

# EXPOSITOR

A PUBLICATION OF ONEPASSION MINISTRIES



DELIVERING  
the  
SERMON

JOHN MACARTHUR  
DELIVERING THE  
EXPOSITION

---

STEVEN J. LAWSON  
DISTINGUISHING MARKS OF  
EFFECTIVE DELIVERY

---

FRED G. ZASPEL  
THE SPIRIT AND THE WORD:  
REFLECTIONS ON  
SPIRIT-EMPOWERED PREACHING



ISSUE

08

NOV/DEC15



## Tour Scotland & England *for Free with Dr. Steven J. Lawson*

---

When a Pastor refers 10 couples to register for the 2016 Scottish and English Reformation Tour with Dr. Steven Lawson, the cost of the tour will be waived for the Pastor and his wife. All accommodations, stated meals, taxes, gratuities, luxury coaches, airport transfers, dynamic conference times with Dr. Lawson, and concierge service from Sovereign's Guardian Angels throughout the entire journey will be included in this once in a lifetime trip occurring May 17-25, 2016.\*

Dr. Lawson will personally guide you through historic venues in Edinburgh and London, where the Scottish and English Reformation occurred. It was here that epic movements were birthed that shaped Western Civilization for centuries to come. We will walk where John Knox preached the gospel and shook Scotland to its core. We will see where the martyrs of Queen Mary I, otherwise known as "Bloody Mary", were put to death at the stake in London. We will see where many of the Puritan leaders, such spiritual giants as John Bunyan, John Owen, and Isaac Watts, were buried in Bunhill Fields in this famous city.

We hope that you will take advantage of this special opportunity for Pastors and join us on this enriching experience that will intertwine history with all five senses.

---

For more information please visit our website, [onepassionjourneys.com](http://onepassionjourneys.com), or call Sovereign Experiences at: 877-661-6458 ext. 103



Space is limited.

\*NOT Included: Airfare, excess baggage rates, meals not included in the itinerary, all items of a personal nature such as laundry, cleaning, telephone, telex or fax expenses, beverages including tea and coffee (except at breakfast), wines, liquors or soft drinks.

FLORIDA SELLER OF TRAVEL #ST35876

STEVEN J. LAWSON, PRESIDENT, ONEPASSION MINISTRIES

**T** rue expository preaching always involves a lengthy, full treatment of the biblical text before us. When Ezra stood before the people of Israel in Nehemiah 8, he read “from morning until midday, before the men and women and those who could understand; and the ears of all the people were attentive to the Book of the Law” (Neh 8:3b).

The service went from sunrise to high noon, from 6:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. It was a six hour period of time. Obviously, this was a unique setting and situation. Every sermon is not to be six hours long. He did not cut it short; his treatment of the Word was *lengthy*. But our delivery should be long enough to be deep. This was not the scene we see at many church’s in the U.S.—a twenty-minute sermon and a twenty-minute invitation. This was not the spiritual fare at the average “seeker” church—one hour of syrupy choruses and a twenty-minute pep talk from someone sitting on a stool. No, this was a *full* treatment of the Word. Ezra presented the Word without watering it down.

Careful Bible exposition requires considerable time in the pulpit. It takes times for there to be an introduction, transition, homiletical points, explanation, word studies, cross references, historical background, thematic context, authorial intent, application, illustration, exhortation, persuasion, and conclusion. It always takes longer to get a 747 off the runway than it does a crop duster. So it is with preaching. An in-depth sermon requires full-length exposition.

Early in my pastoral ministry, one of the matriarchs of the church I pastored said “Pastor, your sermons are becoming too long.” I said, “Well, ma’am, it all depends on the size of the cup you bring to church. If you bring a little thimble, it will not take me long to fill it up. May God enlarge your heart for the things of His kingdom.” Sometimes I am asked to speak in a seminary chapel, and the dean or president will say to me, “We want you to model exposition for the students. You have twenty minutes to preach.” The fact is, I cannot model exposition in a compressed period of time—not a true exposition of the Scripture.

Again, this is not to say that every sermon should last several hours. There are many variables that need to be taken into consideration concerning how long to preach. Some of those factors are our own giftedness, where our congregation is spiritually, and the dynamics of the particular service you are preaching in. But there needs to be a full disclosure of the text, and such a weighty event cannot be short-circuited.

The issue of *Expositor* magazine you currently hold in your hand explores the subject of sermon delivery and the components necessary for such delivery to be God-honoring, Christ-exalting, Holy-Spirit-filled, and Word-centered. ♦



*Steven J. Lawson*

# FEATURES

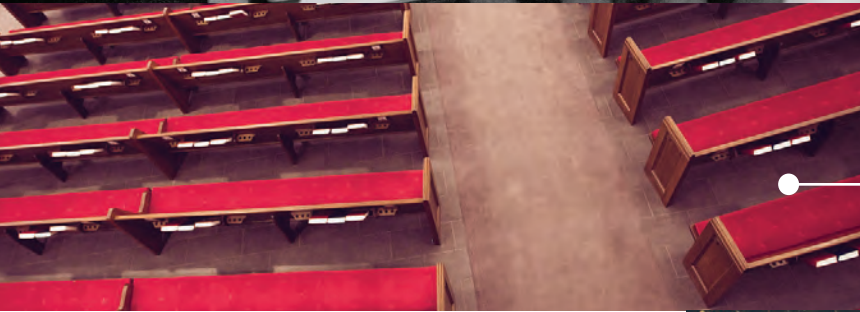
06

**Distinguishing Marks of Effective Delivery**  
by Steven J. Lawson



14

**Delivering the Exposition**  
by John MacArthur



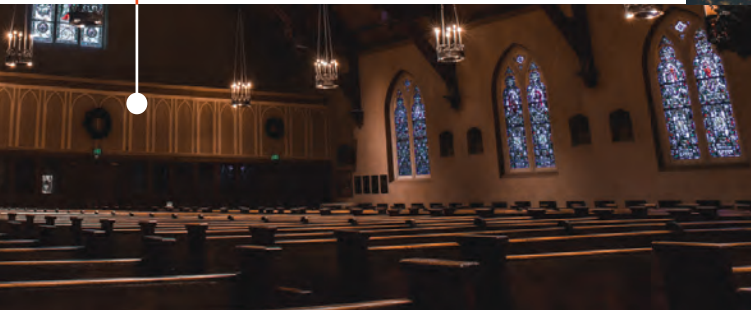
24

**Preaching Christ in Triplicate:  
Improving by Applying the  
Three Offices of Christ**  
by David W. Hall



20

**The Spirit and The Word:  
Reflections on  
Spirit-Empowered Preaching**  
by Fred G. Zaspel



**After Preparation—  
Before Preaching**  
by David Strain

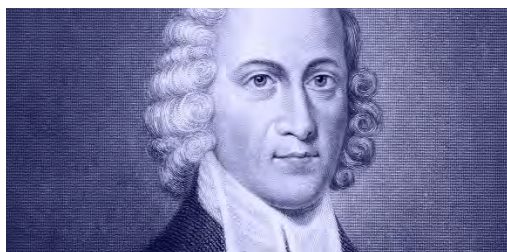
**30**



**34**

**Hearing the Sermon:  
The Listener's Responsibilities**  
by Guy M. Richard

## DEPARTMENTS



**40**

**LONG LINE OF GODLY MEN**

The Life and Legacy of  
Jonathan Edwards, pt. 1  
by Steven J. Lawson



**44**

**THE STUDY**

Origen on the Discipline of Prayer  
by Dustin W. Bengé

**EXPOSITOR**

**ONEPASSION**

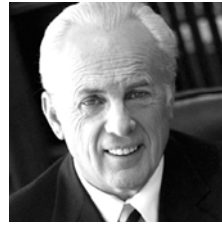


NOV/DEC15 ISSUE 8 © 2015 ONEPASSION MINISTRIES EXECUTIVE EDITOR *Steven J. Lawson* EDITOR *Dustin W. Bengé*  
DESIGN DIRECTOR *Dustin W. Bengé* MARKETING DIRECTOR *Grace Anne Lawson* PROOFREADER *C. Rebecca Rine*

Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quotations are taken from the New American Standard Bible®, Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission. ([www.Lockman.org](http://www.Lockman.org)) SUBSCRIPTION INFORMATION: Annual subscription price (6 issues): \$30.00. You can subscribe to *Expositor Magazine* by MAIL: *Expositor Magazine*, P.O. Box 461508, Escondido, CA 92046 ONLINE: [www.expositormagazine.com](http://www.expositormagazine.com) EMAIL: [expositormagazine@pcspublink.com](mailto:expositormagazine@pcspublink.com) PHONE: 855-492-1670. *Expositor* is published bi-monthly by OnePassion, Inc. P.O. Box 601649, Dallas, TX 75360. Periodicals Postage Paid at Dallas, TX 75382 and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to *Expositor Magazine*, P.O. Box 461508, Escondido, CA 92046.



**Steven J. Lawson** is president of OnePassion Ministries, professor of preaching at The Master's Seminary, teaching fellow with Ligonier Ministries, and author of over twenty books, including *The Daring Mission of William Tyndale*.



**John MacArthur** is pastor-teacher of Grace Community Church in Sun Valley, CA, and president of The Master's College and Seminary. He is the author of over one hundred books and author and editor of *The MacArthur Study Bible*.



**Fred G. Zaspel** is a pastor at Reformed Baptist Church in Franconia, Pennsylvania, and adjunct professor of systematic theology at Calvary Baptist Seminary in Landsdale, PA. He is the author of numerous books and articles.



**David W. Hall** serves as the senior pastor of Midway Presbyterian Church, Powder Springs, GA. He is the author or editor of over 20 books and numerous essays. He was the Executive Director of Calvin500.



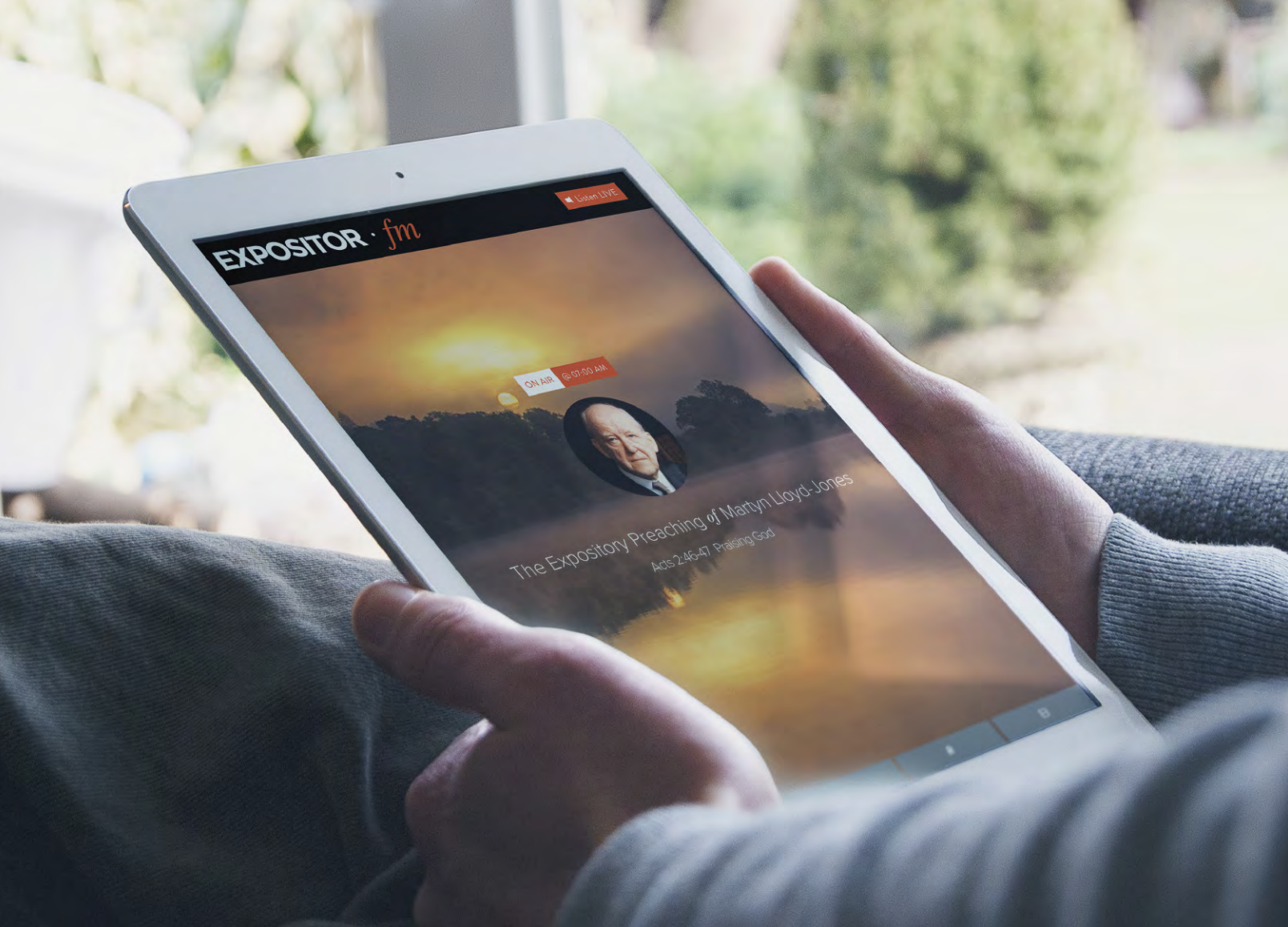
**David Strain** is the senior minister of First Presbyterian Church, Jackson, MS. Born in Scotland, he has pastored in London, England and is currently pursuing a D. Min. at Reformed Theological Seminary.



**Guy M. Richard** serves as the senior minister of First Presbyterian Church, Gulfport, MS. He has published two books, *What is Faith?* and *The Supremacy of God in the Theology of Samuel Rutherford*.



**Dustin W. Bengé** is the editor of *Expositor* magazine and Director of Operations for OnePassion Ministries. He is also a Ph.D. candidate at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, KY.




