how important Bills’ words were until I was well into my pastorate. His advice—know your people—was the most valuable advice I received. I think it’s advice that, unfortunately, a lot of young leaders don’t understand.

I’m realizing this even more now that I’m not a pastor. For the first time in decades, I’m not part of a pastoral team, not preaching or setting up the service on Sunday. I’m simply attending church with my family. It’s amazing what this perspective is doing for my view of the pastorate.

People come weary and broken into the doors of church on Sunday. They need to hear a word from the Lord. Yes, they often need to be challenged, stretched, exhorted, and rebuked. But if all they ever hear is that they don't love Jesus enough, aren't making disciples fast enough and with enough urgency, aren't praying enough and are sinning too much—if this is all the people hear every single week—they will be crushed.

As much as God's people need a preacher, they need a pastor. And if you are going to be a pastor, you have to be a shepherd. You must ascend to the pulpit with the weight of their burdens and their brokenness on your shoulders.

There are a lot of good preachers today, men who faithfully declare what God has already said about Himself. But there are far fewer pastors. Men who are living in faithful and broken gospel community with their people.

I'm not the expert on pastoral ministry, but I have found these to be four practical ways to faithfully shepherd our people:

**1 OUR PREACHING SHOULD REFLECT THE SCRIPTURE'S BALANCED SPIRITUAL DIET.**

If you have preached for any length of time and have not spent time in the Psalms or Lamentations or Jeremiah or Job, you should start soon. Why? We need to teach our people how to properly lament.

Guys like me who love theology and are passionate about discipleship and missions can tend to be ranchers instead of shepherds. This is especially true if you are leading a revitalization project, trying to

push people to think beyond their stuffy traditionalism and invigorate them to live on mission. But we can quickly forget that broken people are sitting in our pews. It's a good idea, when preparing our messages for Sunday, to ask ourselves:

The woman who just had a miscarriage but hasn't told anyone about it—will she hear of the Great Comforter of souls this morning? The guy who lost his job but is too ashamed to tell anyone—will he be reminded that his worth is not defined by a few lines on his resume but by his identity as a blood-bought child of Christ? The pimply and overweight teenage girl—will she find a Jesus who can release her from the bondage of her insecurity? Will she find a friend in the Savior that she cannot find anywhere else in her life?

## **2** SPEND TIME WITH YOUR PEOPLE.

There is a temptation to isolation for pastors who labor long and hard to craft substantive, weighty, gospel-rich sermons. We can get so cloistered in our study with our books that we stay removed from the people we are called to serve. While it is important to have structured and jealously guarded time for study, it's equally important—for our preaching—to live among our people. If we have not spent precious time with our people, hearing their struggles, listening to their concerns, understanding their day-to-day work lives—we've failed. We've become producers of biblical content—preachers but not shepherds.

Of course every church and every pastor structures this a bit differently. There is wisdom in having leaders with different roles, some to do the administrative work, some to do counseling work, some to do teaching work. And yet we should not so organize our

churches that we isolate the main pastor/teacher from the people. On Sundays, people will fill the auditorium and hear an inspirational speaker, perhaps a good preacher, but they will not hear the voice of someone they consider their pastor. The preaching will be harsh, impersonal, and vague.

So go out for coffee with your people. Have them for dinner. Visit them at their workplace. Email them, call them, text them. Know what is going on, at least in some sense, in their daily lives. Cry with them, laugh with them, plan with them. When you do this, I promise you, it will change the way you preach.

**3**

**KEEP THE PEOPLE'S HURT IN FRONT OF YOU.**

People come to church, most Sundays, needing hope. Not Joel Osteen hope, but the hope of the Savior who leads them like a shepherd through the valley of the shadow of death. Perhaps I feel this more now than I ever have, as a member of a church who needs refreshment on Sunday. I recently heard Mike Glenn, senior pastor of Brentwood Baptist Church, say on a podcast, "People use up all their faith just getting in the door on Sunday."

One of the things I tried to do in my pastorate was to reflect, in my pastoral prayer, the brokenness of the people before me. Regardless of my text, I would always begin our service with a prayer that went something like this, "Father, be with those who come today, broken and bloodied, in deep sorrow over things only you know about. Help them to find refuge and comfort in their Great Shepherd. Help us to see how these trials of life are shaping us into your Son's image." To hear their pastor express solidarity in prayer, before the Heavenly Father, is a gift you can give to your people every single week. Do this and

then when you push them toward more faithfulness, they will know that they are being provoked to love and good works by someone who genuinely loves them, not just someone who is preaching at them.

**4 SHAPE YOUR WORSHIP SERVICE TO REFLECT THE DIVERSITY OF SPIRITUAL EMOTIONS.**

Much of our worship music is music of triumph in the victory of Christ over sin and death. And this is how it should be. When we gather on Sunday, we gather to declare that Christ is the sovereign King and is to be worshipped and adored and praised. But it seems that there is often no room for lament in our services. Every song is upbeat. Every song is a celebration.

We would do well to include some somber, sober songs in our worship sets. After all, what would the Scriptures be without the Psalms, where David laments and cries out to the Lord? Or Jeremiah, the weeping prophet? Even Paul, who often was vivid in describing his trials. Jesus wept at the passing of Lazarus.

We live in a fallen, broken world. Our worship needs to reflect the wide range of human emotions and a sensitivity to people's needs—laughing and weeping, sad but not despairing, sorrowful and yet rejoicing.

*Preparing My Soul to*

# TO PREACH

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*Nathan Rose*

Discouragement. That feeling you get immediately after delivering a sermon you spent all week preparing. If it's not there Sunday afternoon, just wait. It'll be waiting for you on Monday morning.

So how does a pastor prevent the discouragement that too often follows him on his descent from the pulpit? I believe it is prevented through better preparation. I don't mean that we should spend more time preparing our sermons, though that may be the case. I mean we need to spend time preparing ourselves. I've found that preparing my soul to preach can stave off discouragement in several ways. Below are a couple steps I take to ensure my soul is ready to preach Sunday's sermon.

## **1** REMIND MYSELF OF THE GOSPEL

I don't know about other preachers, but I have a sinful tendency to equate my significance with my ability to preach. This is one reason why I need to remind myself of the gospel on Sunday morning. When I rehearse the gospel, I remember that my worth is

not found in my performance, but in the performance of Another.

My heart desperately seeks the acceptance and approval of others, especially my audience, but in the gospel I find something greater: the approval of a holy, glorious, and mighty God. I know that because of Jesus' perfect life, sacrificial death, and victorious resurrection I have God's unwavering love and blessing. Once I am reminded of this, it is difficult for critical comments and discouraging thoughts to linger in my heart and mind.

Reminding myself of the gospel also warms my cold heart, giving me a passion to preach God's Word and tell of his glory and marvelous grace.

## **2** RECOGNIZE MY DEPENDENCE ON GOD

It is easy to fall into the trap of thinking that a sermon is merely an intellectual exercise. Success in the pulpit cannot be reduced to merely the exchange of biblical information, polished verbiage, and captivating illustrations. Sermons are successful when they are fruitful. And only God can produce spiritual fruit. As the Apostle Paul wrote, *"I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth."* (1 Cor. 3:6)

This reality forces me to pray and plead with God to work through my sermon because I know that if God does not act, then his people will not be transformed into the likeness of his Son. Even when my sermons aren't as good as I would like, I know that God is powerful enough to effect change in our souls. Recognizing this forces me to focus less on me and more on him, and this in turn helps ward off discouragement.

In addition to extemporaneous prayers, I have been using a written prayer from the collection of Puritan prayers *The Valley of Vision* entitled “A Minister’s Preaching.” I use this as a prayer guide about 15 minutes before corporate worship begins. Here are a few excerpts from it:

*“My Master God,  
I am desired to preach today, but go weak and needy to my task...Give me assistance in preaching and prayer, with heart uplifted for grace and unction...Keep me conscious all the while of my defects, and let me not gloat in pride over my performance...Attend with power the truth preached, and awaken the attention of my slothful audience...And help me not to treat excellent matter in a defective way, or bear a broken testimony so worthy a Redeemer, or be harsh in treating of Christ’s death, its design and end, from lack of warmth and fervency.”[1]*

My Sunday morning routine includes several cups of coffee and more than a few reviews of my sermon notes. However, my primary goal is to influence the posture of my heart. I want to be able to say, along with John the Baptist, “He must increase, but I must decrease” (John 3:30). I need to be reminded that preaching, just like life, is much more about Christ than it is about me. And once I have adopted that mindset, my soul is prepared to preach.

<sup>1</sup> Arthur G. Bennett, *Valley of Vision (leather): a Collection of Puritan Prayers and Devotions*, Deluxe ed. (Charlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 2003), 348-49.

*How Your Preaching Might Be Increasing*

# SIN IN YOUR CHURCH

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**Jared C. Wilson**

*For what the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the flesh, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering . . .*

*– Romans 8:3*

I will tread lightly here, but I fear we vastly underestimate the spiritual damage inflicted on our churches by “How To” sermons without an explicit gospel connection. The Bible is full of practical exhortations and commands, of course, but they are always connected to the foundational and empowering truth of the finished work of Christ. When we preach a message like “Six Steps to \_\_\_\_\_” or any other “be a better whatever”-type message—where the essential proclamation is not what Christ has done but what we ought/need to do—we become preachers of the law rather than Christ. (And it is not rare that this

kind of message with barely any or no mention of Christ at all gets preached.)

But is it just merely unfortunate? Something that could be improved but not really that big of a deal?

I think the Scriptures show us that this kind of preaching isn't just off-center, but actually does great harm, actually serves to accomplish the very opposite of its intention. How?

**1 PREACHING EVEN A "POSITIVE" PRACTICAL MESSAGE WITH NO GOSPEL-CENTRALITY AMOUNTS TO PREACHING THE LAW.**

We are accustomed to thinking of legalistic preaching as that which is full of "thou shalt not"s, the kind of fundamentalist hellfire and brimstone judgmentalism we've nearly all rejected. But "do" is just the flipside to the same coin "don't" is on. That coin is the law. And a list of "do"s divorced from the DONE of the gospel is just as legalistic, even if it's preached by a guy in jeans with wax in his hair following up the rockin' set by your worship band.

**2 THE MESSAGE OF THE LAW UNACCOMPANIED BY AND UNTETHERED FROM THE CENTRAL MESSAGE OF THE GOSPEL CONDEMNS US.**

Because besides telling us stuff to do, the law also thereby reveals our utter inability to measure up.

**3 THEREFORE, A STEADY DOSE OF GOSPEL-DEFICIENT PRACTICAL PREACHING DOESN'T MAKE CHRISTIANS MORE EMPOWERED, MORE EFFECTIVE, BUT MORE DISCOURAGED, LESS EMPOWERED.**

This is because the law has no power in itself to fulfill its expectations. The only thing the Bible calls power for the Christian is the grace of Christ in the gospel.

But it gets more serious than that.

**4 THE BIBLE GOES FURTHER TO SUGGEST, ACTUALLY, THAT WITHOUT THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST'S FINISHED WORK, THE PREACHING OF THE LAW OF WORKS SERVES TO EXACERBATE DISOBEDIENCE.**

See Romans 5:20 and Romans 7, for this consideration. The law arouses passions eventually against itself or against its referent. In other words, without the saving power of the gospel, we go one of two ways in having the law preached to us: we end up being pushed to disobey (whether from anger at its judgment or discouragement from inability to keep it) or we end up thinking ourselves righteous apart from the righteousness the law really points to, that of Christ.

**5 THE LAW BRINGS DEATH (ROMANS 7:10).**

So the preaching of practical, relevant, applicational “do” messages aimed at producing victorious Christians is fundamentally a preaching of condemnation. It is the proclamation of grace, counter-intuitive though it seems and oddly enough, that trains us to obey God (Titus 2:11-12).

**6 THE PREACHING OF CHRISTLESS, GOSPEL-DEFICIENT PRACTICAL SERMONS INCREASES SELF-RIGHTEOUSNESS.**

Because it is not focused on Christ's work but our works. Christ-implicit, gospel-deficient practical sermons do not make empowered, victorious Christians, but self-righteous self-sovereigns. And the self-righteous go to hell.

Again, I do want to tread lightly. But the stakes are high. And I think they are higher than we tend to think.

Brothers, let us preach the practical implications and exhortations of Scripture, yes. But let us not forget that the message of Christianity is *Christ*. It is the message of the sufficiency and power of salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. Let's not preach works, lest we increase the sinfulness of our churches and unwittingly facilitate the condemnation of the lost. The gospel of Jesus Christ is of first importance (1 Cor. 15:3).

*For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.*

*-- 1 Corinthians 2:2*

*Preaching*

# SANCTIFICATION

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*Nick Floyd*

When I was a kid, I always enjoyed going to the playground and playing on the seesaw. If you're not familiar with this childhood joy, a seesaw is essentially a flat board with a handle on each side connected to something that makes it go up and down. You get on one end while your friend gets on the other. Up and down, up and down, and so on. Now all ten-year-old boys have done the same thing at some point. You wait until your friend is up in the air, you jump off, and your friend slams to the ground in pain. What happened? The seesaw got out of balance and it caused a crash.

In every sermon, there are two basic components that keep us balanced in preaching sanctification. These two are guided by an overall understanding of sanctification. Sanctification is closing the gap between your identity and your behavior. When our behavior lines up with our identity, we look more and more like Jesus. In many churches, the sermons usually lean to one end, resulting in a spiritual crash for people in pursuit of becoming more like Jesus.

We need look no further than Paul's word to the Ephesian church. It is a beautiful picture of both components as he is pushing these Ephesian believers towards Christlikeness. In the first three chapters,

Paul speaks in deep, rich theological language that powerfully exhibits the identity of the believer. In the last three chapters, he deals very specifically on matters of their behavior and what it practically looks like to follow Jesus. Paul's preaching gave a healthy perspective of what sanctification looks like.

Many times we have a tendency to only give the identity side of following Jesus. Pastors are usually people who have been to seminary, studied the Bible, and understand the absolute importance of embracing your identity in Christ. So, we preach the identity of the believer. The danger in only preaching on our identity is that it could easily produce a big head but a cold heart. We may be able to learn a lot in a sermon on Sunday but how is this affecting Monday?

The danger in only preaching on behavior is that we easily slide into a moralistic gospel. This gospel believes if I can continue to improve myself, then God will continue to love me. This type of preaching doesn't produce cold hearts, but usually tired hearts. Preaching behavior without identity is a hopeless endeavor that leaves the people of God exhausted.

What we need is both. Preaching sanctification biblically means that we lift high the identity of the believer and the change that Christ has produced. Preaching sanctification also means that we lift high the call of Jesus to deny ourselves and follow Him in every aspect of our behavior. When both are preached faithfully from the Scriptures, we exude that we are serving Christ from our identity, not for our identity. We clearly proclaim that because Jesus has changed the very core of who we are, begin to follow Him in every area of our life. Preaching the balance produces for the people of God a clear path towards Christlikeness. May our goal be to produce a congregation full of hot

hearts ready to change the world for God who completely rest in the work of Christ.

*Preaching When*

# **DISTRESSED**

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*Adam McClendon*

How do we continue to faithfully preach and teach God's word when our hearts are heavy?

Distractions of all forms hit pastors. These distractions are circumstances that burden the pastor's heart to such an extent that it threatens their ability to properly prepare for preaching the Bible faithfully.

Recently my mother exhibited extreme paranoia to the extent that I had to go through a process of getting her diagnosed with a mental illness against her will and placed in a mental hospital for a season. It is one of the hardest things I've ever had to do. My wife and I were informed by her nurse that we will have to deal with her illness the rest of her life. My mother is angry, hurt, feels betrayed, and doesn't understand or believe that anything is truly wrong. As a result, we are dealing with the fallout of this horrible situation almost daily with hours of phone calls, ceaseless prayers, and a heartache that's hard to put into words. I'm distracted daily to an extent that, if I'm not careful, the ministry to which God has called me may be in jeopardy.

Whether it's a child's death, marriage issue, betrayal of a confidence, medical diagnosis, pastoral friend who falls morally, or the general winter blues, every leader faces distressed moments in ministry. So, how can we prepare and preach faithfully in the midst of such moments. Here are five helpful recommendations.

**1 PROTECT STUDY TIME:**

Whatever your the schedule is for studying the Bible and preparing preaching material, protect that time relentlessly. Additionally, cushion that time, since as a result of the heavy heart, it often takes longer to get clarity on the text and prepare messages.

**2 REMOVE DISTRACTIONS:**

Remove anything that can serve as a potential distraction during study and preparation time. In distressed seasons, the mind has a more difficult time concentrating. Turn off phones, remove ticking clocks, and turn off email. When the heart is constantly heavy, it's okay to be distracted at other times through a movie or game, but watch out for those distractions when it comes time to prepare. It may even be helpful to go off site or change study venues.

**3 FIGHT FOR THE TEXT:**

Be careful not to allow the present emotions to spill over and color the text being studied. The text carries its own content. It is important to allow ample study time to clear the mind from its current issue and then to absorb and to relay the meaning of the text.

**4 SPEND TIME IN THE PSALMS:**

Do not neglect personal devotions. Personal time in the word and in prayer is essential. Personally, I always recommend praying through a Psalm daily, because the Psalms present a range of emotions while

directing me to God.