# EXPOSITOR • *fm*

24 HOUR INTERNET RADIO • PROCLAIMING THE LIFE-CHANGING WORD OF GOD TO ALL THE NATIONS

Experience in-depth training and instruction from trusted evangelical preachers and teachers, Martyn Lloyd-Jones, James Montgomery Boice, S. Lewis Johnson, John MacArthur, Steven J. Lawson, and more. Be instructed 24 hours a day in verse-by-verse exposition for the renewal of your mind and transformation of your life.

VISIT OUR WEBSITE OR DOWNLOAD THE APP AT EXPOSITOR.FM

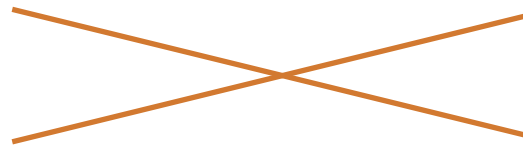




**DISTINGUISHING  
MARKS OF  
EFFECTIVE  
SERMON DELIVERY**

STEVEN J. LAWSON





**G**od is concerned not only with *what* an expositor says in the pulpit, but with *how* it is said. Of first importance is the doctrine that is proclaimed. The substance of the message is always the priority. Nevertheless, the delivery of the sermon is also of vital importance. It matters little if the preacher is well studied in the Word if he cannot communicate the truth effectively.

Picture, if you would, two preachers. Both men hold to the same doctrinal standard. Both were trained at the same seminary. Both have the same exegetical skills in the biblical text. Both know the original languages equally well. They both are grounded in the same principles of sound hermeneutics. However, despite their equal footing in what they know, one will be far more effective in his pulpit ministry. The reason often lies in the simple fact that his sermon delivery is far more effective than the other man's. Simply put, delivery matters.

The extent of a preacher's knowledge matters little if he is not able to skillfully present what he knows to his listeners. No matter how accurate he may be with his analysis of the biblical text, the delivery of the sermon is critically important. Many times, the preacher who knows theology the best is, sadly, the least effective in the pulpit. The one who knows less can better convey the gospel than the one with more degrees after his name. We must not mistake knowledge for sound preaching. Every preacher must reconsider the distinguishing marks of what makes for a successful sermon delivery.

### **MARK #1: HUMILITY**

Effective sermon delivery begins with the humility of the preacher. To be powerfully used by God, an effective expositor must be one who is bowed low in yielded submission before the lordship of Christ. The preacher who stoops the lowest in self-renunciation will be the one lifted up most highly by God. It is the humble man with a broken heart through whom the Holy Spirit works. The preacher who has died to self is the one who is controlled by the Spirit.

Tragically, too many preachers suffer from talking about themselves. They are relentlessly talking about their experiences and their exploits. They be-

come the hero of their own stories. They relate everything to their own lives. Is it any wonder that their delivery has the abrasiveness of coarse sandpaper? Is it any mystery that they are perpetually rubbing people the wrong way? Pride in the preacher is a deathblow to effective delivery.

Consider the great English evangelist of the eighteenth century, George Whitefield. This amazing figure preached the gospel with unparalleled success on both sides of the Atlantic. Yet the key to his effectiveness principally lay not in his giftedness, but in his godliness. He was a genuinely humble man. When urged to make a name for himself, Whitefield responded, “Let the name of Whitefield perish, but let Christ be glorified.” He would often say, “Let the name of Whitefield die so that the cause of Christ may live.” Likewise, “Let the name of George Whitefield be forgotten and blotted out as long as the name of the Lord Jesus Christ is known.”

Let every preacher clothe himself with such lowliness of mind. Pride is the chief threat to any herald of the truth. Humility is the chief virtue in the pulpit. Lowliness of mind is the first distinguishing mark.

## MARK #2: AUTHORITY

A successful sermon delivery must also be marked by a note of divine authority. A necessary command in the pulpit rests exclusively upon the authority of Scripture. The best sermon delivery is the one most filled with “the Bible says.” The greatest eloquence is “Thus says the Lord.” An effective expositor *must* be speaking the Word of God. Further, he must be deeply convinced that what he says is true. He must believe that his listeners *must* hear what he says, and that those who hear him *must* act upon the truth. He is not giving suggestions. Nor is he laying out options. Rather, he is speaking with the authority of God Himself.

Those who heard Jesus preach recognized the authority with which He spoke (Matt 7:28–29).

The Apostle Paul spoke with the same authority. He grounded his own words in the authoritative Word of God: “This we say to you by the authority of the Lord Jesus” (1 Thess 4:15). In like manner, Paul instructed Titus, “These things speak and exhort and reprove with all authority. Let no one disregard you” (Titus 2:15). Speaking with divine authority is a fundamental prerequisite for every preacher.

This kind of authority enables a preacher to drive home his point in convincing fashion. There must be a penetrating directness to his delivery. He must not only speak *to* his listeners, but *through* them, to their hearts. His words must cut to the bone. Theodore Beza said of the delivery of John Calvin, “his every word weighed a pound.” In other words, the Genevan Reformer spoke with an authority grounded in Scripture itself. Theologian J. I. Packer agrees, “Preaching that does not display divine authority, both in its content and in its manner, is not the substance but only the shadow of the real

thing.” Packer recognizes, “The Bible is the real preacher and the role of the man in the pulpit...is simply to let the passages say their piece through him.” The preacher is merely the mouthpiece for the Word of God.

## MARK #3: SIMPLICITY

Moreover, an effective sermon delivery should be easy for the listener to follow, not complicated or hard. A preacher should be linear in his delivery, not circular or scattered. He must stay with laser-like focus on the central thrust of his text.

Simplicity of movement in a sermon requires having a clearly developed central idea. There must be one dominant theme that is being expounded, not two or three. No matter how many homiletical points a preacher may have, every sermon must be a *one*-point sermon. That is to say, it must be organized around one dominant idea. If not, the delivery will be disjointed and disconnected. Simplicity is good; complexity is not.

A well-structured sermon outline is important to any effective delivery. Whether the homiletical headings are verbally stated or not, there nevertheless must be a definite structure in the preacher’s mind. This skeleton of thought must direct everything he says. This scheme will cause him to stay on message. Many sermons fail because they try to say too many different things rather than reinforcing one essential truth.

John MacArthur cautions, “Avoid complex outlines; they cause your listeners to miss your major points. The most helpful way of emphasizing your theme and outline is repetition. As you move from one point to the next, use brief transitional sentences to review the points you have already covered. Re-state the central idea of the message as often as appropriate.” In other words, effective preaching is easy to follow and understand.

## MARK #4: ACCURACY

Effectiveness in sermon delivery also requires accuracy of speech. A life-changing, truth-filled sermon is crystal clear in what it says. Though truth is profound, it must be presented in a manner which is easy to understand. A successful sermon is unclouded and coherent. As Philip Ryken notes, “Expository preaching means making God’s Word plain.” There is no virtue in being an enigma in the pulpit.

The Reformers affirmed the doctrine of the perspicuity of the Scripture. They claimed that the Bible is understandable to the common man in matters of salvation and Christian living. In this, we agree. We affirm the perspicuity of genuine biblical preaching. William Perkins, the gifted Puritan, wrote in his classic book on preaching, *The Art of Prophesying*: “Preaching must be plain...It is a by-word among us: ‘It was a very plain sermon.’ And I say, the plainer, the better.” Plainness in preaching is a priority for effective sermons. The clarity of the gospel should be evident in expository preaching.

MacArthur writes, “Good preaching begins with *clarity* of content. And clarity begins with a single, easy-to-recognize theme.” Too often, an expositor’s delivery is cluttered with so many small bits of information that they obscure the big picture of what he is trying to say. A preacher can be so focused upon the micro that he loses sight of the macro. As a result, his listeners are lost in the complex minutia of the message.

### MARK #5: FERVENCY

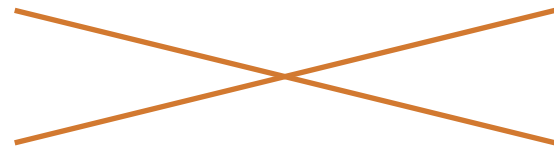
Great pulpit delivery is marked by the passion of the preacher. He must be on fire with the truth if it is to burn its way into the hearts of his listeners. Without the fervency of delivery, the sermon devolves into dry-as-dust lecturing. If there is no passion, there is no preaching. Preaching must come through a man who is consumed with the truth. An impassioned preacher is contagious. The truth he proclaims spreads like wildfire from the pulpit to the pew. An enflamed heart in preaching works its way into the souls of his listeners.

In a word, the expositor must be *passionate*. “Nothing,” Richard Baxter said, “is more indecent than a dead preacher speaking to dead sinners the living truth of the living God.” The preacher’s fiery convictions cause his delivery to burn its way into the hearts of the congregation. His ardent inner being causes his message to engage his listeners. Biblical preaching must come from the life of one who is fervent for the glory of God, zealous for the Word of God, and aflame for the souls of men, women, and youth.

A discouraged preacher once asked Spurgeon what he must do in order to draw a crowd like those who were coming to hear him. “Simply douse yourself in gasoline, strike a match, and set yourself on fire,” Spurgeon answered. “Then people will come to watch you burn.” His point was clear: the preacher must be ignited with holy passion for God if others are to be drawn to Christ.

Walter Kaiser likewise explains the indispensable place of passion in preaching. Where there is passion in the sermon, the truth becomes contagious. Kaiser writes: “From the beginning of the sermon to its end, the all-engrossing force of the text and the God who speaks through that text must dominate our whole being. With the burning power of that truth on our heart and lips, every thought, emotion, and act of the will must be so captured by that truth that it springs forth with excitement, joy, sincerity, and reality as an evident token that God’s Spirit is in that word.” Such passion makes a sermon come with burning power.

Kaiser concludes, “Away with all the mediocre, lifeless, boring, and lackluster orations offered as pitiful substitutes for the powerful Word of the living Lord. If that Word from God does not thrill the proclaimer and fill [him] . . . with an intense desire to glorify God and do His will, how shall we ever expect it to have any greater effect on our hearers?” Dispassionate preaching betrays the message itself.



THE PREACHER’S FIERY  
CONVICTIONS CAUSE HIS  
DELIVERY TO BURN ITS  
WAY INTO THE HEARTS  
OF THE CONGREGATION.  
HIS ARDENT INNER BEING  
CAUSES HIS MESSAGE TO  
ENGAGE HIS LISTENERS.  
BIBLICAL PREACHING  
MUST COME FROM THE  
LIFE OF ONE WHO IS  
FERVENT FOR THE GLORY  
OF GOD, ZEALOUS FOR  
THE WORD OF GOD,  
AND AFLAME FOR THE  
SOULS OF MEN, WOMEN,  
AND YOUTH.

### MARK #6: SOBRIETY

Every preacher must deliver the message as though life, eternity, heaven, and hell are hanging in the balance. He must be earnest as he preaches. The prophets called this “the burden of the Lord” (Zech 9:1). Such sobriety is a blood-earnestness, a weightiness, a gravitas that grips the preacher. He must preach like Richard Baxter, who said, “I preached as never sure to

preach again. I preached as a dying man to dying men.” Perhaps such earnestness is the most missing characteristic of the modern day pulpit.

Indicting all indifferent preaching, John Stott sounds a much-needed alarm: “To handle issues of eternal life and death as if we were discussing nothing more serious than the weather, and to do so in a listless and lackadaisical manner, is to be inexcusably frivolous...For one thing is certain: if we ourselves grow sleepy over our message, our listeners can hardly be expected to stay awake.” To the contrary, let us preach with urgency.

Concerning this sense of sobriety, John MacArthur calls us to “feel deeply about the truth you are to preach. If you were giving a book review or reciting an autobiographical vignette,

his voice to resonate in the ears of his listeners. Pressing urgency causes his words to be arresting to his hearers.

Martyn Lloyd-Jones speaks to this point of urgency in preaching. He argues that passionless preaching is not preaching at all:

If the preacher does not suggest this sense of urgency, that he is there between God and men, speaking between time and eternity, he has no business to be in a pulpit. There is no place for calm, cool, scientific detachment in these matters. That may possibly be all right in a philosopher, but it is unthinkable in a preacher....Surely the whole object of this act is to persuade people. The preacher does not just say things with the attitude of “take it or leave

it.” He desires to persuade them of the truth of his message; he wants them to see it; he is trying to do something to them, to influence them. He is not giving a learned disquisition on a text, he is not giving a display of his own knowledge; he is dealing with these living souls and he wants to move them, to take them with him, to lead them to the Truth....if this element is not present, whatever else it may be, it is not preaching. All these points bring out the difference between delivering a lecture and preaching, or between an essay and a sermon.

### MARK #8: PERSONALITY

Every expositor is uniquely gifted by God with a one-of-a-kind personality. It is imperative that he preach in his own unique style. One mistake that some preachers make is they try to emulate, if not copy, other noted preachers. While every preacher should learn

from other gifted men, each expositor must discover and develop his own voice in preaching. He must speak as individually as God has made him to be. This requires that he preach within the confines of his own intelligence, temperament, and background.

In his famous 1877 Yale *Lectures on Preaching*, Phillips Brooks defined “real preaching” as “divine truth through personality.” This is to say, the truth preached must be flavored with each man’s unique personality. In other words, be yourself. Or put another way, be natural. Preach with your own ac-



it would be different. Remember that expositors have a mandate from God to preach the truth and that eternal consequences hang in the balance.”

### MARK #7: URGENCY

The expositor must also be marked by a compelling sense of urgency as he preaches. He must speak to men and women as those who must respond *now*. There must be immediacy about his message. He must convey that the truth of his message requires action today, not tomorrow. Importunity causes

cent. Each expositor must be careful not to be someone who he is not. If he does, his delivery will be stifled. At the end of the day, every preacher must utilize the specific abilities entrusted to him by God.

The preacher should be Christ-focused rather than being focused upon other preachers. They should be riveted upon the greatness and glory of God. Lloyd-Jones urged all preachers:

Be natural; forget yourself; be so absorbed in what you are doing and in the realization of the presence of God, and in the glory and the greatness of the Truth that you are preaching....that you forget yourself completely.... Self is the greatest enemy of the preacher, more so than in the case of any other man in society. And the only way to deal with self is to be so taken up with, and so enraptured by, the glory of what you are doing, that you forget yourself altogether.