**5 WATCH DIET, SLEEP, & EXERCISE:**

Poor eating, sleeping, and exercise habits will impact the body, mind, and soul. Human beings are multifaceted and interconnected. Maintaining a reasonable diet, sleep, and exercise routine is essential for having the mental fortitude necessary for focused preparation and preaching

*What is Preaching,*

# ANYWAY?

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*Jared C. Wilson*

Contrary to popular wisdom, good preaching has little to do with eloquence, fashion, or the length of a sermon. Good preaching is all about content and posture. By content, I mean, “What is the message about?” and by posture I mean, “How is it about it?”

Film critic Roger Ebert has said that a movie is not what it is about but how it is about it. In other words, what makes a movie bad or good is not mainly what it’s about but how it presents its content. Similarly, a preacher can preach on nearly any subject found in the Scriptures so long as he does so in a Scriptural posture.

Good preaching goes with the grain of the Bible. So we are not flippant where the Bible is not flippant. We are not angry where the Bible is not angry. We smile where the Bible smiles, and we yell where the Bible yells. (Some preachers only preach smiling sermons or angry sermons, which shows they aren’t really preaching the Scriptures faithfully.) Good preaching is dependent on content (the Scripture’s words) and posture (in their Scriptural sense).

That is what good preaching is. But what is preaching itself? Lots of theologians and ministers define preaching in different ways, but I tend to think that *preaching is proclamation that exults in the exposing of God's glory.*

## "PROCLAMATION"

Preaching can employ instances of conversation and laid-back chit-chat but preaching cannot be typified by conversation and chit-chat because it is first and foremost declarative. The Bible does not come with fill-in-the-blanks. It isn't MadLibs. Preaching in essence declares, "Thus saith the Lord."

Because the gospel is good news, not good advice, we come proclaiming "It is finished," not "Get to work." Because the gospel is a God-authored story, we come proclaiming his wisdom revealed in Christ, not our wisdom revealed in fortune-cookie bon mots. With our sermons we are meant to be delivering what we've received, not what we've created.

The soundest and safest Christian reflection, according to Vincent of Lerins, consists in

"what you have received, not what you have thought up; a matter not of ingenuity, but of doctrine; not of private acquisition, but of public Tradition; a matter brought to you, not put forth by you, in which you must not be the author but the guardian, not the founder but the sharer, not the leader, but the follower."

Preachers approach God's word as its recipient, its servant, and its deliverer, not its author, manager, or marketer. Because our

triune God is holy, infinite, almighty, and wise, we preach like he is. Preaching assumes authority, from God and from his infallible word. So then we don't preach like so many ninnies as if every sentence ends with a question mark. And we preach like we're at a pulpit even when we're at a music stand or Plexiglass lectern. These words from Lloyd-Jones offer powerful wisdom:

*“God is not a subject for debate, because He is Who He is and What He is. We are told that the unbeliever, of course, does not agree with that; and this perfectly true; but that makes no difference. We believe it, and it is part of our very case to assert it. Holding the view that we do, believing what we do about God, we cannot in any circumstances allow Him to become a subject for discussion or of debate or investigation. I base my argument at this point on the word addressed by God Himself to Moses at the burning bush (Exod. 3:1-6). Moses had suddenly seen this remarkable phenomenon of the burning bush, and was proposing to turn aside and to examine this astonishing phenomenon. But, immediately, he is rebuked by the voice which came to him saying, “Draw not nigh hither: put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground.” That seems to me to be the governing principle in this whole matter. Our attitude is more important than anything that we do in detail, and as we are reminded in the Epistle to the Hebrews, God is always to be approached “with reverence and with godly*

*fear: for our God is a consuming fire” (Heb. 12:28 and 29).*

*To me this is a very vital matter. To discuss the being of God in a casual manner, lounging in an armchair, smoking a pipe or a cigarette or a cigar, is to me something that we should never allow, because God, as I say, is not a kind of philosophic X or a concept. We believe in the almighty, the glorious, the living God; and whatever may be true of others we must never put ourselves, or allow ourselves to put, into a position in which we are debating about God as if He were but a philosophical proposition*

I don't believe we ought to forbid talking about God in any position, whether it be from an armchair or from a ditch on the side of the road, but as it pertains to preaching, Lloyd-Jones's point is sound and important. We do not approach preaching casually unless we approach God casually. We can make jokes about ourselves and be self-deprecating when we preach, because we do not “preach ourselves.” In the preaching ministry, we take ourselves lightly and the word of God heavily.

We preach the terrors of God's wrath as if they are terrifying, we preach the joys of God's salvation as if they are joyful. We preach hell in serious, sober ways, neither being glib about it nor speaking as if it is the only word. And we preach the gospel in declarative ways, bold and certain and full of Christ's glory.

## **"THAT EXULTS"**

Preaching is proclamation that exults. As I've said, preaching takes the content of the text and proclaims it according to the posture of the text. Preaching is fundamentally an act of worship. We don't stop worshiping when the music is done. We keep worshipping during the preaching of God's word, and we hope our preacher is worshipping as he's preaching God's word.

Preaching is a kind of singing in itself. Not literally, of course, but in its declaration of God's worth and work, it is a worshipful projection of God's anthem of his own awesomeness. When we preach with exultation, we are out-singing the enemy and giving voice to the wordless groaning and declaration of creation.

Preaching that exults necessarily entails a preacher who understands his sermon text in the spiritual sense. His affections have been charged and shaped by the text. He feels the Scripture he is preaching. In the crucible of his daily life dedicated to the Bible generally and his prayerful, watchful, thoughtful study and preparation in his office specifically, his heart is broken by and filled with the text. This is a Spiritual work, and the preacher has been praying all along that it will happen for him and for his hearers.

He ascends to the pulpit, then, carrying the mantle of God's call and prepared to joyfully work and seriously play, to preach what John Piper calls "gravity and gladness," but not to mess around. He's not throwing things out to see what will stick. He is playing his instrument and launching arrows. Like Nehemiah's men, he is building the wall with a trowel in one hand and a sword in the other.

The gospel-centered preacher is not blasé or boisterous. He is exultational. If he is impressed with himself, this won't work. But if he is awed by God, he might find the jet stream of the text and ride it into rapture. The Spirit may grant him unction, but even if the Spirit doesn't, the gospel-centered preacher knows he has not exulted in vain. God's word will have its purposed effect according to the wisdom of God.

### **"IN THE EXPOSING"**

Preaching is exultational proclamation in a text that is taught. In other words, preaching is not simply reciting the Scriptures with feeling (although it can and should include such work); it also explains the Scriptures. Nehemiah and Ezra's epic project involved providing proclaimers not merely to read the Law, but to teach it. "They read from the book, from the Law of God, clearly, and they gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading" (Nehemiah 8:8). Jesus "interpreted" to the disciples in the Scriptures all the things concerning himself (Luke 24:27). He didn't simply recite the Bible; he "gave the sense."

This is what is generally meant by the label "expository preaching" (or "expositional" preaching). Jonathan Leeman explains:

*"One thing is definitive for an expositional sermon: It lays out the meaning and purpose of a biblical text clearly. It says, "Here is the point of this text, and it's relevant to you, no matter who you are, where you are from, or what's happening in your life right now." The preacher concentrates all his powers on reproducing the burden*

*of the Bible in the hearts and minds of the people, and he avoids letting anything in his person get in the way of that goal.”*

Expository preaching can involve a variety of means of exposition: message points (with or without alliteration or acronyms, of course), stories and illustrations, and quotes and scholarly interpretations, but it is largely about sticking primarily to the text to reveal what the text says and what the text means.

Expository preaching does not have to be rigidly verse-by-verse preaching. In fact, many times verse-by-verse preaching can end up obscuring the meaning of the text, because it may reflect a lack of immediate context or a disconnect from the Bible’s larger storyline. So not all expository sermons “give the sense” of the Scriptures, which is the overarching truth that God saves sinners through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. As Jesus walked with the disciples on the road to Emmaus, he showed them all the things in the Scriptures pertaining to himself. Christ provides a motivational template for Christ-centered preaching. This means it is possible to preach a message from Leviticus in an unchristian way.

What expository preaching aims to do is explicate what the text means, expound on how it applies to the lives of the hearers, and explain its connection to the gospel storyline of the entire Bible.

### **“OF GOD’S GLORY.”**

Moses says, “Please show me your glory” (Exodus 33:18). Deep

down, this is the cry of every human heart. Ecclesiastes 3:11 says eternity is written there. The gospel of God's glory in Christ must be central in our preaching because nothing else even comes close to filling the eternal gap.

We all agree that fallen man has a "God-shaped hole," but then we go on to suggest all kinds of fillers that are not God—financial success, good sex, promotions at work, healthy relationships, happy spouses and children, community service, outlets for our creativity, etc. All good things but all things you can have and do and still be eternally bankrupt.

Our scale is far too small. The Bible speaks to all manner of good things useful to all men, but the Church is starving (starving!) for the glory of God. We too easily forget that the gospel covers the scale of eternity, that it is the division between real life and death, that God is infinite and our sin is a condemnation-worthy offense against an eternally holy God. We preach and we settle for much less than, "Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God!" (Romans 11:33).