### MARK #9: VARIETY

A well-delivered sermon should also be marked by elements of variety. The tone of the preacher's voice should vary. He should not be loud the entire time he is in the pulpit. Neither should he be consistently hushed or speaking in soft tones. With either extreme, he will be hard to listen to. Instead, the volume of his voice should rise and fall. He should be both loud and soft, having both a prophetic edge and a pastoral touch. His approach should be both intense and casual, his tone both high pitched and low pitched. Like the rising and receding of the ocean's tide, the voice of the preacher should both increase and decrease in its expression.

Further, the preacher should have a variety in his vocabulary. There should be diversity in his manners of expression. While teaching by repetition is important, the constant reusing of the same words is a distraction. Creative and nuanced word choice keeps the listener's ear attentive to what is being said. Without this assortment, one's listeners will lose interest. The habitual use of the same word soon reaches a point of diminishing returns. In such cases, the preacher sounds more like a broken record than a finely tuned speaker.

Also, varied diction reaches a broader cross section of people. Some words are common terms that readily connect with the average person in the pew. Other words are more rare and enrich the listening of well-educated professionals. Yet other words are far less demanding and connect with teenagers and even children. The expositor should learn to layer his words. He should address each kind of person in his congregation, rotating his modes of expression and saying the same thing in multiple ways. This requires that the preacher be constantly reading and enlarging his word choices. Using a thesaurus in sermon preparation can be an invaluable aid in writing a manuscript.

### MARK #10: CHARITY

With any effective delivery, the preacher should convey a large-hearted concern for his congregation. The success of any pulpit presentation often rests in how the preacher comes across to the listeners. They must sense that the one expounding the Scripture desires God's best for them. If he tears down, he must then build up. Every expositor must "speak the truth in love" (Eph 4:15). Not only the message matters, but so does the motive and the manner with which it is delivered. Truth spoken in love wins the day in every pulpit. Paul wrote, "the goal of our instruction is love" (1 Tim 1:5).

Speaking to this very point, the Apostle Paul wrote, "If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal" (1 Cor 13:1). In other words, the preacher may be right in his exposition, but if he is devoid of love, he comes across as, simply, a loud noise. Paul adds, "If I have the *gift of prophecy*, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing" (1 Cor 13:2). This is to say, no matter how much the preacher knows and no matter how right he is, speaking any truth without love is absolutely meaningless.

Moreover, Paul concludes, "And if I give all my possessions to feed the *poor*, and if I surrender my body to be burned, but do not have love, it profits me nothing" (1 Cor 13:3). Regardless of how committed a preacher is to the truth, even if he is a martyr in the flames, if he lacks compassion, his preaching amounts to nothing.

Genuine love comes across in many ways. It is demonstrated with a warm countenance in the pulpit. It is conveyed with an endearing smile. It is expressed with eye contact. It is communicated with warm and inviting gestures. It is expressed with tears of compassion. It is also made known with a sincere voice and well-focused sermon.

### MARK #11: LIBERTY

A preacher must feel an unhindered liberty as he stands to speak. He must feel a freedom of expression when he delivers his sermon. . A detailed preaching manuscript can be helpful in sermon preparation, but at the same time, it can be a hindrance to effective delivery. A preacher who is chained to a full manuscript may never be able to speak with spontaneity in the pulpit. With an overdependence upon notes, he may instead be unnecessarily confined to a straightjacket. The meticulous preparation of the sermon lays a firm foundation, but can also cause the message to be top heavy and topple.

If the preacher's head is buried in his manuscript or notes for 30 to 45 minutes, it will become virtually impossible for him to engage with his hearers. Rather, it is best to rely less on notes and to interact with the congregation instead. Eye contact is critical to any effective delivery. The preacher must be able to read his listeners as he speaks if he is to know where

EVERY PREACHER SHOULD GIVE CONSIDERATION TO HOW HE SAYS WHAT HE SAYS WHEN STANDING IN THE PULPIT. HE SHOULD KEEP WATCH OVER BOTH HIS DOCTRINE AND HIS DELIVERY. IF WE BELIEVE RIGHT BUT SPEAK WRONGLY, WE HAVE NOT YET COMMUNICATED THE TRUTH.

they are and what needs to be stressed.

In most cases, young preachers need more notes in the pulpit. They have a smaller body of knowledge in the Scripture to draw from in a spontaneous and relaxed fashion. But as

preachers progress through thirty or forty years of ministry, they will draw from a deeper well of truth learned. This was certainly the case with Jonathan Edwards. Earlier in his ministry, he worked off a full manuscript. But over the years, as his knowledge of the Bible increased, the size of his manuscript decreased. Such will most likely be true in your preaching ministry.


The advantages of a partial manuscript for sermon delivery are many. Reliance on a full manuscript will, at least to some extent, inhibit establishing good eye contact with the congregation. Looking into the eyes of the one to whom you are speaking is critically important in any successful communication. Moreover, a less than full manuscript allows room for the Holy Spirit to more easily add to one's notes taken into the pulpit. It facilitates spontaneity in the pulpit that can be impactful and compelling. With many preachers, approximately thirty percent more material than is in the notes will be added in the heat of the preaching moment. It is often the case that this thirty percent is among the best things they say in the sermon.

#### HOW YOU SAY WHAT YOU SAY

One's pulpit delivery is crucial to the overall success of the sermon itself. Granted, the substance of the message is most important. But the reason people listen to one preacher over another, especially if both are teaching the same thing, often pertains to the manner with which the message is given. The way the message comes across impacts the receptivity of the hearers.

Every preacher should give consideration to *how* he says *what* he says when standing in the pulpit. He should keep watch over both his doctrine and his delivery. If we believe right but speak wrongly, we have not yet communicated the truth. ♦





LISTEN to the WEEKLY  
DEVOTIONAL PODCAST



## A NEW PODCAST COMING SOON FROM STEVEN J. LAWSON

In Matthew 16:24 Jesus said, “If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me.” *Following Christ* is a new weekly devotional podcast from OnePassion Ministries featuring Dr. Steven J. Lawson’s insight into the sayings, commands, and exhortations of the Lord Jesus. Listen to *Following Christ* to grow deeper in your faith as you learn how to follow Christ.

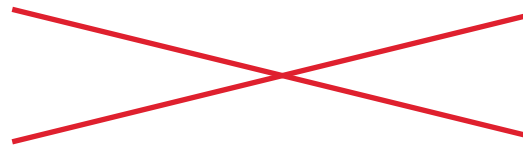
VISIT OUR WEBSITE TO LEARN MORE  
[ONEPASSIONMINISTRIES.ORG](http://ONEPASSIONMINISTRIES.ORG)



**DELIVERING  
THE  
EXPOSITION**

JOHN MACARTHUR





ver the years I have had a lot to say about preaching. Of course, I've always been an advocate of verse-by-verse biblical exposition. It's my delight through our seminary and annual Shepherds' Conferences to train preachers and help equip them with the tools they need to unpack the meaning of the text. My books and other writings are full of instructions and exhortations for preachers, all with one consistent

theme: "Preach the word . . . in season and out of season" (2 Tim 4:2).

Naturally, my emphasis has been weighted heavily toward the task of careful study and preparation. The *substance* of a sermon interests me far more than the preacher's *style*. That, of course, reflects the Bible's own priorities. Scripture is emphatic about the need for diligent study and rightly handling the word of truth (2 Tim 2:15)—while it says little or nothing about the preacher's posture, gestures, or tone of voice.

Nevertheless, how a preacher delivers the message is by no means a trivial matter. It's possible to preach a perfectly sound sermon in such a tiresome and tedious way that the preacher actually undermines the very truth he is attempting to proclaim. A good sermon poorly preached can turn people away from the truth as quickly as a poor sermon skillfully preached.

There's a famous (possibly apocryphal) story about a time when Alexander MacLaren slipped in unannounced to hear a young preacher. The younger man, unaware of MacLaren's presence, began by saying he had been too busy to prepare a fresh sermon for the evening, so he was going to preach one of Dr. MacLaren's. He read the message in such a droning monotone that afterward, MacLaren told him, "I don't mind if you preach my sermons, but if you're going to read them like that, please don't say they're mine."

Elders must be "able to teach" (1 Tim 3:2; 2 Tim 2:24). A lack of skill in public speaking disqualifies a man from pulpit ministry just as surely as theological ineptitude does. Anyone who makes God's Word seem dull and tiresome simply doesn't belong in the pulpit. Indeed, this is one of the major factors to consider when determining a man's call to preach: can he deliver a sermon in a way that commands and holds the attention of an audience? Does he speak with such *clarity*, *authority*, and *passion* that people are edified

by hearing the message? Or does he bore them and lull them to sleep? If it's the latter, the man is most likely not called to preach. He is certainly not *ready* to preach.

Preaching is like playing the piano in that the basic techniques can be learned and improved. But preaching with excellence requires God-given gifts, and such gifts are by no means universal. Not everyone can draw large audiences or preach as well as George Whitefield, Charles Spurgeon, or Martyn Lloyd-Jones. (It's worth mentioning also that no preacher should be motivated by a desire for prestige or celebrity. None of the great preachers in church history craved fame or admiration in the first place. What they aspired to was faithfulness.)

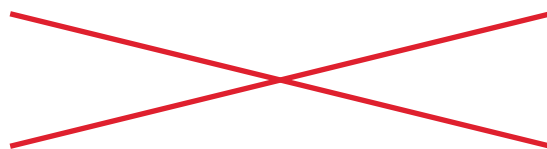
However, anyone who is called to preach can learn to deliver the message more effectively by observing a few basic principles. I've already mentioned three of the most important ones: *clarity*, *authority*, and *passion*. Let's consider how those qualities are important in preaching.

### CLARITY

Several factors bring clarity (or a lack thereof) to a sermon. The most obvious is the logical flow of the sermon itself. This starts, of course, in the preparation stage, and it's related to the sermon's content, but the preacher's pace and rhythm can also contribute to (or detract from) the clarity of the message. Speak too rapidly and your audience will not be able to keep up. Speak too slowly and the listener's own train of thought will take him elsewhere. Punctuate your thoughts with long pauses and his mind will fill those gaps with wandering thoughts. Each of those mistakes will cause your hearers to tune out. If you lose your congregation for even a few seconds, you undermine the clarity of your own message.

A clear outline helps your hearers follow the sequence of your arguments. It moves them along logically so they can clearly see inescapable implications in the text and therefore make their own personal applications. Repetition of the logical points pulls people back into the flow of thought. When organizing my sermons, I sometimes think of myself as a kind of lawyer making a reasoned argument that leads inescapably to the truth God is revealing for our blessing and His glory.

Another major key to clarity is the ability to make yourself heard with precision. This may seem pretty basic, but it is evidently not an obvious enough point for many. I have heard more good sermons ruined by mumbled sentences, slurred-together syllables, and indistinct consonants than by any other combination of delivery-style *faux pas*. Every word in your sermon needs to be pronounced clearly, completely, and precisely. Listen closely to any news reader or professional announcer and notice how carefully they articulate every syllable. The best preachers do the same thing. Sloppy pronunciation won't motivate your hearers to listen more closely; it will encourage them to tune you out.



PREACHING IS LIKE  
PLAYING THE PIANO  
IN THAT THE BASIC  
TECHNIQUES CAN BE  
LEARNED AND IMPROVED.  
BUT DOING IT WITH  
EXCELLENCE REQUIRES  
GOD-GIVEN GIFTS, AND  
SUCH GIFTS ARE BY NO  
MEANS UNIVERSAL.

Similarly, it might seem obvious that public speakers need to speak up, but it is a common tendency of inexperienced speakers to do the opposite. Timidity causes the preacher to soften his tone, sometimes to the point of making him hard to understand. Ironically, this is a bigger problem today than it was in the years before electronic microphones. In the era of Spurgeon and before, preachers had to shout to be heard by large audiences. Spurgeon once preached to a crowd of twenty thousand in the Crystal Palace (a glass structure with the acoustics of a greenhouse rather than an orchestra hall). But people who stood on the fringe of that crowd testified that they were able to hear every word clearly. People said George Whitefield could be heard and clearly understood up to two miles away when he spoke in the open air. Microphones have eliminated the need for sermons to be delivered at superhuman volumes like that, but many preachers nevertheless need to be encouraged to speak louder.

In all the elements of vocal style (volume, rhythm, tone, pitch, inflection, and so on), the key to keeping people's attention is *variety*. Monotony is the enemy of clarity. Other irritating vocal habits can likewise break your connection with the audience. It's a good idea to listen critically to recordings of your own sermons. We all sound differently from how we

think we sound inside our heads, and it can be a painful experience to hear ourselves the way others hear us. But a critical review of one's own delivery can be a helpful wake-up call, exposing bad mannerisms we didn't even know we had.

## AUTHORITY

A second vital characteristic of good preaching is *authority*. Of course, the preacher has no intrinsic authority of his own, but insofar as he proclaims and explains the Word of God accurately, he is delivering a message that comes with God's own authority, and his style should reflect that fact.

This, of course, the singular characteristic of Jesus' preaching that made His message so compelling to people who heard: "He was teaching them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes" (Matt 7:29). Matthew is pointing out that Jesus spoke with His own authority, whereas the scribes were constantly buttressing their teaching with citations from this or that rabbi or tradition. Jesus, in stark contrast, said things like, "You have heard that it was said . . . But I say to you" (Matt 5:21–22; 27–28; 33–34; 38–39; 43–44).

Still, what made Jesus' authority so definitive *as a preacher* was the character of His life. When the chief priests and council were looking for an excuse to put Him to death, they couldn't even find a credible false witness (Matt 26:59–60).

A similar principle applies to every preacher. The Word of God is inherently authoritative, so any preacher who pro-

claims it clearly and accurately is giving an authoritative message. Indeed, the preacher's authority comes from the biblical mandate to proclaim the Word of God as the King's own ambassador, speaking with the King's personal authority. "'We are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us'" (2 Cor 5:20).

That's true of every preacher, young or old. Consider Paul's charge to Timothy:

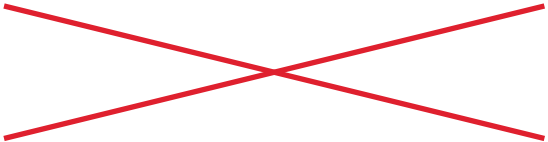
Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity. Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching. Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophecy when the council of elders laid their hands on you. Practice these things, immerse yourself in them, so that all may see your progress. Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers. (1 Tim 4:12–16)

The clear implication is that no preacher can have true authority in his delivery unless his own character is consistent with his message. Indeed, until a man is tested and proven above reproach, he is not ready to serve in any official capacity, much less stand in the pulpit and preach (1 Tim 3:1, 10). If the life of a preacher does not harmonize with his words, the resultant discord will drown out the inherent authority in the message, regardless of how well prepared and well delivered the sermon may be.

It is also possible to undermine the authority of the message with a weak style of delivery. Those scribes of Jesus' time, for example, were part of a movement that began centuries before, in Nehemiah's time. Their original goals were to preserve the record of Scripture meticulously; to teach its truths to the people of Judah; and thereby to halt that nation's frequent apostasies. But gradually, over several generations, the scribes themselves eroded the people's confidence in the authority of Scripture. They did this by incessantly citing human traditions and human authors as proofs of their doctrines rather than explaining Scripture with Scripture. Don't make that error.

Your tone of voice should also re-





## GENUINE HEARTFELT PASSION FROM THE PREACHER WILL DO FAR MORE THAN ANY VISUAL AID TO CAPTURE THE ATTENTION OF THE CONGREGATION AND HELP THEM REMEMBER THE LESSON.

flect the authority of the biblical message. Some preachers are so fearful of sounding dogmatic that they never state anything definitively. Rather than stressing the fact that the Bible has one true meaning and seeking to teach their people what that is, they will review all the alternative interpretations before timidly introducing the view they believe is right, with a weak version of “It seems to me. . .” I’ve heard preachers give five or more alternative interpretations of a passage without ever expressing an opinion on which view is right. That style of teaching is actually gaining popularity in these postmodern times, but it utterly lacks authority.

### PASSION


Closely related to the importance of preaching with authority is the necessity of preaching with genuine passion. Mar-

tyn Lloyd-Jones famously referred to preaching as “logic on fire.” He meant that good preaching must bring together *both* well-reasoned biblical content and intense passion. He wasn’t advocating passion *per se* (the crass brand of raw agitation whose sole purpose is to stir a crowd into a mindless emotional high), but a real, earnest conviction of the truth being proclaimed.

Genuine, heartfelt passion from the preacher will do far more than any visual aid to capture the attention of the congregation and help them remember the lesson. I often advise preachers: turn off PowerPoint, stop with the fill-in-the-blank hand-out sheets, and proclaim the truth of God’s Word with sincerity and fervor, energized by the Holy Spirit.

Baptists used to refer to this as *unction*: a manner of speaking that manifests earnest emotion about the truth being proclaimed. Unfortunately, the word *unction* took on a derogatory connotation in the wake of the charismatic movement, because so many blatant charlatans employed artificial enthusiasm as a substitute for meaningful content in their messages. But genuine passion has nothing to do with showmanship. It has everything to do with transparency, integrity, and a genuine love for the truth. In the delivery of a sermon, nothing should be theatrical in the sense that it is rehearsed acting. The passion has to be honest and natural—rising from love for Christ and zeal for His truth. Behind such zeal is a faithful, careful and precise study of the text that goes beyond the academic aspects of sermon preparation to capture the heart of the preacher with the glory and urgency of the doctrine taught in his text.

The influence of the charismatic movement has conditioned many Christians in our generation to assume that the only legitimate passions are giddy, whimsical, or even utterly irrational. That’s sheer folly. What may be most lacking in the church today is the polar opposite: a deep and thoughtful sobriety in the presence of God’s Word. God Himself commends such passion: “This is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word” (Isa 66:2). That is an especially vital passion for preachers to cultivate.

Let the truth set your heart ablaze, and the fire will be evident in your preaching. 





# Give Expositor as a Gift this Christmas



	U.S.	Canada	Foreign
One-Year Subscription	\$ 30 (6 issues delivered bi-monthly)	\$ 44	\$ 48
Two-Year Subscription	\$ 55 (a \$ 5 savings)	\$ 79	\$ 83
Three-Year Subscription	\$ 75 (a \$ 15 savings)	\$ 113	\$ 117

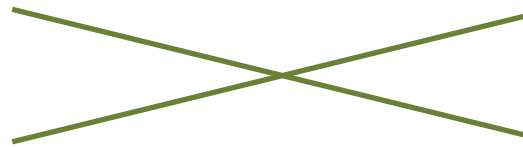
For your convenience, your subscription to *Expositor* magazine will continue with automatic renewal and a continuous service guarantee unless you ask us to stop. We will send you an email reminder before your subscription renews. You can stop or cancel at any time and receive a refund of any unmailed issues by contacting *Expositor* customer service.

Gift a Subscription at [ExpositorMagazine.com](http://ExpositorMagazine.com)  
or call toll-free 1-855-492-1670



**THE SPIRIT AND  
THE WORD:  
REFLECTIONS ON  
SPIRIT-EMPOWERED  
PREACHING**

**FRED G. ZASPEL**



**T**he familiar expression “the Spirit and the Word” captures well the biblical emphasis on the necessity of *both* the gospel *and* the sovereign work of the Spirit in preaching. Neither the “implicit faith” of Roman Catholicism nor the extra-biblical revelations of some charismatic types will do. The gospel is indeed “the power of God for salvation” (Rom 1:16), and the singular power and effectiveness of God’s Word is a theme that dominates Scripture from its opening pages onward. No other word but God’s is able to effect life and thoroughly equip God’s people for life and service for God. For both the claiming (1 Pet 1:23) and the perfecting (2 Tim 3:16–17; cf. Rom 16:25; Heb 4:12) of God’s people, there is no other message that will do.

We love—and insist on—this wonderful truth of the unique ability of God’s Word, and it is the great consideration that drives and shapes our preaching. And yet we never dare imagine that success in preaching is due to just so much human activity. If men and women are brought to life and built up in the faith by our preaching, it is only because God Himself has been at work in it: “our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction (1 Thess 1:5). It is not the Word alone that claims and transforms the hearts and lives of men and women. But neither is it the Spirit alone. It is “the Word and the Spirit”—the Spirit working by the Word.

This idea is reflected often in the New Testament. Sometimes particular emphasis is given to one side or the other, but the two are always held together.

Perhaps the most extended treatment of this theme is from the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 1–3. A kind of party spirit dominated the troubled church at Corinth. The church had enjoyed a variety of preachers—Paul, Peter, Apollos—and, as is always the case, personal preferences were expressed with regard to them, evidently to the point of faction: “I am of Paul,” “I of Cephas,” and so on. And it seems that *variety of preaching style* had come to mean too much. The expressions “cleverness of speech” (1:17), “superiority of speech or wisdom” (2:1), and “persuasive words of wisdom” (2:4), whatever else they reflect in their particular historical setting, betray on the part of the Corinthians more a concern with form than with content—more atten-

tion to *how* the message was delivered than the message itself; a preoccupation with packaging the message in a way that was itself impressive and therefore presumably more persuasive. This kind of thinking, of course, is deeply mistaken, and Paul confronts it on several levels.

It is in this context that the Apostle reminds the Corinthians at length that the gospel is considered by the world to be foolishness, and yet that it is by that message that men and women come to know God and are transformed. Now, if it is by a “foolish” message that God claims men and women for Himself, then we must conclude that this message “works” only because and only when God makes it work. That is the burden of 1 Corinthians 1:18–31. The gospel is considered foolish by all until, in the preaching of that Word, God effects a change in the heart to see it otherwise (1:21). The God who chose us in the past now in time calls us into the fellowship of Christ through the gospel that is preached.

But to say this is to say also that it is not the preacher or the style of his preaching that proves effective in transforming the human heart. It is God alone—the Spirit working through the Word to accomplish His sovereignly-appointed ends.

The Apostle presses his argument further in chapter two. Here, he holds his own ministry up as a model for them to consider carefully and follow. Paul’s ministry among them did not succeed because of Paul’s style of preaching. He did not package his message in some strikingly impressive way. Indeed, as the Apostle reflects on his arrival in Corinth, he recalls that he was marked by anything but self-confidence: he was fearful, even trembling (2:3) from the realization that what he had come to accomplish was beyond his ability to effect. His preaching, successful as it was, was not marked by self-confidence but by conscious dependence on the Spirit of God (2:4). His preaching was not persuasive because it was impressive; it was persuasive because the Spirit of God was powerfully at work persuading hearts by it.

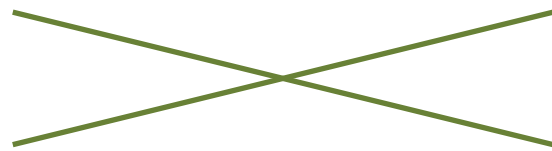
Moreover, it was very important for Paul that this would be the case. If someone were to “believe” simply because they were impressed with the preacher, it would be a faith grounded in something human. But only a faith grounded in the power of God will do (2:5).

Paul expounds this further in chapter two. The “hidden mysteries” of God in the gospel (2:7) remain unrecognized until the Spirit of God opens sin-darkened eyes (2:6–16). This divine message, glorious as it is, fails to penetrate the deep biases of the natural heart unless God Himself intervenes with power.

Paul emphasizes this yet again in chapter three. For all their esteem as beloved ministers of the Word, “What is Apollos? And what is Paul?” Answer: they are but “*servants*”—“servants through whom you believed, *even as the Lord gave opportunity to each one*” (1 Cor 3:5; italics added). Put another way, the ministers are *nothing* (v. 7). One plants the seed, another wa-

ters it, “but God was causing the growth” (v.6). Apart from the Spirit’s blessing, our preaching accomplishes nothing at all.

That is, the same Apostle who affirms the singular efficacy of the gospel insists that this gospel is effective only as it is made so by the sovereign Spirit. We are saved by a hearing of the gospel (Rom 10:17; 1 Cor 1:18–25; 15:1; etc.), and we are built up and strengthened by the gospel (Rom 16:25). We are set apart to God both initially and progressively through the instrumentality of His preached Word. Yet none of this is simply “automatic.” Transformation of heart and life remains the prerogative of the Holy Spirit, who alone can use His Word to these ends. “The Spirit and the Word” is more than a mere slogan. It is an expression that captures exactly the means by which God works.



THE GOD WHO CHOSE  
US IN THE PAST NOW IN  
TIME CALLS US INTO THE  
FELLOWSHIP OF CHRIST  
THROUGH THE GOSPEL  
THAT IS PREACHED.

Now, what does all this mean to the preacher himself? How ought all this to shape our own thinking concerning our work of preaching?

Most obviously, of course, this ought to give those of us who preach a sober and more accurate estimate of ourselves. For all the lofty opinions we might secretly be tempted to entertain concerning our role and our abilities, the truth is we are but “servants” whom God may use—or not!—according to His own purpose. Whatever success our preaching has seen—however many people have come to faith and however many have grown stable in that faith—we may be assured it is not due to our brilliance or abilities. Success in preaching is proof only that God has been at work. It is a thrill like no other to see men and women come to Christ and grow in grace through our preaching, but we must never cherish any



mistaken notion that somehow we are to be credited for our own “success.”

We’ve probably all seen preachers bound into the pulpit seemingly full of confidence. But that is not how the Corinthians would have perceived the “mighty” Apostle Paul whose “weakness and trembling” betrayed a keen awareness that he was in over his head. The work God had called him to do, he realized, was a work that he was unable to do at all. It was a work only God could do. Certainly, a preacher who claims to recognize the truth captured in this famous expression—“the Spirit and the Word”—ought to be a man marked by a profound sense of humility.

This realization should also bring about a certain carefulness on our part, as for the Apostle Paul himself, never to speak in such a way that would just manufacture “results,” as though we could ourselves effect the transformation of the human heart. Paul was very concerned that no one would believe simply because he had spoken. He was clearly a brilliant man, and we can safely assume that he had intellectual abilities that would have been capable of manipulating people to “make decisions” for Christ. But he would have none of that! In all of his pleading and seeking to “persuade” men and women to come to Christ, he would not stoop to manipulation, for a faith that rises from anything human is of no value, and no genuine concern for human souls will be content with it. So, Paul would allow nothing in his preaching that would distract from the message itself, leaving it entirely to the Spirit of God to convict and convince—and this “in order that” (*hina*, 2:5) their faith would rest in God alone.

Stated more positively, if we understand that it is only the Spirit’s enablement that renders our preaching successful, we will be men whose preaching is marked by a profound sense of dependence upon God. This recognition of his own inability to effect genuine conversion led the Apostle Paul to an utter

reliance upon the Spirit of God to do what Paul himself could not do. Paul preached the gospel, and he would plead and seek to persuade. But he would not presume to play the Holy Spirit as though he were himself the persuader. He preached recognizing fully that only as the Spirit of God was at work would his message accomplish that heart-transforming purpose to which it was sent.

Finally, a realization ought to make us men of prayer. If we realize that success in our preaching comes only when God is at work, then this sense of conscious dependence on Him will drive us to petition Him for His aid, seeking His blessing—His “anointing,” as it has been traditionally called—to use us as instruments of His saving and sanctifying grace. I am tempted to say here that a neglect of prayer for the Spirit’s enablement in preaching betrays a sinful sense of self-confidence. It certainly may. How else might we account for our prayerless preaching?

We’ve all heard preaching that is marked distinctly by the Spirit’s blessing. And we’ve all heard preaching where the Spirit’s blessing is distinctly lacking. And we who preach have also likely experienced both ourselves. Preaching under the Spirit’s enablement can accomplish marvelous—indeed, supernatural!—results. By Spirit-anointed preaching, hearts and lives are forever transformed—lovers of sin become lovers of God, weak-souled believers become strong in faith, and God’s people are refreshed in divine love for faithful service to Christ. Spirit-empowered preaching—“the Spirit and the Word”—is the means by which God sets us apart, both initially and progressively, for Himself.

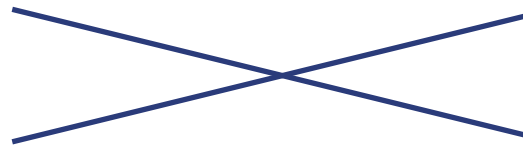
Let us who preach, then, seek the Spirit’s enabling power continuously, so that those who hear us will come to and grow in a faith that does “not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God,” to His glory (1 Cor 2:5). ♦



The background is a photograph of a church interior, showing wooden pews, a high ceiling with exposed beams, and stained glass windows. A semi-transparent blue rectangular overlay is centered on the image, containing the title text. Two large, thin blue 'X' marks are positioned above and below the title text.