Every week people file into our church services aching for eternity; in our zeal to provide something they may find comfortable and useful and inoffensive, are we offending the God who wishes to offend us in awe of his glory? Are we dismissing our brother Jesus whose formula for victory includes crucifixion?

The scale is enormous, the stakes are high. Instead of spiritually dressing up the idols we know people want, let's give them what

they need—God as all in all, the filling of the Spirit, the exaltation of the risen Lord.

“Behold what manner of love the Father has given unto us, that we should be called the sons of God!” (1 John 3:1a). That should be the chief service of our worship services—beholding. Behold our glorious God and his lavishing of grace on us in his precious Son. When we “expose” what God’s word means, how it applies to our lives, and what it reveals about his saving purposes in Christ, we are showing his glory.

We are aiming for awe of God. Preaching advice is a poor means to that end. We want the Lam to be beheld, so we must hold him up high and long. We proclaim not helpful hints but eternal visions. We can’t do this if we are making the Bible’s words serve our words. Biblical preaching trusts that the Bible can be set loose to work its power.

Brothers, isn’t it wonderful that we are set free from the tyranny of our good ideas to the power of the Bible’s good news?

<sup>2</sup> Excerpted from *The Pastor’s Justification* by Jared Wilson, © 2013. Used by permission of Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers, Wheaton, IL 60187, [www.crossway.org](http://www.crossway.org).

*Pulpit*

# AGONIES

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*Nick Jones*

Whenever I stand in the pulpit, two sermons are being preached.

The first is the sermon that comes from me. It is the one that has been labored on all week, drawn from the text, prayed and meditated over, and slowly formed into the gospel message that will hopefully help people mature in their relationship with God in Christ.

The second sermon, however, comes to me. It is the one that arrives unbidden to my heart and mind, and seeks to captivate me with its message. It is the voice of a color commentator that keeps interjecting his thoughts about how the sermon is going. It's almost always negative. And it's almost always spot-on.

*"This point should have been refined more."*

*"Why did you just say that?"*

*"What is that guy in the back doing? Why are you boring him?"*

*"You'll get an email about *that* this week."*

*"Ugh, why do you even do this?"*

And on and on it goes.

As I walk down the steps from the platform my heart is often filled with what Samuel Pearce called “pulpit agonies.” They are the reminders that we are so insufficient for the great task that has been laid upon us. But here is where the turn must come. I can either let my pulpit agonies run and ruin me, or I can own them and press them hard into the gospel.

As I reach the bottom step of my descent from the pulpit and walk back to my chair in the second row, I must exhort myself to cling more fully to the gospel, because it alone urges me on and gives me hope.

Here is how Samuel Pearce put it:

*“Pulpit agonies...have been of use to me...particularly in teaching me the importance of attaining and maintaining that spirituality and pious ardour in which I have found the most effectual relief, so that on the whole I must try to ‘glory in tribulations also.’...How often has it been found that when ministers have felt themselves most embarrassed, the most effectual good has been done to the people. O for hearts entirely resigned to all the will of God!”*

I can choose to focus on my imperfections and my inabilities, but I will quickly be swept away into a sea of despair, tossed about by the waves of bitterness and frustration. Or I can choose to remember

the sovereignty of God, even in my preaching. I can remember that when Paul says “all things work together for good,” he truly means “all things.” I can see, even in a bomb of a sermon, that God has provided me with a chance to grow in the knowledge and depth of the gospel myself. A bad sermon preached can provide great sanctification for the preacher.

Pastors, own your pulpit agonies. Use them, not as a backpack filled with weighty reminders of your insufficiencies, but instead as fertilizer, spread throughout the soil of your soul that will aid the growth of the gospel in your life and ministry.

<sup>3</sup> Joy Unspeakable and Full of Glory: The Piety of Samuel and Sarah Pearce, 167.

*Expository Preaching in*

# STUDENT MINISTRY

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*Jason Kees*

During my time in college I served as an interim youth minister at Kingsville Baptist Church in Ball, Louisiana. I previously served as an intern at my home church, so I thought I had an idea of what it took to be a youth minister. I took on the task eagerly and had as much fun as I possibly could while I invested my life into the students that were under my care.

During my junior year the church hired a full time youth minister, so I stepped aside to let him take control. I resigned my position so that the students would change their leadership focus from me to him. In the spring semester I enrolled in a class called Introduction to Expository Preaching taught by Jason Meyer. Since I had been preaching (or what I considered preaching) for over a year I thought this would be an easy class, but I was wrong.

As Dr. Meyer taught the theology that drives preaching, I began to

realize that I failed miserably as a youth minister. I saw for the first time what preaching truly is, how serious it should be taken, and what is at stake. After my third class I went back to my dorm room, sat down on the floor, and wept.

I had failed.

I spent much time in prayer and, aside from other requests made, I remember pleading with God that if I was given the opportunity once more, I would not fail again. It was there that I committed myself not only to expository preaching but also to take seriously the task that was (and still is) set before me: the preaching of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

I have often heard well-meaning brothers and sisters in Christ candidly rebuke a type of ministry that gives a greater portion of time to the Scriptures. Now, granted, they probably do not realize what they are saying. There are hardly any evangelical churches that would suggest we don't teach our youth the Bible. But our methods speak louder than our words.

People are often quick to point out that teenagers today live in a visual world that is filled with short videos and posts of 140 characters, so their attention span is lacking. Through weaving together stories, games, illustrations, and jokes we are able to teach students the Bible in a way that is relevant to them so that they can understand.

I disagree.

## **1** YOUTH ARE SMARTER THAN YOU THINK

Through some circumstances, the Lord granted my request and I returned on staff once more. On a Wednesday night in March 2009 I began to walk my students through the book of James, and we finished in April 2010. I took my students verse by verse, line by line, word by word through a book of the Bible. Through this method, something amazing started to happen: they began to understand the Bible.

Now I would be wrong to say that when we got to James 1:9 the group exploded and we began averaging 100+ each week. To be honest, some students began to waver in their attendance. To my recollection, we went from averaging fifty each week to thirty. Should I have changed something? Some would say yes (and they may have been correct), but I was committed not to fail once more. I continued preaching through James verse-by-verse, and the students continued to come.

I do not base my success as a preacher on the number of people who attend. It is God who gives the growth. But each week the students attended, they began to see the big picture of this short epistle. They began to see that Christians will experience tests, but that it is for our good (1:2–4). They saw how similar the teaching of both Paul and James were on justification by faith (2:14–26) and how our deeds and words (3:1–12) are both issues that stem from our conversion, or lack thereof. When we finally finished the epistle, I challenged them to consider those who had wandered from the truth and bring them back (5:19–20), and I will never forget the look on their faces as nearly every student contemplated a friend at school who quit attending church altogether.

## **2 A PLEA TO PREACH EXPOSITIONALLY**

Brothers, our main task as ministers is to preach Jesus Christ and him crucified. Now we may claim this mantra all day, but our methods will prove ultimately what we believe. When we preach expositionally through books of the Bible, I am convinced we are communicating to our people the authority of the Word. As evangelicals, we believe each and every word of Scripture is God-breathed and is profitable for teaching. In my opinion, the expositional model of preaching makes this available.

There are many advantages to preaching expositionally, but I will list five.

1. We are forced to preach the difficult texts.
2. We know what text we preach next week, and so does our congregations.
3. Our congregations become familiar with different books of the Bible.
4. Our knowledge of a particular author/theological theme is expanded.
5. It teaches our congregation how to read the Bible in context.

I was reminded of my commitment to the Lord on my dorm room floor in 2009 after I received confirmation of my election to serve in my first pastorate. Because of my commitment to expository preaching I am taking my congregation through 1 John on Sunday mornings and Exodus on Sunday evenings.

Brothers, I encourage you to evaluate where your youth ministry is and that preach expositionally to your students.

*The Prince of Preachers in*

# PAIN AND PERSECUTION

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*Christian T. George*

Charles Spurgeon was a man who preached most of all, and best of all, in the crucible of pain. But from what did Spurgeon suffer?

In her thesis, *Suffering and Character Formation in the Life and Sermons of Charles Haddon Spurgeon*, Kim-Hong Hazra, categorizes Spurgeon's suffering by highlighting, first, the great physical affliction that began in October of 1867 when Spurgeon suffered his first attack of chronic nephritis, or Bright's Disease, an inflammation of the kidneys. At the age of 35, this condition progressed into an arthritic disorder called "gout." Gout is caused by the retention of uric acid in the blood. When this acid circulates throughout the body, it settles into the joints and produces microscopic, needle-like crystals that cause inflammation and acute burning sensations.