**PREACHING CHRIST  
IN TRIPLICATE:  
IMPROVING BY  
APPLYING THE THREE  
OFFICES OF CHRIST**

**DAVID W. HALL**



**A**

lmost every Sunday for the past 35 years, in the wee hours of the morning, a habitual fright has awakened this *practicing* pastor from his slumber: do I have a word from the Lord for His people? And before the alarm sounds, I take a step back to see if—at the end of a week’s preparation—I have some message from the Lord to convey to His people.

Yes, it is—and I think it should be—a weekly jolting, petrifying thought.

Sometimes, I’m helped in this quandary about improving my final sermon preparation by an old catechism. The Westminster Children’s Catechism summarizes the major roles (“offices”) of Christ as: Prophet, Priest, and King. I reason that if those are accurate summaries and if we wish to improve our Christ-like preaching, then normal expository sermons will include some elements from that formula, thus allowing us to preach Christ triply.

Maybe it will help all expositors—veterans and rookies alike—to join in a similar final review of his sermon before delivering it, in order to ascertain the Christlikeness of a sermon. Below is a short matrix—far from a panacea—to help us preach Christ in triplicate, along with three concluding reminders. If our goal is to hold forth Christ always, then it should hardly be objectionable to preach Christ triply whenever possible.

### THE OFFICES OF CHRIST

The first office of Christ is that of a prophet. In the Old Testament, the prophet was the mouthpiece of God—He was a medium through whom the mind of God was conveyed. The prophet did not speak for himself; nor, as 2 Peter 1 teaches, did the word of the Lord arise from mythology, much less from the prophet’s own will or imagination. The prophet—and Christ our Lord perfectly exemplified this—was not speaking for himself, but he had a consciousness that he was speaking for his Superior, for the Lord of Hosts.

Do you, as a preacher, realize that the precious minutes graciously given by your audience are times to hear not from you but from the Lord through your lips? These times, those thousands of listening hours, are not for us to

display our wisdom (1 Cor 2:1) nor our comedy nor our impressive digestion of culture, art, movies, music, psychology, or poetry (1 Thess 2:3–5). No, our preaching is not to be with clever words or suave rhetoric—we are, following Christ’s first office, prophets of God. We are standing in for God, and we should never forget that. I’m helped when I awaken and re-view my sermon at 5:00 AM, often with perspiration, to ask: is my sermon, albeit not inerrant, notwithstanding speaking *in loco Dei*, in place of God?

The Children’s Catechism elaborates on how Christ is a prophet in this way: “Because he teaches us the will of God.” Prophetic expository preaching follows Christ by teaching the will of God, His comprehensive will (Acts 20:27). Moreover, in a guide simple enough for toddlers, the Children’s Catechism asks, “Why do you need Jesus as your prophet?” and affirms, “Because I am ignorant.” All our listeners are “ignorant.” Do your sermons inform and seek to cure native ignorance? Do they bring a word from beyond our horizons, a message that is unrivaled, albeit simple, that unveils or opens the mind of God to your listeners? If not, maybe someone else should be in the pulpit.

Christ’s fulfillment of the office of prophet sets the expectation that expository preaching will be prophetic as well. In addition, Christ is our priest. A priest, of course, is an interceding mediator.

How can an expository sermon accomplish mediation?

A little background on the meaning of this office in the Catechism helps. The answer to how Christ is a priest (#44) is “Because He died for our sins and pleads with God for us.” If that is what our Intercessor does for us—dies vicariously in our place and pleads with God for us—should not our sermons return to those themes often? And should not priestly expository messages plead for us to be reconciled to God? After all, as our children learn, we need Christ as a priest “Because I am guilty.”

As we review our sermon notes weekly, are we showing the

need for redemption? Do we declare both that listeners’ deepest need (far more demanding of attention than their narcissistic “felt needs”) is to know their guilty state and to know how to be saved from that by the One who died for us? And as priestly expositors, do we convey to our listeners that we, too, identify with the ravages of sin, guilt, and weakness (cf. Heb 2:17–18)?

Thirdly, if Christ is king, how does that affect our preaching? Kings, of course, rarely speak directly to the masses.

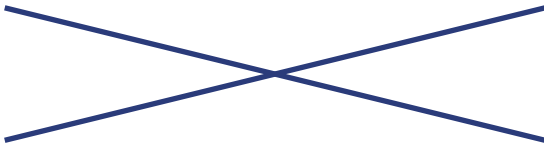
They normally deputize heralds and intermediaries. That is what a gospel ambassador is: a herald who represents a Sovereign, announcing the message of *Pantokrator* (Acts 4:24). It is not our news to edit. *It is an edict, not an editorial*—and thus it comes with authority.

These sermons from regal expositors declare and proclaim. They are not designed for audience approval, as if given to a focus group or issued as an invitation to register a Facebook “like” or “dislike.” The choice of terms from the Sovereign is left up to neither the mouthpiece nor the audience. Do you sense that your spoken message is given from the One who holds all authority in heaven and on earth? Does this not inspire holy boldness as well as strickening humility and awe? Would our pulpits not be elevated, would churches not grow, would sanctification not advance if we returned more fully to the

idea that we are court emissaries, unscrolling a decree from the Lord?

If I don’t have some shred of this in my early morning fright time, I better get up, pray, study more, and find some. For the King’s subjects deserve His royal word.

Again, the Children’s Catechism is helpful. It asks, “How is Christ a king?” and answers that with “He rules and defends us.” Further, the companion payoff question, “why do you need Christ as your king,” is answered with “Because I am weak and helpless.” Those are our congregants: weak and beggarly people (not only the children) who desperately need an



DO YOU SENSE THAT  
YOUR SPOKEN MESSAGE  
IS GIVEN FROM THE  
ONE WHO HOLDS ALL  
AUTHORITY IN HEAVEN  
AND ON EARTH? DOES  
THIS NOT INSPIRE HOLY  
BOLDNESS AS WELL  
AS STRICKENING  
HUMILITY AND AWE?



announcement from the King, telling them how He rules and defends them and how this meets their condition of weakness and neediness.

When Calvin expounds the Lord's Prayer, he ties "Thy Kingdom Come" to preaching, praying for the removal of all hindrances to God's proper reign. Said Calvin:

This is done partly by the preaching of the word, and partly by the secret power of the Spirit. It is His will to govern men by His word; but as the bare voice, if the inward power of the Spirit be not added, does not pierce the hearts of men, both must be joined together, in order that the kingdom of God may be established. We therefore pray that God would exert His power, both by the Word and by the Spirit, that the whole world may willingly submit to Him.

Dependence on the Word and Spirit together is greatly needed in ambassadorial expositions today.

Do our sermons convey these notes? The finest expositors in history did so. Moreover, I am pretty confident that if you wish to return to that matrix, your church will be rare; and those eager to receive prophetic, priestly, and kingly preaching will be most grateful.

### PROPHETIC, PRIESTLY, AND REGAL EXPOSITIONS

I'd like to close with three final, short tips to the expositor who wishes to improve his prophetic, priestly, and regal expositions. To do so requires, *first*, a deep and abiding trust in the inerrancy of Scripture. We will never hit our target of preaching Christ triply if we do not cling to and submit ourselves and our wisdom to the full, unquestioned, and total truthfulness of Scripture. Preaching that honors the offices of Christ will not occur from the lips of those who doubt the truth and timelessness of the Bible.

*Second*, expositors must ask of themselves in a final review: am I expecting the Holy Spirit to work in and through His Word today? Or am I relying on something else? Do we believe that the Holy Spirit still works and that He is the Agent of change? Or do we look to programs, logic on fumes, fads, or our own charisma to affect change?

Protestant forebears regularly depended upon the Holy Spirit to enliven the Word in human hearts. While commenting on 1 Corinthians 1:17–20, Calvin described the Spirit of God as having "an eloquence of His own . . . [and] shin[ing] forth with a native luster peculiar to itself. . . ." Preaching is an act of Spirit anointing, and Calvin was wise enough to distinguish between that kind of preaching and other human oratory.

The Reformer correctly saw Jesus' preaching as starkly contrasting with the scribes, who "were false expounders of Scripture, [with] doctrine [that] was literal and dead, breathed nothing of the power of the Spirit, and was utterly destitute of majesty." As Calvin expounded on Jesus' early preaching ministry, he saw that "the power of the Spirit shone in the preaching of Christ" with great radiance.

The preaching ministry conveys "great majesty," as "if spoken from heaven." This "treasure of heavenly wisdom" calls for "puny" men to respond with reverence to the Spirit speaking in the Scriptures. The office of anointed preaching, thought Calvin, is as necessary for the church as food and drink are for the body. This Spirit's work is "most excellent" and "to be held in highest honor and esteem" (*Inst.* 4:3,3) among believers.

*Thirdly* and finally, we will need to look to Jesus' own priority and practice of preaching. At Christ's incarnation, there was *kerygma* from angels at Jesus' birth, and the gospel narratives show preaching to be the ministry of first resort. When Jesus was baptized by the Holy Spirit, the first sermon of the

gospels was from the Father at this baptism. Jesus preached in the local synagogue in Matthew 4, and believed that “The spirit of the Lord had anointed” Him. Jesus preached with unrivalled authority (Matt 7:27–29), and He sent His disciples to preach (Matt 8–12). Their preaching was a stark contrast to the dead use of the Scriptures by the Pharisees, and in the Parable of the Sower (Matthew 13), Jesus made it clear that our task was to disseminate the seeds that would bear fruit unto eternal life. Jesus modeled this kind of preaching in His discourses, and He was preaching at the End (Matt 24–25). His last earthly mandate was to teach all things that He had said, while making disciples and baptizing (Matt 28:18–20). Taking your clues for ministerial priorities from Jesus will yield steady improvement.

I, for one, hope to continue growing in preparing and delivering expository messages. That’s why I am still a *practicing* pastor. There is no higher calling nor more challenging ac-

tivity. These three tips and applying the offices of Christ may yield fruit in our preaching as we practice day by day and year by year.

After several decades, the prospect of appearing in a pulpit—even with years of study and a week for focused preparation—still scares me. Call me unliberated if you wish, or castigate me as performance-driven, even criticize me for not viewing myself as one of the adopted King’s kids, or deride me as in awe of the One we represent—that matters little. What matters is that we lift our hearts to heaven and seek the smile of the One we represent. A dose of the prophetic, a dash of priestly preaching, and an ounce of regal exposition is probably a good review before entering any pulpit.

Perhaps most expository pastors can improve by reviewing the Children’s Catechetical targets as a final exam on our work each week. Preaching Christ triply, or in all His fullness, surely is worth the final inspection. ♦



## THE EXPOSITORY PREACHING OF DR. S. LEWIS JOHNSON, JR.

SLJInstitute.net provides multimedia distribution of roughly 1,500 of Dr. Johnson’s messages compiled from the 1960’s through the 1990’s.

This is a free resource made possible by the SLJInstitute, working in conjunction with his former congregation at Believers Chapel of Dallas.



## GRACE UPON GRACE

In this twelve-message teaching series by Dr. Steven J. Lawson, you will learn how the doctrines of grace—such as radical depravity and definite atonement—are woven throughout John’s gospel, while developing a new appreciation for the riches of God’s unmerited favor. Dr. Lawson demonstrates that the Gospel of John offers one of the clearest presentations of the doctrines of grace in all of Scripture.



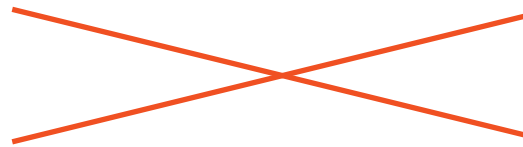
Ligonier.org | 800.435.4343



**AFTER  
PREPARATION –  
BEFORE  
PREACHING**

DAVID STRAIN





W

hen the study is complete and the composition of the sermon is finished, what then? In the days between preparation and proclamation, how should the faithful expositor ready himself? What are the spiritual pitfalls to be avoided and the resources of grace to be deployed as we make the transition from the desk to the pulpit?

Paul calls faithful ministers to “take heed to themselves” and “to the doctrine” (1 Tim 4:16). When it comes to preparation for preaching, certainly both must be done simultaneously. We are not attending to the truth as we ought if, as we prepare, we are not also examining our hearts in its light. And yet, there is a time when, in his preparation, taking heed to the doctrine—constructing the sermon from the text—will be the primary burden of the preacher, as well as a time when this work is complete. Then the work of taking heed to himself must continue, and even grow in its intensity and focus. Here we are concerned with how the preacher takes heed to himself after the book-work is done, but before the pulpit-work begins.

### 1. PREACH THE WORD

What is the first duty of the preacher when the sermon is ready and the notes are compiled? Before preaching to others, his first duty is to preach to himself! If a man will not preach the truth he has prepared for others from the pulpit of his own heart and in the sanctuary of his own conscience, he will not likely be of much help when he stands behind the pulpit in the midst of the congregation. After his study is complete, the primary work of the expositor is to be sure the truths to be preached have penetrated his own soul and become part of his own spiritual diet. He must take the scripture text and the message to be proclaimed from it, and he must take his application points in particular, and *marinate* in them. He must massage them (like dry rub on well-prepared barbeque!) into every pore of his soul until their flavor permeates his whole being.

It is sometimes said that the preacher’s devotional life should be distinct from his sermon preparation. And without doubt, there is an important

truth there: faithful preachers must constantly cultivate spiritual vitality for themselves and be on guard against collapsing their personal times of communion with God into their preparations for ministry to others. When preachers tell me that they have no “quiet time” but they “get a lot out of sermon preparation,” I worry that they are not being sufficiently intentional in pursuing communion with the Lord. And yet, *too* strong a distinction between devotion and preparation may sow the seeds of a kind of arid professionalism that strips sermon preparation of essential spiritual vitality. We must not forget that we are still handling the sacred Word, and that cannot be done rightly if our hearts are unmoved by the truth before us. And so, depending on how much time there is between preparation for preaching and the act of preaching itself, it may be helpful for the preacher to build his sermon outline into the fabric of his personal devotions. He might, for example, take the headings of the sermon, and especially the application points, and begin to pray through them with attention to the way they speak to his own heart. As he does so, he ought to ask himself, in the presence of God, such questions as these:

- Is there a duty arising from this text that I am neglecting myself?
- Is there gospel comfort to be held out to the flock that I need to hear with fresh clarity in the circumstances of my own life? May I honestly offer comfort to others from truths from which I have derived no comfort of my own?
- Am I in danger of preaching truths to others with a passion that I do not feel when I meditate on these same truths for myself?
- Can I rise on the Lord’s Day to preach doctrine designed to humble us for sin if I have not been humbled by it myself?