"I thought a cobra had bitten me and filled my veins with poison," wrote Spurgeon to his brother in 1890. To his wife, he said, "I feel as if I am emerging from a volcano." Susannah frequently entered her

husband's study to find him laying prostrate on the floor, unable to move. "When I am suffering very greatly from gout," said Spurgeon, "if anybody [even] walks heavily . . . across the room, it gives me pain." Spurgeon's hands and feet were frequently swollen, and the pain became so great that approximately one third of the last 20 years of his ministry was spent away from the pulpit.

Not only did Spurgeon suffer great physical torment, he was also given to emotional and mental anguish. In his book *The Spirituality of Charles Haddon Spurgeon*, Peter Morden presented Spurgeon's symptoms to Dr. Anil Den, a licensed psychiatrist, who concluded that Spurgeon's depression was not merely "reactive" in the sense that it was brought on by external circumstances, but it was also "endogenous," an imbalance of chemicals in the brain. Spurgeon would often weep without being able to identify the cause. If Spurgeon was alive today, he would have most likely been diagnosed with manic depression—and treated with medication and therapy.

Spurgeon was a great sufferer, but it wasn't just pain he endured constantly. He dealt with his fair share of cultural persecution through constant character attacks. The newspapers of London portrayed Spurgeon as unsavory, lambasting his lack of formal theological education. He was educated, of course, in that that he spoke 6 languages and had internalized a library of Puritan tomes before we was 25, but he never pursued formal theological education. (It was illegal for nonconformists to receive a Cambridge education when he lived there.)

The Ipswich Express said his sermons were "Redolent of bad taste, vulgar, and theatrical." James Wells wrote, "I have . . . my doubts as the Divine reality of his conversion." Another critic posited that

Spurgeon was on the “most intimate terms with Satan.” In 1859, after Charles Darwin’s *Origin of Species* took hold of the cultural imagination, Spurgeon was portrayed as a stick in the mud, a fossil from a previous era, superstitious in his belief in miracles, unenlightened in his insistence on the divinity of Jesus Christ. So when Spurgeon criticized the theory of evolution in a public lecture in October of 1861, the newspapers took to the offensive:

*We are now to be entertained by Mr. Spurgeon’s lecture on the gorilla, but, in after ages,—according to the development theory,—we shall doubtless have a gorilla lecturing on Mr. Spurgeon.*

Elsewhere, Spurgeon was portrayed as a big-headed, a lion of London that growled out a gospel in which “mystery is vulgarized.” Another editorial portrayed him as riding the fast train to popularity while yet another rendered him as Gulliver beached and beleaguered by the critics of his day.

But perhaps the greatest source of criticism in the press occurred at the outset of his London ministry in 1856 at the Surrey Garden Music Hall. Spurgeon rented the Music Hall when the crowds became too numerous to fit into the New Park Street Chapel located on the shores of the Thames. On the evening of October 19, 1856, a few minutes after 6 o’clock, someone in the audience shouted, “Fire in the building!” Widespread pandemonium ensued. A balcony collapses. The people were trying to get into the building blocked the exit of those fighting to get out.

Spurgeon continued preaching, not knowing the extent of the unfolding disaster. He took as his text Proverbs 3:3, “The curse of the Lord is in the house of the wicked . . .” a text that would

haunt him for the rest of his life. An eyewitness said, “The cries and shrieks at this period were truly terrific . . . They pressed on, treading furiously over the dead and dying, tearing frantically at each other.” Spurgeon was ushered out of the building before he could see the seven corpses and the 28 injured lying on the floor.

The newspapers crucified him. “Mr. Spurgeon is a preacher who hurls damnation at the heads of his sinful hearers, wrote a critic in the Daily Telegraph. Spurgeon fell into such a deep depression that he wished himself dead. “Broke in pieces all asunder,” he wrote, “my thoughts which had been to me a cup of delights, were like pieces of broken glass.”

But Spurgeon did recover. He resumed preaching. And his congregation, which continued to expand, transplanted at Elephant and Castle to a brand new building in 1861, the Metropolitan Tabernacle

I would like to submit to you that suffering served to propel three aspects of Spurgeon’s ministry at the Metropolitan Tabernacle—namely, the theological, the spiritual, and the missional.

## **1** THEOLOGICAL

In Spurgeon’s theology, God was not the cause of evil, but, as in the case of Joseph in Genesis 50:20, God caused evil to work together for the good of his people. “All of the grace,” said Spurgeon, “that I have got of my comfortable and easy times and happy hours, might almost lie on a penny. But the good that I have received from my sorrows, and pains, and griefs, is altogether incalculable . . . Affliction is the best book in a minister’s library.” Notice that there

is no health and wealth gospel here. Instead, suffering is a tool that God uses to refine the redeemed. “The Lord gets his best Christians out of the highlands of affliction,” said Spurgeon.

For Spurgeon, Jesus Christ is the primary theme of Scripture, the axis on which both the Old and New Testaments rotate. Moreover, it is only in the incarnation of Jesus Christ and the atoning work on the cross that the horrible reality of suffering makes any kind of sense. The question of theodicy always escorts Spurgeon to the dual-natured hypostasis of Christ. Because Jesus was God, we relate to the Father. Because Jesus was man, the Father relates to us. Death is defeated, creation is being re-created, and God will not tolerate suffering in this world much longer. This is the direction that Spurgeon’s theology of suffering always follows.

## **2** SPIRITUAL

Secondly, suffering also played a significant role in Spurgeon’s spirituality. For Spurgeon, doctrine should always led to doxology. One cannot truly know of God unless one lives in God, resulting worship and praise to God. This also finds expression in spiritual discipline. Christians “must carry the cross,” said Spurgeon, “before they wear the crown.” For Spurgeon, carrying the cross involves daily crucifixion of the flesh. Now given Spurgeon’s immense love for food, it must be said that the discipline of fasting saw no great victory in Spurgeon’s sanctification! But prayer certainly did. D. L. Moody lauded Spurgeon’s sermons, but said that if you really want to get to know to know the man, you must hear him pray.

## **3** MISSIONAL

Finally, Spurgeon's theology of suffering fueled Spurgeon's social and humanitarian ministries. And it is here that this third and final aspect, Spurgeon's missionality, takes center stage.

At one point, 600,000 Irish immigrated to London, straining a city that already suffered from poor sanitation. For the middle class, life became unpleasant. For the poor, life became intolerable. Typhoid, typhus, tuberculosis, and diphtheria abounded. Mothers threw their babies into the Thames because they couldn't feed them. Child labor was unregulated such that the life expectancy for a chimney sweeper in Spurgeon's day was the early teens. At Enon Street Baptist Church, only a few thin planks separated the congregation from the visible mound of skeletons accumulating beneath the floor. A massive cholera outbreak spread throughout London in 1854 during Spurgeon's first year in the city. 10,000 people died within a few months. "There was scarcely a street free from hearses," wrote *The British Banner*. It was here that 20-year-old Spurgeon went from house to house visiting his sick and dying congregation.

"Almost every day I was called to visit the grave," he said. And so Spurgeon began to reach out to his city.

The 1850s and 60s saw a number of ministries and societies at the Tabernacle, including the Poor Ministers' Clothing Society, Sermon Tract Society, and the Christian Brother's Benefit Society. In 1866, a Colportage Association was founded in which 94 agents went to door to door evangelizing and handing out Christian literature. In 1867, the Stockwell orphanage was founded which catered to 240 boys. One day, when musing to Hugh Price about how in the days of Elijah God answered by fire, Spurgeon said that in these days,

“The God that answers by orphanages, let him be God.” In 1868, almshouses were built, along with a day-school for 400 children.

Every Sunday in the basement of the Tabernacle, Spurgeon marshaled volunteers to teach literacy to the marginalized children of Southwark. He founded a ministry for prostitutes, or “fallen women,” which in 1857 totaled 8,600 in London proper. Some have said, and perhaps could say it louder, that Spurgeon was a traditional, first-wave feminist in the sense that he fought for the fundamental rights of British women, saying, “What is fair for women is fair for men. Our laws should be equal, though they are not.”

In 1867, James A. Garfield, who would become the 20th president of the United States of America, attended the Metropolitan Tabernacle. That evening, he recorded in his diary, “I felt that Spurgeon had opened an asylum where the great untitled, the poor and destitute of this great city, could come and find their sorrows met with sympathy . . .” Spurgeon’s combat of opium in the East, slavery in the West, anti-Semitism in the North, and poverty in the South caught the attention of Frederick Douglass and Florence Nightingale, both of whom supported his causes. Spurgeon’s conviction to “preach Christ, simply, [and] boldly,” combined with his passion to reach the marginalized, resulted in what Helmut Thielicke described as the combustion of “oxygen and grace.”

At 11:05 pm on January 31, 1892, after a long battle with gout, depression, Spurgeon’s suffering came to an end when he fell into a coma and died. “My time is up,” he had said earlier that day, “I have finished the race. I have kept the faith.” A telegraph was sent around the world, spreading the news of his death. “If every crowned head

in Europe had died that night,” said B. H. Carroll, “the event would not be so momentous as the death of this one man.”

Though Charles Spurgeon died in the midst of great controversy and suffering, he once prophesied, “For my part, I am quite willing to be eaten of dogs for the next fifty years; but the more distant future will vindicate me.” Nearly 120 years have passed since Spurgeon’s death, and while we have not gathered here today to vindicate Spurgeon but rather to examine him with “a careful curiosity,” we find that our bucket is much too small. Helmut Thielicke was correct: “This bush from old London still burns and shows no sign of being consumed.”

# *A Puritan's Plea for the Simplicity of* **PREACHING**

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***Jason G. Deusing***

Protestant churches in 17th Century England wrestled with similar tensions as our own with regard to methods of preaching. For them, there was a pull toward deference given to the senses in the worship experience as worship in England was only a few decades removed from Latin-narrated Roman Catholic services. However, where 21st Century evangelical pastors feel drawn toward entertainment and sense-driven approaches to attract more people, clergy in the 1600s were concerned with fealty to fellow clergy opinion and practice rather than the response of people at all. Regardless of motive, both eras share a common tilt toward more complicated preaching methods and, as such, an overlapping vortex is opened through which 17th century voices can speak to the 21st century with relevance.

Henry Jacob, a Puritan pastor in London serving in the early 1600s, was one who sought to remind his brothers that preaching is merely expounding and applying the Scriptures to the congregation in a manner that all who hear can understand. Jacob published his thoughts in a booklet written in 1604 entitled *A Position Against Vainglorious, and that Which is Falsely Called Learned Preaching*. He

began with the following argument:

*In ordinary preaching unto Christian congregations to allege authorities of men whether philosophers, poets, or divines; or to use Latin, or other languages besides the vulgar, is unprofitable, unreasonable, and unlawful.*

Jacob then defended this statement with several reasons of support explaining that preaching should be familiar, simple, sufficient, and consistent.

## **1** FAMILIAR

Jacob drew his first reason of support from the earthly ministry of Christ. Jacob stated that the example of Christ is the best pattern to follow and those preachers who rely on human authorities and preach in Latin are not like Christ. The Lord Jesus did not use Latin (or a language other than what his listeners could readily understand), reasons Jacob, so why should preachers in 1604? More than that, though, is Christ's example of clear and plain teaching. When Jesus taught the Jews he taught in such a way that all who heard were able to comprehend the words he was saying. Perhaps for heart reasons they may not understand every meaning of every word, but they nonetheless could, in their heads, understand the words. Jacob called Jesus' preaching "familiar and plain," and contrasted that with his contemporaries' manner of teaching that relied upon human authorities more than Scripture.

## **2** SIMPLE

Henry Jacob's second reason sought support from Apostolic authority. He said that since the Apostles followed Christ, "we

ought to follow them.” The Apostles communicated to the churches, as evidenced in Acts and the Epistles, with “great simplicity.” For example, Paul told the Corinthians he came to them not with wisdom of the world (1 Cor 2:1). The established clergy in Jacob’s day were apt to use more elevated and confusing language than the common vernacular of the people. Also, their erudite preference was to reference the best of human authors and poets rather than Scripture. Jacob referred to these habits as practices of “vain ostentation” and all “sound preachers” should avoid these methods in their “ordinary teaching of Christians.” Rather the example of the Apostles’ “plainness and simplicity” should be “followed and embraced.”

### 3 SUFFICIENT

Third, Jacob upheld the sufficiency of Scripture for proclamation. He stated that it is scandalous if a preacher causes his hearers to think “that the simple word of God, without the adding of men’s authorities, is not sufficient.” This practice was *scandalous* because the use of poets or philosophers in the same way or with greater frequency than the word of God made men think that there might be a better way for salvation—or at least confused them as to the right path.

### 4 CONSISTENT

Jacob’s final reason showed that simple ordinary preaching has been the tradition of the church since its inception. He maintained that Augustine, Chrysostom, and other Church Fathers practiced ordinary sermons for their people and thus his contemporaries should do the same to remain consistent with the earliest

practitioners of the Christian faith. Here Jacob, as a grandchild of the Reformation, recognized that a course correction was needed in recovering the Gospel in churches and such a correction was needed in the preaching of the Gospel as well. The appeal to the early tradition was a transcultural appeal. The point is that there is no culture, however new, that is impervious to the clear explication of the only word that can judge the thoughts and intentions of any human heart (Heb 4:12).

In the 17th century, one pastor sought to remind preachers that the most profitable thing for the gathered people was the clear and simple preaching of the word of God. A sermon that dabbles in the obscure rather than the familiar, seeks eloquence over simplicity, relies on worldly wisdom more than the Word, and prizes innovation over tradition might attract people, but it will more than likely communicate a message that is complex no matter how creative, that is confusing no matter how clever, and that is cheap no matter how crowd-pleasing.

A complicated sermon enhanced with much beyond the teaching of the Bible is bound to communicate far more than the simple meaning of the text of Scripture. It might even induce fog on the already narrow and exclusive path that leads to God. In the overlapping vortex of common concern that relates his world to ours, Jacob's reminder still stands and his plea for plain preaching is a helpful reminder for all. Jacob's point was that it is only simple ordinary preaching that will faithfully direct people to God.

*I Preached a Dud.*

# NOW WHAT?

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***J.A. Medders***

You just stepped down from the stage and you know it. Your wife knows it too. You preached a dud. At least you think you did. And probably a number of people in the church thought so as well.

But what are you to do? Wallow? Sulk? Lament? Weep? Let me rephrase the question. What are WE to do. This post isn't just for you; it's for me too.

## **1** I GOT MY PH.D. IN "DUD"

I write this post as an expert. I preach duds. At least, I think I do. I don't say that to grab encouragement (though I'll take it!) and I also don't say that to question my gifting. I am sure of the Lord's calling and also sure of reality. Don't be shocked, but sometimes, preachers preach duds. And God has His purpose in them.

Even our heroes bring a dud from time to time. I've heard duds from Keller, Piper, and Chandler. At least I thought they were duds.

But let's get back to the point. You just preached a dud and it's time

to recover. Now what? Sunday afternoons can be brutal for a pastor. You are laying on the couch, grieved over:

*what you said*

*what you meant to say*

*what you forgot*

*what you should not have said*

*how your outline didn't work*

*that you had weak exegesis*

*that you didn't hit any points*

*that you gave weak illustrations*

*that you fumbled the intro*

*that you butchered the conclusion*

*how you went way over time*

*etc...*

Now what?

## **2** CHANGE YOUR THINKING

Maybe you noticed, maybe you didn't, but I used a key phrase three times since you've started reading. Did you catch it? Here are the three instances: "At least you think you did; At least I think I do; At least I thought so."

The "dud" is in your (our) eyes. You thought it was a dud (I'm sure others did as well). I thought my sermon was a dud (I'm sure others did also). I thought Piper's was a dud (I'm sure others did too). But you know what else is true? Others were blessed by it. Others thought that you preached one of the most helpful messages they have ever heard. Sure, you thought it was a dud, but someone

in the church was meant to hear that sermon according to the gracious providence of God.

The first thing we should do is change our thinking. That sermon may not have been crafted by God to immediately bless everyone, but it was designed to instantly hit another.

### **3 GOSPEL MINISTRY IS A SEED...GIVE IT TIME**

Reread that last sentence: “that sermon may not have been crafted by God to immediately bless.” Consider the truth that is tucked away in those words. That sermon may not immediately bless, but God knows what it may do over time.

Your main points may not have blow anyone’s socks off, but maybe the Scriptures you referenced got tucked in their heart. Now a saint has been armed with the Word of God. You didn’t intend that, but God did.

Our job is to throw the seeds of God’s truth upon the people that God has given us. The Gospel ministry is a seed and growth takes time. We have no clue what fruit may be harvested weeks, months, and years after a sermon or collection of messages.

I remember receiving a text message that read, “Hey, I never told you but those messages you did on the Glory of God changed my life forever.” I had no idea. When did I hear about this? At least two years later. Brothers, don’t immediately judge a dud but trust God’s providence.

### **3 BELIEVE THE BIBLE AND A PROPHET ACQUAINTED WITH "DUDS"**

Do you believe Isaiah 55:10-11? Do you? Isaiah had a rough crowd. He may have felt like a dud. But listen to what God told him and is telling us:

*For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.*

God's Word will never return to Him empty and void. It will accomplish the purpose, that He ordained. Your sermon may not accomplish your purpose but it will accomplish God's. Maybe we need to revisit our vision for preaching. Is faithfulness our goal? Or is it preaching slick sermons?

In your sermon, did you read the Bible? If so, God is at work. God is at work even among those who proclaim the Word from a sinful motive.