A minister must search the scriptures in order to prepare to preach, but he must equally search his own heart in light of the scriptures before he is ready to preach. Prayerful self-scrutiny that makes use of questions such as these will lead to renewed repentance, strengthened faith, a deeper appreciation for the truth to be proclaimed, and better preaching overall.

## 2. PRAY FOR THE FLOCK

Amid all the busyness and demands of pastoral ministry, the hard deadline of the Sunday sermon can cast an oppressive shadow over the preacher, who must produce material for the people of God no matter what comes during the week. How easy, in such circumstances, to become a mere sermon factory, churning out homiletical products to supply congregational demand! If he is not careful, this kind of minister will cease to view his own preaching as the work of a shepherd tending

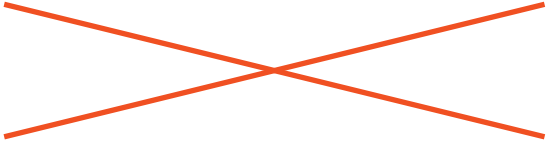
his flock, and will instead see it as the drudgery of a slave driven by tyrannical deadlines. In such fertile soil, the poisonous weeds of resentment easily begin to grow, and the sermon, when it comes to be delivered, will be at best the mere performance of a homiletical professional doing his duty and earning his keep.

To rise from the desk and ascend the pulpit with any hope of spiritual fruit, the preacher must be a true pastor of the flock. If he has not visited his people, prayed with the sick or the mourning, counseled the discouraged and the confused, if he has not been among his people Monday to Saturday, he will not likely have them on his heart when he stands before them on the Lord’s Day. A good barometer of how far the preacher is a shepherd of his flock will be what occupies his prayers between the study and the pulpit. Do the names and faces of his own people press in upon his consciousness as he prays? Does he find that the tears and trials and triumphs of his own congregation actually drive him to pray as he readies himself to open the Word to them? Preaching is an act of pastoral care. Pastoral care informs preaching. And the unifying bond between the shepherd’s task when he is out among the flock Monday to Saturday, and when he is standing before them to preach on the Lord’s Day, is *prayer*. Prayer for the people entrusted to us sharpens our sermonic arrows so that they penetrate to the hearts of our hearers. If there is one thing that should characterize the preacher between preparation and preaching, it must be prayer for those to whom he brings the Word.

## 3. KNOW WHEN TO STOP TWEAKING

Before entering seminary and following a call to pastoral ministry, I trained as an artist. One of the most difficult disciplines to cultivate as an artist was knowing when the painting was actually finished and when to stop adjusting and tweaking and changing and tinkering. Many a fine work was ruined by an artist’s inability to stop working on it. A sermon manuscript or homiletical outline will never be perfect. Study will never yield all the results we might wish. A good preacher will never feel himself as prepared as he might like. In a word, many a fine sermon is ruined by the preacher’s inability to stop tweaking.

If we are not careful, we can find ourselves preoccupied with our notes or manuscripts, with getting that turn of phrase just right, with the perfect illustration for that important point, with that one elusive exegetical insight that will really change hearts. And so we go on and on, adjusting and polishing and tinkering, and soon all our attention rests on the aids we take into the pulpit to assist us in preaching instead of on the spiritual temperature of our own hearts and hearers as we preach. Of course diligent study is vital. Competent exegesis is a non-negotiable. Clarity of expression and lucidity in illustration cannot safely be omitted if we are to be



PREACHING IS A  
SPIRITUAL BUSINESS, NOT  
AN ACADEMIC EXERCISE.  
MORE IMPORTANT THAN  
A WELL-CONSTRUCTED  
MANUSCRIPT OR OUTLINE  
IS A HEART RESTING ON  
THE SUPPLIES OF THE  
HOLY SPIRIT THAT CHRIST,  
IN HIS PROPHETIC OFFICE,  
GIVES TO HIS SERVANTS AS  
THEY OPEN THE WORD TO  
HIS PEOPLE.

of help to anyone. But there must always come a time when the preacher stops work on the sermon aids he brings into the pulpit and rests entirely upon God for the blessing of His Spirit on the preaching itself.

Surely, one of the most important prayers a preacher can utter in this regard must be that God would grant him grace to prepare his preaching notes with rigor, and grace to proclaim the preached Word with liberty, free from the constraint his notes can sometimes impose. Faithful and fruitful preaching cannot be so dependent on the products of study that it precludes all possibility of new insight, new illustration, and new application coming to the preacher in the act of preaching itself. Preaching is a spiritual business, not an academic exercise. More important than a well-constructed manuscript or outline is a heart resting on the supplies of the Holy Spirit that Christ, in His prophetic office, gives to His servants as they open the Word to His people. While the revelatory gift of

prophecy has ceased in the church, there remains a prophetic ministry in the exposition of the Word, as by the Spirit, Christ our Prophet communicates His will to His people.

Surely this ought to be the focus of our attention, the burden of our hearts, and the craving of our prayers as we rise to preach the Word. A manuscript or notes, or whatever we take into the pulpit to assist us in preaching, can easily become a crutch for the preacher. If he is not careful, he comes to rely more on the tangible products of his own study brought with him into the pulpit than he does on the Spirit of Christ without whose anointing there is no true preaching at all. Sometimes we hide proud self-reliance and rank unbelief beneath a cloak of piety, telling ourselves we are being faithful in preparation, when in fact we are so fearful of embarrassing ourselves in the pulpit that we forget that preaching is not about the preacher but about the Christ we preach and the flock to whom Christ is preached. We need to know when to stop *tweaking* and when to start *trusting* God.

#### 4. GET SOME REST

The doctrine of the Sabbath reminds us that we are built for rhythms of work and rest. Our bodies and our minds need to stop. Sometimes the nature of pastoral ministry is such that there is little choice, but if we are preparing late into the evening on Saturday night on a regular basis, the chances are that we will be less able to preach with energy and passion on Sunday morning. It may be that we need to adjust our schedules, say “no” more often, delegate more effectively, ask for help more frequently, and listen to the counsel of others, especially our spouses, who might wish we were more available on Saturday than we have been! The sacrifice of time with family, of sleep, or of strength for the sake of Christ is sometimes a minister’s calling. But we had better be sure, as we make such sacrifices, that it really is in obedience to the call of King Jesus that we make them, for they would be utterly unlawful for gospel ministers under any other circumstances. God has ordained that time with family and friends and rest for body and mind are normally necessary to the effective performance of our duties as ministers of the gospel. There is nothing heroic or pious in their neglect.

The transition from the preacher’s desk to the pulpit can be both a venue for temptation and a great opportunity for growth. Its neglect in the thought of most of us who are called to preach means that we will likely not be intentional in capitalizing on the opportunities afforded us between preparation and preaching. But if we can develop strategies and spiritual habits that direct our hearts heavenward and away from ourselves, and burden us for the flock more than for our performance, we will have redeemed the time, and our preaching—and especially our hearers—will be the better for it. 💡

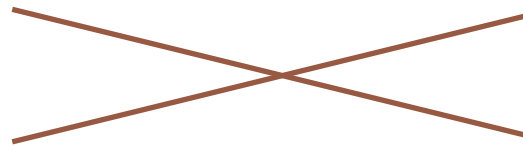


✕

**HEARING THE  
SERMON:  
THE LISTENER'S  
RESPONSIBILITIES**

✕

GUY M. RICHARD



It is common knowledge that John Calvin, like the Reformers in general, believed that the true church was distinguished from the false by two primary “marks” or characteristics: the faithful preaching of the Word and the right administration of the sacraments. But what may not be common knowledge is that Calvin meant more by “the faithful preaching of the Word” than just a bare proclamation of it. Calvin believed that it was not enough for a true church of Christ simply to be proclaiming the Word of God; that Word must also be heard and received by the people. Thus, Calvin said that a true church exists “wherever we see the Word of God purely preached *and heard*” or “wherever it is preached...*and received and has a fixed abode*” or “where the preaching of the gospel is *reverently heard*” (see Calvin’s *Institutes* 4.1.9–10, emphasis added). For Calvin, the true church was singled out from all counterfeit expressions of it not only by its preaching of the Word of God but also by its response to that preaching.

When we think of the clear teaching of Scripture, especially in passages such as John 8:31 and 10:16, 26–27, we can understand where Calvin was coming from. For in these passages, Jesus Himself tells us quite plainly that genuine Christians will hear the voice of their Savior and will respond by building their lives upon His words. In John 8:31, Jesus goes so far as to say that this is *the* distinguishing mark that differentiates genuine believers (those who are “truly disciples of Mine”) from everyone else. Genuine disciples will “continue” in His word. They will abide in it and will want to hear it and to build their lives upon it. Thus, it shouldn’t be all that surprising that Calvin would stipulate the hearing of the Word of God as a mark of the true church.

But when we look around at the state of the church in the twenty-first century, we might not only be surprised but maybe even a little discouraged by Calvin’s comments. Although there is clearly precious little faithful preaching of the Word today, there may even be less faithful *hearing* of it. To be sure, rich Bible exposition is lacking in many of our pulpits today, but I fear the real reasons for this in many cases may have more to do with the changes among the hearing preferences of our people. Looking to have their “ears tickled,” many people have “turn[ed] away their ears from the truth” (2 Tim 4:3–4) and have sought after shorter, shallower, more entertaining, feel-good



messages. And in the name of church growth, the church has tended to go along with this tide rather than swimming against it.

Calvin warned us that this would happen. He warned us that Satan would strive to remove these marks from the church. He believed it was Satan's number one tactic to destroy the "upbuilding of the church" and render it ineffective in the world (*Institutes* 4.1.11). The downgrading of the hearing preferences of many professing Christians is, therefore, exactly what we would expect to see. What we need today is a new generation of preachers and listeners willing to stem the tide of popular thought and to reclaim "faithful" and "pure" preaching *and hearing* in our churches.

But how do we do that? Practically, what can we do as preachers to cultivate the kind of hearing that loves and even demands deep, rich Bible exposition? And what can our people do to grow in their ability to listen more effectively to God's Word and apply it to their lives? In an attempt to answer these questions, this article will present two practical suggestions to help listeners improve their hearing and eight to help preachers cultivate better hearing within their congregations. The hope is that we might once again reclaim these distinguishing marks of the true church in our generation.

### PREPARATION THROUGH PRAYER

Starting with the listener, there are two main things that sermon-hearers can do to foster better hearing of God's Word: they can pray, and they can prepare themselves in advance before they come to worship. Let's start with the first, which is really the most important—prayer. Many years ago, a friend was really struggling with the preaching at her church. She found it dry and unhelpful and, quite frankly, boring. She decided to pray. She prayed for her minister, for his preaching, and for her listening. She prayed that God would give her a deep love for the preaching of His Word and an ability to apply it to her life. And she was astonished at how quickly her minister began to improve as a preacher! He seemed to have changed overnight, and it was all because she began praying for him. I am convinced that many of the problems Christians face in listening to sermons would vanish altogether if they simply spent more time in prayer for their ministers and for the preaching and hearing of the Word.

### PREPARING THE HEART AND MIND

Second, sermon-hearers can also prepare their hearts and minds to hear the preaching of the Word before they arrive at worship. One of the advantages of preaching *lectio conti-*

*nua* (continuously through a book of the Bible, verse by verse) is that people will know what verses will be covered in each sermon, and they can read and think about those verses beforehand. To help with this, we ought to consider providing a book table at our church that has at least one good, readable commentary on the book of the Bible that we are preaching through, along with a good study Bible. We want to encourage people to prepare in advance for the sermon by putting tools into their hands to enable them to study each passage ahead of time. (Incidentally, this also encourages the minister to work harder at sermon preparation, because he knows that his congregation will be familiar with the passage before he preaches on it.)

### THE PREACHER'S RESPONSIBILITY

Keeping these things in mind, I want to transition to talking about what preachers can do to help cultivate good listening within their congregations. Although I clearly believe that listeners have a responsibility to do what they can to improve their hearing of God's Word, I also believe that preachers have the greater responsibility to craft their sermons and to deliver them in such a way that they make it as easy as possible for their listeners to hear what they are saying. I see the greater burden being on the one who is doing the communicating rather than on the one to whom the communication is directed. Those of us who are preachers need to ensure that we do all that we can to help people hear God's Word. There are at least eight practical things that we can do.

**1. Pray.** The most important thing we can do to improve the preaching and hearing of the Word of God is to pray. The Holy Spirit (not ourselves) is what gives our messages their cogency, power, and effectiveness. Without the Spirit, our logic, skill, persuasiveness, and profundity are ineffective at best and harmful at worst. We need to pray that the Lord will give eyes to see, ears to hear, and minds to understand. We need to pray for courage to proclaim the whole counsel of God's Word. We need to pray that God will use the proclamation of His Word as He sees fit for the praise of His glorious grace.

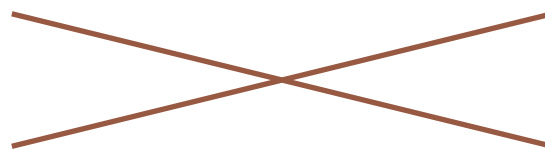
**2. Prepare.** Prayer is not a substitute for sermon preparation. It works along with our preparation. It is not an "either-or" but a "both-and" proposition. We need to prepare adequately so that we know what the passage is saying in its original context and, then, what it is saying to us in our twenty-first-century contexts. We do not stumble upon the pulpit. We go in well prepared, knowing that our God is a God of means. He uses our efforts and our studies.

**3. Rely upon the Holy Spirit.** After we have prayed and prepared, we need to trust God to speak through us. I am convinced that the best way to do this is to preach extemporaneously. No doubt, this is a difficult step to take. It brings with it a real element of anxiety, because of the distinct possibility that the Spirit will leave us wallowing in our own ineptitude

and allow us to fall on our faces in public. But it also forces us to depend upon the Lord (and to pray) more than we would otherwise and to learn to submit to His sovereign will, even when it means that we fall on our faces. Extemporaneous preaching allows the preacher to maintain uninterrupted eye contact with the congregation and to speak from the heart rather than from the written page.