*"What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice. Yes, and I will rejoice" (Philippians 1:18-19).*

This isn't being simplistic; this is being Biblical. God is at work and we don't even know it. He may even keep you from knowing it. He will grow humility in a preacher. And He might want to do it by making you depend more and more on the Spirit and not on

your sermon skills.

4

#### **PREACH ON**

So, you preached a dud. Learn what you can and move on. Don't pout over your paper airplane that didn't take off. Start over. Refine. Pray. Seek. Pray. Did I mention pray? Remember, God works with duds. I mean, just take a look in the mirror.

# *When Your Wife is Bored with* **YOUR PREACHING**

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*Joshua Hedger*

Perhaps the title of this post makes you think that my wife is unspiritual. After all, how could any Jesus-loving individual be bored with the preaching of the gospel? I can assure you that she loves Jesus in a profoundly deep way. The issue was not my wife. The boredom she was feeling was my mine.

I don't think I'll ever forget the conversation. It was late one night, sitting on our couch, and my wife asked me, "Josh, what's wrong with your preaching right now?" I remember thinking with irritation, "What did you just ask me?" but I managed to present it in the more gentle form of "What do you mean?"

"You are the preacher that I learn the most from. I would rather listen to you preach than anyone else, but I've kind of been bored with it lately because you don't seem like yourself."

Those words pressed in upon my chest like the depths of the ocean, suffocating, choking, and smothering my pride.

I began preaching in 1999 at the grand ole age of 18. I have preached over 1,000 sermons in dozens of churches and camps. You'd think

I would be better at it. In 2009 we planted a church and I was the primary preacher where I would preach the same sermon 2-3 times each Sunday in our multiple services.

Yet it was now, at this time, that my preaching was boring? I was forced to think, forced to deal with the reality of the truth of her statement. It was true. I was bored too, and I didn't feel like myself. That is what my wife was sensing. She was bored with my preaching because I was bored with my preaching.

I began to search the depths of my heart and mind, asking questions and seeking answers. The thoughts and confessions that came out shocked me. I had not realized these things were taking root in my beliefs, but there they were, overtaking my mind and heart and strangling my joy.

I realized a few things that night.

First, when I left my previous church to move to Kansas City and plant, many others left over the next few months as well. Some of those even completely dropped out of church. I have been blaming my insufficient preaching as the reason.

Second, when I began working at Midwestern Seminary I found myself surrounded by men who were far more brilliant than I, cleverer than I, and better preachers than I. This belief birthed comparisons of my weaknesses with their strengths. Your weakness compared to another's strengths will always leave you wanting and insecure.

Third, I became insecure in sharing the preaching responsibilities at

my church. The elder with whom I regularly share preaching duties is gifted by God with a mind that can explain the theologically complex in a brilliantly simple way for anyone to understand. Almost weekly people will tell me how much his messages speak to them. Suddenly, I became insecure. I began to wonder if I even needed to be at this church.

All of these things combined birthed fear, insecurity, and self-loathing. I failed to recognize the call on my life and the giftings that God had given me to proclaim the Scriptures. I stopped remembering all of the stories of life-change in my previous church and focused only on the faults. I began comparing my weaknesses with other's strengths and ceased being pleased in God's intentional design of me (the pot telling the potter he missed something). I failed to celebrate that God was using a fellow pastor and put all of my affirmation in the words of man rather than the calling of God.

In all of this, I tried to be someone I was not in the pulpit and all of it blended together to cause me to be bored when I preached. I was timid. I was confused, and I was frustrated. My wife could tell.

Thank God for a wife who loves Jesus, loves the gospel, loves the church, and loves me enough to say, "You don't seem like yourself when you preach."

What can we learn from this?

1. Preacher, do not blame yourself when those who hear you preach do not respond in lasting faith. You are responsible to preach faithfully. They are responsible to respond in obedience.

2. Preacher, do not compare your weaknesses to another's strengths. It'll only lead to insecurity, perhaps even attempting to be what you are not.
  
3. Preacher, do not find your value and worth in the affirmation of the audience but rather in the calling of God and obedience to faithfully preach.
  
4. Preacher, give your wife the freedom to speak hard things to you for the good of your church and your own soul.

*Why I'm Committed to*

# EXPOSITORY PREACHING

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*Jason K. Allen*

Evangelical Christians are in general agreement that preaching is God's divinely appointed means to proclaim the gospel and to convey his truth to his people. Yet, within evangelical Christianity, precisely how one is to preach the Bible remains a contested topic—and with huge ramifications.

Though I sometimes wrestle with what text to preach, I never wrestle with how to preach it. I determined long ago for every sermon to be an expository one. For me, this started experiential and practical, but it quickly, and ultimately, became biblical and theological. Let me explain why.

**1**

## MY JOURNEY INTO EXPOSITORY PREACHING

Though I was reared in a Bible believing church, it wasn't until my college years—when I was converted and called to ministry—that I

really began to pay attention to sermons and give thought to what preaching is to be and do.

As a college basketball player with daily practices at 8:00pm, I could attend the Sunday and Wednesday evening services at the church adjacent to campus, Dauphin Way Baptist, and hustle back in time to get suited up for practice. It was on those evenings that I first encountered biblical exposition through the preaching ministry of Steven Lawson. Lawson's expository sermons mesmerized me. For me, the Bible had been something of a riddle, irreducibly complex as to how it all fit together and how one should rightly interpret it. Refreshingly, verse-by-verse exposition began to unlock the Bible for me, helping me to see how to study it, interpret it, and preach it.

He became an early ministry mentor to me, modeling biblical exposition and actually showing me how to craft sermons. He also pointed me to Adrian Rogers, Jerry Vines, Stephen Olford, and, most especially, John MacArthur as models for biblical exposition. Those men's sermons, tapes, and books served me as pre-seminary training.

As I continued to cut my teeth in ministry, I grew to appreciate what biblical exposition did *in me* as I sat under it, what it did *for me* as I prepared sermons, and what it did *through me* for others when I preached. These early, experiential benefits were reinforced by biblical, theological, ministerial, and practical reasons. I was—and remain—sold on expository preaching.

Now that I lead a seminary and have a formative role in training ministers, I not only practice biblical exposition; I advocate it. Of course, there are glorious exceptions, in times past and present, of

faithful pastors who didn't practice biblical exposition, yet whose ministries God chose to bless. These occasions notwithstanding, the benefits of expository preaching remain compelling.

## **2** EXPOSITORY PREACHING DEFINED

While the meaning of “expository preaching” has become elastic in recent years, it remains a useful designation. Yet, given its elasticity it can be especially difficult to define.

As far as more technical definitions go, Alistair Begg, Haddon Robinson, and Bryan Chapel have all made helpful contributions. Begg defines expository preaching as, “Unfolding the text of Scripture in such a way that makes contact with the listener’s world while exalting Christ and confronting them with the need for action.”

Haddon Robinson’s definition has been standard issue in seminary classrooms for several decades. He describes expository preaching as, “The communication of a biblical concept, derived from and transmitted through a 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 him to the hearers.”

More recently Bryan Chapell has argued, “The main idea of an expository sermon (the topic), the divisions of that idea (the main points), and the development of those divisions (the subpoints) all come from truths the text itself contains. No significant portion of the text is ignored. In other words, expositors willingly stay within the boundaries of a text (and its relevant context) and do not leave

until they have surveyed its entirety with their listeners.”

While each of these three definitions are beneficial, a sermon can be considered expository, even if it does not evidence all of the criteria offered in the more technical, aforementioned descriptions.

A more condensed, working definition of expository preaching might simply be: to rightly interpret and explain the text, in its context, and to bring the text to bear upon the lives of the congregants. Expository preaching, and its definitions, can be much more than this; it mustn't be anything less than this.

Martyn Lloyd-Jones, the longtime pastor of the Westminster Chapel in London, England, described preaching as “The highest, the greatest, and the most glorious calling to which anyone can ever be called.” While Lloyd-Jones' assessment resonates broadly with evangelical preachers, precisely how one is to preach lacks such consensus.

Expository preaching—to rightly interpret and explain the text, in its context, and to bring the text to bear upon the lives of the congregants—should be the preacher's standard approach to the pulpit. To be sure, bad sermons come in all forms, including expository, but I am convinced biblical exposition is the healthiest and most faithful form of preaching. Consider with me these twelve reasons why.

### **3 EXPOSITORY PREACHING BEST FULFILLS THE BIBLICAL COMMANDS REGARDING PREACHING.**

The Bible has a lot to say about what preaching is to be. Prescriptively,

passages like 2 Timothy 4:1-5 and 1 Timothy 4:13-16 call for a Word-centered ministry. These injunctions are straightforward. There is no question as to who's Word or which Word; we are to preach the Word. In fact, if Timothy and Titus got anything out of their Pauline correspondence, it was that they were to preach the Word with authority and faithfulness.

Descriptively, throughout the Bible, and especially in the book of Acts, we repeatedly see a model set forth for preaching. In Acts, for example, Peter and Paul explain the Old Testament and bring it to bear. This is no coincidence. Implicit within the call to preach is the call to preach the Scripture, and expository preaching best fulfills this biblical command.

#### **4 EXPOSITORY PREACHING AFFIRMS A HIGH VIEW OF SCRIPTURE.**

It is one thing for theological liberals who disavow the inerrancy of Scripture to not preach the Word, but it is altogether another thing for evangelical preachers to neglect the Scriptures. To do so is illogical, and it undermines one's claim to believe in the inspiration, inerrancy, and authority of Scripture. Consistent exposition affirms a Bible that is true, powerful, and life changing. When it comes to preaching and one's stated beliefs about Holy Scripture, actions speak louder than words. How we handle and preach the Bible reveals what we truly believe about it.

#### **5 EXPOSITORY PREACHING MOST HONORS THE AUTHORITY AND STATUS OF PREACHING.**

It is hard to overstate the importance of this point. Biblical

preaching gives people a clear and certain Word. Preaching, if anything, is to be authoritative, and expository preaching gives the sermon a “Thus sayeth the Lord” influence. Conversely, to preach commandingly without the authority of Scripture is tantamount to pulling rank. Don’t settle for human authority when you can have God’s, as established in his Word. Personalize Paul’s instruction to Timothy, “speak these things with all authority.”

## **6 EXPOSITORY PREACHING ADDS GRAVITY TO ONE’S MINISTRY.**

Biblical preaching puts the text of Scripture front and center in the sermon, thus bringing a level of seriousness to the pulpit. The great preachers of church history who truly made their mark—men like Bunyan, Whitefield, Edwards, Spurgeon, etc.—were men of the text and men of gravity. They were cheerful, but not goofy; happy, but not trite. Their seriousness was rooted in their biblical preaching. We would do well to emulate them.

This point comes with immense practicality. In every man’s ministry, seasons of trial will come. Ethical quandaries, contentious personalities, scandalous sin, and other issues will require heroic pastoral leadership. The pastor whose ministry is marked by joyful sobriety, who evidences a respect for Scripture and a determination to preach it, will be best positioned to lead the church through such a crisis, having long since earned leadership credibility and the congregation’s respect.

**7 EXPOSITORY PREACHING MOST MATURES THE CONGREGATION.**

In every church there will be a trickle-down effect from the pulpit to the pew. Overtime, for better or worse, churches tend to reflect the personalities and passions of their pastor. The church that receives a steady diet of biblical exposition will grow in its knowledge of the Bible, and in its confidence to study, practice, and teach it.

Moreover, strong pulpits become a beacon in the city, drawing mature believers who want to be fed and be part of a maturing congregation. Over time, expository preaching leads to a healthier church. A weekly diet of John 3:16 leads to a weak church.

**8 EXPOSITORY PREACHING DEMONSTRATES TO YOUR CONGREGATION HOW TO STUDY THE BIBLE.**

It is no compliment when a church member asks, “Wow, where did you get that from?” Church members should be able to see the root of your application, and how it is derived from the preached text. A part of preaching the Scriptures is to demystify the preaching and sermon preparation, thus educating our people on how to study the Bible. Expository preaching does more than explain the text, it shows our people how to interpret and explain the text as well.

**9 EXPOSITORY PREACHING ENSURES THE SERMON'S RELEVANCE.**

Though perhaps counterintuitive at first consideration, there is often an inverse correlation between biblical relevance and attempted cultural connection. Nothing dates a sermon like being chock full of pop-cultural references. Sermons that are text-

oriented, speak to the perennial needs of the human heart. And when they are amplified by cross-references, historical illustrations, and pointed application they enjoy no “sell by” date.

This reality occurred to me shortly after I became a believer. While in college, I listened to the local Christian radio station. I often heard sermons by John MacArthur and J. Vernon McGee. At that time, I had no idea who these men were or that Pastor McGee had been deceased for many years. In my naiveté, I assumed the broadcasts were their previous Sunday’s sermon. After listening for quite some time, I still remember my surprise when hearing McGee reference Khrushchev and shortly thereafter hearing MacArthur reference Watergate. The sermon series I had been hearing were decades old, but it took me weeks of listening to detect they were so dated. These men’s commitment to exposition enabled their sermons to be evergreen, perennially relevant.

**10 EXPOSITORY PREACHING MOST CONSISTENTLY PRESENTS CHRIST AND A ROBUST GOSPEL MESSAGE.**

Paul’s ambition to preach Christ and him crucified should be ours as well, and we can best accomplish this by not just preaching “gospel” messages, or by tacking on the gospel at the end of our sermon. To rightly interpret any text is to draw lines from that text to the broader, biblical meta-narrative of Christ and him crucified. Therefore, to preach an Old Testament narrative or a New Testament epistle should not be a detour from the gospel. Rather, every sermon based on Scripture is a sermon where Christ can be prominently featured.

**11 EXPOSITORY PREACHING MOST MATURES ME AS A MAN OF GOD.**

Biblical exposition isn't easy. It takes time to interpret the passage in its context, to build an exegetical outline, and to fashion it all together in homiletical form. Year after year, the rigor of preparing sermons has deepened by Scriptural knowledge. The thousands of hours wrestling with texts have been incalculably sanctifying. Moreover, preaching verse-by-verse through books in the Bible forces me to confront difficult doctrines, grapple with knotty texts, and apply the full compliment of Scripture to my own life. All of this, and more, facilitates spiritual growth and maturation.

**12 EXPOSITORY PREACHING GIVES ME CONFIDENCE IN MY SERMON.**

The confidence I have in my sermon is derived from the confidence I have in the truthfulness, authority, and power of Scripture. Sure, the full effectiveness of a sermon can vary for a host of reasons, but grounding the sermon firmly in the text ensures a certain baseline fruitfulness. The text itself serves as a homiletical safety net, guaranteeing at least a minimal return on the sermon and that no sermon will ultimately fail.

**13 EXPOSITORY PREACHING MOST OPTIMALLY STEWARDS MY TIME.**

In my earliest forays into preaching, determining which text to preach was often nerve-wracking. After much prayer and Bible-page turning, I would often still be unsettled. On some occasions every verse seemed to scream "preach me," while on other occasions every

verse seemed silent. In either event the problem was the same—how do I determine which verse to preach?

With expository preaching, you typically just preach the next verses. This saves time in the passage-selection process. It also saves you time in your sermon preparation process, as you can carry forward your week-to-week study.

### **13** EXPOSITORY PREACHING ENSURES BALANCE IN THE PULPIT.

As God's divine Word, the Bible is perfectly balanced. God's chosen emphases are superintended and impossible to improve upon. Expository preaching naturally lets God speak what he has spoken, and emphasize what he desires to emphasize. It prevents hobbyhorse preaching, dodging difficult passages, or reverting to sugar-stick sermons. Biblical exposition lets the text speak, which lets God himself speak.

Great preachers master the art and science of preaching. While artistic diversity is appropriate and expected, the science of preaching not so much. And when it comes to the science of preaching, I'm sold on biblical exposition, and I hope you are too.

*The Sermon Cannot Do Any Good*

# UNLESS CHRIST IS IN IT

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*Charles Spurgeon*

A Welsh minister who was preaching last Sabbath at the chapel of my dear brother, Jonathan George, was saying, that Christ was the sum and substance of the gospel, and he broke out into this story:—A young man had been preaching in the presence of a venerable divine, and after he had done he went to the old minister, and said, “What do you think of my sermon?”

“A very poor sermon indeed,” said he.

“A poor sermon?” said the young man, “it took me a long time to study it.”

“Ay, no doubt of it.”

“Why, did you not think my explanation of the text a very good one?”

“Oh yes,” said the old preacher, “very good indeed.”

“Well, then, why do you say it is a poor sermon? Didn't you think the metaphors were appropriate and the arguments conclusive?”

“Yes, they were very good as far as that goes, but still it was a very poor sermon.”

“Will you tell me why you think it a poor sermon?”

“Because,” said he, “there was no Christ in it.”

“Well,” said the young man, “Christ was not in the text; we are not to be preaching Christ always, we must preach what is in the text.”

So the old man said, “Don't you know young man that from every town, and every village, and every little hamlet in England, wherever it may be, there is a road to London?”

“Yes,” said the young man.

“Ah!” said the old divine “and so from every text in Scripture, there is a road to the metropolis of the Scriptures, that is Christ. And my dear brother, your business is when you get to a text, to say, ‘Now, what is the road to Christ?’ and then preach a sermon running along the road towards the great metropolis—Christ. And,” said he, “I have never yet found a text that had not got a road to Christ in it, and if I ever do find one that has not a road to Christ in it, I will make one; I will go over hedge and ditch but I would get at my Master, for the sermon cannot do any good unless there is a savour of Christ in it.”

*About the*

# CONTRIBUTORS

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