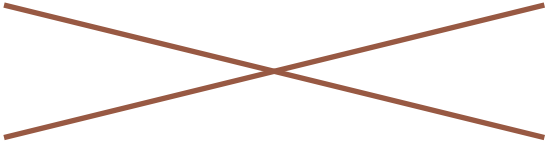
**4. Preach *lectio continua*.** Besides giving our people advance notice of what we will be speaking about, *lectio continua* preaching through books of the Bible has several other advantages: it exposes our congregations to everything the Bible says in its original context; it forces us to preach on every passage, rather than skipping around and choosing those passages that we would like to preach on; it keeps us from preaching our own hobbyhorses; it allows us to minister to God's people in the variety of places and situations in which they find themselves in life (joy, sorrow, pain, discouragement, apathy, growth, etc.); and it keeps the focus of our preaching on Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

**5. Strive to warm your own heart before you preach.** In his book *The Reformed Pastor*, Richard Baxter helpfully describes the essence of preaching as a communication of the heart of the preacher to the hearts of his hearers. This means



THE MOST IMPORTANT  
THING WE CAN DO TO  
IMPROVE THE PREACHING  
AND HEARING OF THE  
WORD OF GOD IS TO  
PRAY. THE HOLY SPIRIT  
(NOT OURSELVES) IS WHAT  
GIVES OUR MESSAGES  
THEIR COGENCY, POWER,  
AND EFFECTIVENESS.

that if the preacher's heart is cold toward the Lord when he goes into the pulpit, he will not be able to bring any warmth to the hearts of his hearers. The preacher needs to do whatever is necessary to warm his own heart before he enters the pulpit. He needs to wrestle with the Lord in prayer; listen to a rousing sermon; read a book or a passage of Scripture that will awaken his heart; meditate on the great promises of the Bible; or think about the weightiness of what he is about to do and how many souls need to be nourished, convicted, comforted, or reminded of eternal things. Then and only then will our people who come with cold hearts have any chance of leaving in a different condition.



THE PREACHER NEEDS  
TO DO WHATEVER IS  
NECESSARY TO WARM HIS  
OWN HEART BEFORE HE  
ENTERES THE PULPIT. HE  
NEEDS TO WRESTLE WITH  
THE LORD IN PRAYER . . .

**6. Preach simply.** Preaching above people's heads might cause them to be impressed with the preacher. But it will not make any lasting spiritual impression, because the message wasn't heard. It didn't connect. It wasn't accessible. If we want our people to hear our messages, we need to labor to make them as simple as we possibly can. One of the things this means is that we should rarely, if ever, mention the original Greek or Hebrew. More often than not, the Greek or Hebrew does not add anything to the sermon and only serves to make people think that we are smarter than we really are. Another thing this means is that we should try to use smaller, less sophisticated words to ensure that we are being understood by everyone who is listening. Why would I want to use a word that only ten percent or even eighty percent of the people listening to me know? Quite simply, I wouldn't, if I really want people to hear and understand what I am saying. Please note, I am not suggesting that we should simplify the *content* of our

messages. I am all in favor of deep and rich Bible exposition. I am all in favor of teaching our people deep theology. Absolutely! But we need to present it in such a way that they will understand it. We need to put these deep truths on the bottom shelf, as it were, and make them accessible to everyone in our hearing.

**7. Remember the long view.** When I was just starting out in ministry, I looked at preaching like firing a tank into a brick wall. One or two shots (sermons) would be all that was required to rip holes in walls. The impact would be immediate and obvious. After more than ten years of regular preaching, however, I now realize that preaching has far more in common with firing a BB gun into a brick wall. One shot is not going to make much of an impact. But if we fire that BB gun over and over again in the same place, and do it for long enough, we will begin to see a hole develop. And the more we shoot at it, the larger that hole will grow. I think that is what preaching is like. No doubt, God can, and at times does, do mighty things with one sermon. But He more ordinarily works steadily—almost imperceptibly—through the ongoing faithful preaching of the Word over a long period time. We need to remember that and not lose heart in our preaching ministries when we do not see immediate fruit from our labors. Most of the best preachers in history, if not all of them, have struggled with discouragement because of the lack of visible fruit in their ministries. We need to remember that God ordinarily works slowly over time, and we need to press on in our faithful, consistent preaching of the Word.

**8. Bring something new to the table.** In every congregation, there will be a number of people who have been Christians for several decades. It is quite possible that they will have heard multiple sermons on many passages in the Bible. We need to keep them in mind when we prepare our sermons, so that we can try to bring a fresh perspective to every sermon we preach. I do not mean that we ought to read things into the text that are not there. But I do mean that we need to bring our own creativity and personality to each passage we preach. People need to receive something new from us, either in terms of our content, our application, or our delivery, even if they have heard many sermons on the passage on which we are preaching.

If and when we can preach this way, we will make it easier for our people to listen “faithfully” or “purely” to the Word of God. We will even find, over time, that they may begin to ask us to extend the length of our sermons. That is a sure sign of the Holy Spirit at work, as He gives people a hunger and thirst for the voice of the Good Shepherd. And when that begins to happen in enough of our churches, we will in fact see a modern-day Reformation. That is my hope and prayer. ♦





AN **INERRANT** BIBLE

DEMANDS  
EXPOSITORY  
PREACHING

THE MASTER'S SEMINARY IS PASSIONATELY COMMITTED TO BOTH.



800.CALL.TMS | TMS.EDU

LONG LINE OF  
GODLY MEN



---

THE LIFE AND LEGACY OF  
JONATHAN EDWARDS, PT. 1

STEVEN J. LAWSON

It has been almost three centuries since Jonathan Edwards last ministered in colonial New England, and yet, he is still regarded as the most distinguished minister ever to grace the American scene. With enduring influence, Edwards continues to tower over the intellectual and spiritual life of the evangelical church through his exemplary life and prolific writings. Many would say he is the most eminent preacher this country has ever produced. Most believe that he delivered America's most famous sermon, *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God*. Others regard Edwards as "America's greatest evangelical theologian," even "the greatest [theologian] of any variety." Unmistakably, he is recognized as "the theologian of the First Great Awakening" and esteemed "among the half-dozen greatest theologians of all time." That all these lines would intersect in one man is astonishing.

Jonathan Edwards stood squarely at "the headwaters of the revivals" in the 1730s and 1740s. As the leader of the greatest awakenings that would shake the church in America, his influence downstream is virtually impossible to exaggerate. At the beginning of the twentieth century, a study was conducted of the descendants of Jonathan Edwards in order to trace his lasting effect upon America. The results were staggering. From Edwards came a large and distinguished progeny: three hundred clergymen, missionaries, and theological professors; one hundred twenty college professors; one hundred ten lawyers; more than sixty physicians; more than sixty authors; thirty judges; fourteen presidents of universities; numerous giants in American industry; eighty holders of major public office; three mayors of large cities; three governors of states; three U.S. senators; one chaplain of the U.S. Senate; one controller of the U.S. Treasury; and one vice president of the United States. It is hard to imagine that anyone else has contributed more vitally to the soul of this nation than this New England divine.

#### AT THE CROSSROADS OF HISTORY

Jonathan Edwards stood at the crossroads of history at a most strategic time. This American divine lived at the end of an era. He is considered "the last of the medieval Scholastic theologians" and "the last representative of Puritan theology and thought in the New World." At the same time, Edwards ministered at the beginning of a new era in colonial American thought and became "the first of the modern American philosopher-theologians." It was this forward thinking that not only influenced many people in his day, but also impacted generations to come. So pivotal was Edwards that he stood as *the seminal figure* in one of the most critical hours of Western civilization. He remains "the outstanding intellectual figure in colonial America," and "the most influential single figure in American Christianity until the twentieth century—and

arguably down to the present."

Revered Princeton theologian Benjamin B. Warfield wrote that Edwards "stands out as the one figure of real greatness in the intellectual life of colonial America." George Marsden, author of an acclaimed biography of Edwards, notes that he was "the most acute early American philosopher and the most brilliant of all American theologians." Marsden believes that three of Edwards' many works—*Religious Affections*, *Freedom of the Will*, and *The Nature of True Virtue*—stand as "masterpieces in the larger history of Christian literature."

S. M. Houghton writes that Edwards became "a star of the first magnitude in the annals of the Church of God." Reformed theologian R. C. Sproul estimates that Edwards's *Freedom of the Will* "is the most important theological work ever published in America." Paul Ramsey, an Edwardian scholar, writes that "Edwards' *Freedom of the Will* is sufficient to establish its author as "the greatest philosopher-theologian yet to grace the American scene." Mark Galli writes, "Some consider him to be the finest theologian America has produced." Harry S. Stout marvels that the remarkable feature of Edwards is "his enduring ability to speak across the ages." From these accolades, it is obvious that Jonathan Edwards's life is worthy of our study and emulation.

#### WHY JONATHAN EDWARDS?

Given the prodigious influence of Jonathan Edwards, certain questions beg to be addressed: What made him so great? What caused this man to be so effectively used by God? Why Edwards? Ultimately, it was God in His sovereignty who chose him to be such a distinguished and influential leader. But on a more personal, practical level, Edwards combined both the spiritual and the intellectual—he was both *godly* and *gifted*. Martyn Lloyd-Jones believed that the secret of Edwards was this: "The spiritual always controlled the intellectual in him." In other words, "All his rich and brilliant gifts were not only held to be subservient, but were used as servants." The real secret of Edwards, Lloyd-Jones argues, lies here: the man was "God-dominated."

Granted, Edwards was intellectually brilliant and theologically commanding. But Edwards's genius lay in his zeal for the glory of God. What distinguished him as a man after God's own heart was his "profound...and exceptional spirituality." In the soul of this American Puritan was a deep devotion to pursue the supreme honor of God. Edwards was *resolved* to live with uncompromising fidelity for the greatness of God. His eye was singular; his soul was steadfast; his will was strong.

As an eighteen and nineteen-year-old man—only one year after his conversion—Edwards wrote what he called his *Resolutions*. They were seventy purpose statements for his newly converted life, seventy declarations that served as a mission statement that would govern and guide him in the pursuit of God's will. Edwards would review these resolutions once a

week for the rest of his life, and they would act as a compass for his soul, always pointing him upward toward the north star of a life lived with abandonment for the glory of God.

Before we consider the *Resolutions*, let us first survey the remarkable life of this luminous figure—Jonathan Edwards. Where did he live? What influences shaped his life? How did God use him?

### A YOUNG PURITAN IN THE MAKING (1703–1726)

Born October 5, 1703, to the Reverend Timothy and Esther Edwards in East Windsor, Connecticut, Jonathan Edwards was the only son among ten daughters. His was one of the most respected families of colonial America—in New England, a minister was considered to be an aristocrat. Edwards’s father was a Harvard-trained pastor who faithfully preached at the same church in East Windsor for more than sixty years (1694–1758). His mother, Esther Stoddard Edwards, came from one of the most prominent families in Connecticut, perhaps in all New England. She was the daughter of Solomon Stoddard, who also pastored one church for sixty years, the congregation in Northampton, Massachusetts. Known as “the Northampton Pope” and the “Pope of the Connecticut River Valley,” Stoddard served one of the most prestigious congregations in the early colonies.

### Well-Educated, Brilliant Mind

Intellectually brilliant, Jonathan was well taught as a young man. His father, Timothy—an “excellent teacher” and “strict disciplinarian”—educated him, along with many of the town’s children, giving him superior grammar and secondary education. Timothy groomed young Jonathan for the ministry by teaching him Scripture, the Westminster Catechism, and Reformed theology. His ten sisters were all sent to Boston for finishing school and, upon returning home, assisted their younger brother in his studies. Growing up in a minister’s home, his mother, Esther, was known for her “native intelligence” and was “demanding” as well. Young Edwards was well-focused upon God and the richness of Puritan theology. Throughout his childhood, Edwards received first-hand exposure to the Christian life, doctrinal truth, pastoral ministry, and personal godliness from his father. Nevertheless, Jonathan was not converted to Christ during his formative years.

When Jonathan was thirteen, Timothy Edwards enrolled him at a new and troubled school, Yale College, then named Collegiate School of Connecticut. Timothy had been educated at Harvard, which had been established as a Calvinistic school but had weakened under Arminian influences. Because of this doctrinal erosion, Timothy enrolled Jonathan at newly established Yale, which was unashamedly true to Reformed theology. In the bachelor’s program, Edwards received a broad liberal arts education, studying grammar, rhetoric, logic, ancient history, arithmetic, geometry, astronomy,

“There came into my soul, and was as it were diffused through it, a sense of the glory of the Divine Being; a new sense, quite different from anything I ever experienced before.”

— JONATHAN EDWARDS

metaphysics, ethics, natural science, Greek, Hebrew, Christian theology, natural philosophy, and classical literature. Edwards also received a healthy exposure to the greatest Puritan and Reformed minds, reading John Calvin, John Owen, William Ames, and other divines. He graduated at the head of his class with a B.A. degree from Yale (1720), and delivered the valedictory address.

### Converted by Sovereign Grace

Edwards immediately began the master’s program at Yale, which required two years of independent study. During his second graduate year, Edwards, age eighteen, was suddenly converted to Jesus Christ. Edwards wrote that, while contemplating 1 Timothy 1:17, “There came into my soul, and was as it were diffused through it, a sense of the glory of the Divine Being; a new sense, quite different from anything I ever experienced before.” His heart was immediately overjoyed with rapturous thoughts of God. Jonathan would later write:

I began to have a new kind of apprehensions and ideas of Christ, and the work of redemption, and the glorious way of salvation by Him. An inward, sweet sense of these things, at times, came into my heart; and my soul was led away in pleasant views and contemplations of them. And my mind was greatly engaged to spend my time in reading and meditating on Christ, on the beauty and ex-

cellency of His person, and the lovely way of salvation by free grace in Him.

Upon completing his classwork for the master's program and before writing his thesis, Edwards traveled to New York City to be the interim pastor of a small Scottish Presbyterian church near Broadway and Wall Street. During this time, he "felt a burning desire to be in everything a complete Christian." This proved to be a soul-stretching time in which Edwards gave careful thought to the priorities that he desired to be his life's guiding principles. It was then that Edwards, still eighteen years old, began writing his *Resolutions*. He eventually composed seventy purpose statements designed to direct his newly begun Christian journey. Edwards thus articulated "the guidelines, the system of checks and balances he would use to chart out his life—his relationships, his conversations, his desires, his activities." At this formative time, Edwards also began keeping a *Diary* to monitor and maintain his spiritual walk (1722–25, 1734–35). Further, Jonathan began writing his *Miscellanies*, a collection of one-sentence maxims, observations, and reflections, which range in subject matter from philosophical thoughts to exegetical insights into a biblical text. Wherever he was, Jonathan recorded his penetrating thoughts as they flowed from his mind, often pinning them to his coat.

### Graduating from Yale

When his interim pastorate concluded in April 1723, Edwards returned home to Connecticut to write his master's thesis and provide pulpit supply. He graduated from Yale in October 1723 with a master of arts degree after orally presenting and defending his thesis on the doctrine of imputation. The title of the address was "A Sinner Is Not Justified before God except through the Righteousness of Christ by Faith." Edwards then served a short interim pastorate at the Congregational church in Bolton, Connecticut, from the winter of 1723 to the spring of 1724 before returning to Yale to assume an instructor's position (1724–1726). It was then that he began courting young Sarah Pierpont, the daughter of James Pierpont, Sr., a pastor in New Haven. Sarah eventually would become his wife.

With much inner turmoil, Edwards was wrestling with his vocational calling. Should he pursue the disciplined world of academics or local church ministry? After much soul-searching, Edwards gave himself to the high calling he had closely witnessed his father and grandfather pursue, that of the pastorate.

### EARLY MINISTRY (1727–1739)

Young and energetic, Edwards accepted a call to serve as the assistant minister in Northampton, Massachusetts, alongside his eighty-three year old maternal grandfather, the renowned Solomon Stoddard. Stoddard was "the most influential cler-

gyman in the region," having pastored this congregation for fifty-seven years. But many felt that the aging Stoddard needed assistance. Jonathan was ordained as his associate on February 15, 1727, with the understanding that Stoddard would train young Edwards to succeed him. In July 1728, Edwards married Sarah Pierpont, concluding their four-year courtship. When Stoddard died the following year, Edwards was suddenly thrust into one of the most visible pulpits in New England at the age of twenty-six—a remarkable placement for such a young man. He would pastor this church for the next twenty-two years, through both momentous and miserable times.

### A High View of God's Sovereignty

In the pulpit, Sunday by Sunday, Edwards soon distinguished himself as a preacher. His sermons were marked by "riveting expository skill . . . wide thematic range, a wealth of evangelical thought, a pervasive awareness of eternal issues, and a compelling logical flow to make them arresting, searching, devastating, and Christ-centrality doxological to the last degree." His preaching style was "commanding and by all accounts was almost hypnotic in its power to fix his hearers' minds on divine things." During this time, Edwards also emerged as "a determined opponent of Arminianism." Roger Olson remarks, "No theologian in the history of Christianity held a higher or stronger view of God's majesty, sovereignty, glory, and power than Jonathan Edwards." This New England divine "ardently defended the Puritan Calvinistic doctrines," declaring that "God is the all-determining reality in the most unconditional sense possible and always acts of His own glory and honor."

One prime example of Edwards's staunch Calvinistic defense was his address to the Puritan ministers of Boston in July 1731. This young preacher chose for his text 1 Corinthians 1:29–31, an unmistakable assertion of the absolute sovereignty of God in salvation. The message, titled "God Glorified in Man's Dependence," was designed to counter the growing influence of the man-centered Arminianism in his day. The Harvard alumni who were gathered were impressed with the force of his argument. The sermon soon became the first of Edwards's works to be published. Edwards himself had earlier fought against the biblical doctrine of divine sovereignty—a truth he once called a "horrible doctrine." But through personal study, Edwards had become convinced with absolute certainty that God orders the salvation of His chosen people. Edwards would arise to be a guardian of this sacred truth. ♦

# ORIGEN ON THE DISCIPLINE OF PRAYER

DUSTIN W. BENGE



Until the third century, as far as we know, no full treatise on the subject of Christian prayer had been written. Within fifty years, three works on prayer were produced, each of them including a commentary on the Lord's Prayer by a man born on the southern shores of the Mediterranean. Tertullian (c. 160–c. 225) and Cyprian (c. 200–258) were born in the Roman province of Africa, and Origen (184/185–253/254) in Alexandria. Tertullian's treatise on prayer was written at the very beginning of the century, Origen's work between A.D. 231 and 250, and Cyprian's about A.D. 250.

## LIFE OF ORIGEN

Among the early Church Fathers, Origen was as towering and prominent as Augustine (354–430) and Aquinas (1225–1274). In the Western church, both Jerome (347–420) and Ambrose (c. 340–397) unhesitatingly copied Origen's work and thus bequeathed it to posterity. Bernard (1090–1153) and Eckhart (c. 1260–c. 1327) read his works in the original, and Erasmus

(1466–1536) admitted that one page of Origen meant more to him than ten pages of Augustine. One author affirmed, "His work is aglow with the fire of a Christian creativity that in the greatest of his successors burned merely with a borrowed flame."

Eusebius, the main authority on Origen's life, described Origen as "not yet seventeen" when the persecution by Emperor Septimius Severus (145–211) broke out against the church, falling with particular severity in Egypt. Origen was born in Alexandria to Christian parents immediately after what Edward Gibbon (1737–1794) called "the period in the history of the world during which the condition of the human race was most happy and prosperous." He was educated by his father, Leonides (d. 202), who instructed him within the framework of a standard Hellenistic education, but also had him study the Christian Scriptures. As the oldest of seven sons, Origen began to bear the heavy weight of supporting his family after his father was beheaded for his Christian faith. When he was eighteen, Origen was appointed to the task of giving catechetical direction for the Alexandrian church where Clement of Alexandria (c. 150–c. 215) had once taught. Origen taught during the day, devoted the greater portion of the night to the study of the Bible, and lived a life of rigid asceticism.

This youthful teacher soon distinguished himself not only

as an eloquent teacher and preacher, but also a more innovative scholar and systematic thinker than others of his generation. Origen traveled extensively throughout his life and gained notable influence throughout the ancient world. With the aid of stenographers supplied by friend, Ambrose, Origen produced a prodigious number of works, much of it aimed at refuting disciples of an influential Gnostic of the previous generation known as Valentinus (c. 100–c. 160). His growing influence and notoriety led to imprisonment and torture during the persecution of Christians under Decius (250 CE). Later supporters considered him a martyr and saint, but many of his supporters actively resisted the imposition of the Nicene Creed (325 CE). As a result, a century after his death Origen was labeled a heretic, and most of his works were destroyed. Only two works survived intact: a treatise defending prayer (*De Oratione*) and a refutation of a pagan critic of Christians (*Against Celsus*).

### TREATISE ON PRAYER

Origen's treatise *On Prayer* is addressed to his friend Ambrose and an unknown lady, Tatiana, written in A.D. 233 or 234. *On Prayer* is the oldest extant theological treatise written on Christian prayer. John J. O'Meara notes, "It is not merely a treatise on prayer; it is a prayer in itself." Erasmus recognized that "the spirit of Origen is everywhere aflame, burning here with such intensity as to make it impossible for the reader to remain untouched."

More clearly than any of Origen's other writings, *On Prayer* reveals the depth and warmth of his religious life and piety. The introduction opens with a statement on how the impossibility of human nature is made possible in our prayers by the grace of God, the work of Christ, and the Holy Spirit. Origen asserts, "By the grace of God poured forth with measureless abundance from Him to men through that minister of unsurpassed grace to us, Jesus Christ, and through that fellow worker with the will of God, the Spirit, these realities have become possible for us." The treatise consists of two parts: the first part (chs. 3–17) deals with prayer in general, and the second part (chs. 18–30) with the Lord's Prayer in particular. An appendix (chs. 31–33), which makes additions to the first section, concerns the attitude of the body and soul, gestures, the place and the direction of prayer, and the different kinds of prayer. In the conclusion, Origen begs Ambrose and Tatiana to be content with the present writing until he can offer something better, more beautiful, and more precise. Apparently, Origen was never able to fulfill his promise.

Origen begins *On Prayer* by setting the stage with a question:

My conviction, so far as my weakness allows, is that one of these impossible things is giving a clear account of prayer that will be accurate and religious—for what and

how we ought to pray, and what we should say to God in prayer, and what times are more appropriate than others for prayer. . . . [We know that Paul] was cautious about the abundance of revelations so that no one might think more of him than he saw or heard of him (cf. 2 Cor 12:6–7). And he confessed that he did not know how to pray "as we ought." For he says, "What we ought to pray for as we ought we do not know" (Rom 8:26). It is necessary not only to pray, but also to pray "as we ought" and to pray for what we ought. Our attempt to understand what we should pray for is deficient unless we also bring to our quest the "as we ought." Likewise, what use to us is the "as we ought" if we do not know for what we should pray?

Origen clarified the phrase "as we ought" to be the words of prayer, while also referring to the disposition of the person praying, "For what better gift can a rational being send up to God than the fragrant word of prayer, when it is offered from

“For what better gift can  
a rational being send up  
to God than the fragrant  
word of prayer, when it is  
offered from a conscience  
untainted with the soul  
smell of sin?”

### — ORIGEN

a conscience untainted with the soul smell of sin?" In order to follow the command to pray "as we ought," Origen set forth two conditions:

The person praying must stretch out "holy hands" by thoroughly purging the passion of "anger" from his soul and harboring no rage against anyone and by forgiving each the sins

he has committed against him (cf. 1 Tim 2:8; Matt 6:12, 14; Luke 11:4). Next, so that his mind may not be muddled by thoughts from outside, he must forget for the time being everything but the prayer he is praying. (How can such a man fail to be highly blessed?)

According to Origen, to pray “as we ought,” the believer must learn to “pray for the things that are chiefly and truly great and heavenly.” The Lord’s Prayer is set forth as the preeminent example of leaving “to God what concerns the shadows that accompany the chief goods.” Origen gives a beautiful interpretation of the opening address, “Our Father, who art in heaven,” which anchors his preceding exposition. He emphasizes that, until this main point is understood and rightly employed in the prayers of a believer, he or she cannot proceed with the following petitions contained within the Lord’s Prayer.

In particular, Origen points out that the Old Testament does not know the name “Father” as an alternative for God, at least not in the Christian sense, which indicates a steady and changeless adoption for those who confess Christ’s name. Only those who have received the spirit of adoption can recite the prayer rightly. Therefore, the entire life of a believer should consist in lifting up prayers that contain, “Our Father who art in heaven,” because, argues Origen, the conduct of every believer should be heavenly, not worldly. He writes,

Let us not suppose that the Scriptures teach us to say “Our Father” at any appointed time of prayer. Rather, if we understand the earlier discussion of praying “constantly” (1 Thess 5:17), let our whole life be a constant prayer in which we say “Our Father in heaven” and let us keep our commonwealth (Phil 3:20) not in any way on earth, but in every way in heaven, the throne of God, because the kingdom of God is established in all those who bear the image of Man from heaven (1 Cor 15:49) and have thus become heavenly.

In his concluding thoughts, Origen gives special instructions to the one praying. These recommendations concern the posture of prayer, cultivating a heart of prayer, and the time and direction of prayer. The most poignant point he makes, one with which all believers struggle, is appropriate preparation for prayer. According to Origen:

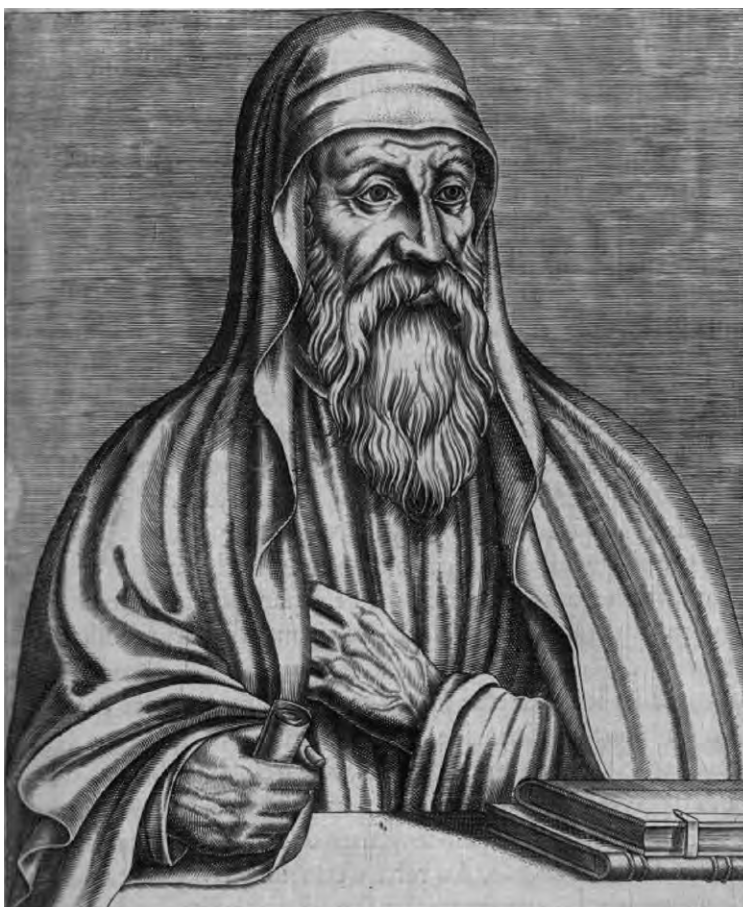
It seems to me that the person who is about to come to prayer should withdraw for a little and prepare himself, and so become more attentive and active for the whole

of his prayer. He should cast away all temptation and troubling thoughts and remind himself so far as he is able of the Majesty whom he approaches, and that it is impious to approach Him carelessly, sluggishly, and disdainfully; and he should put away all extraneous things. This is how he should come to prayer, stretching out his soul, as it were, instead of his hands, straining his mind toward God instead of his eyes, raising his governing reason from the ground and standing it before the Lord of all instead of standing.

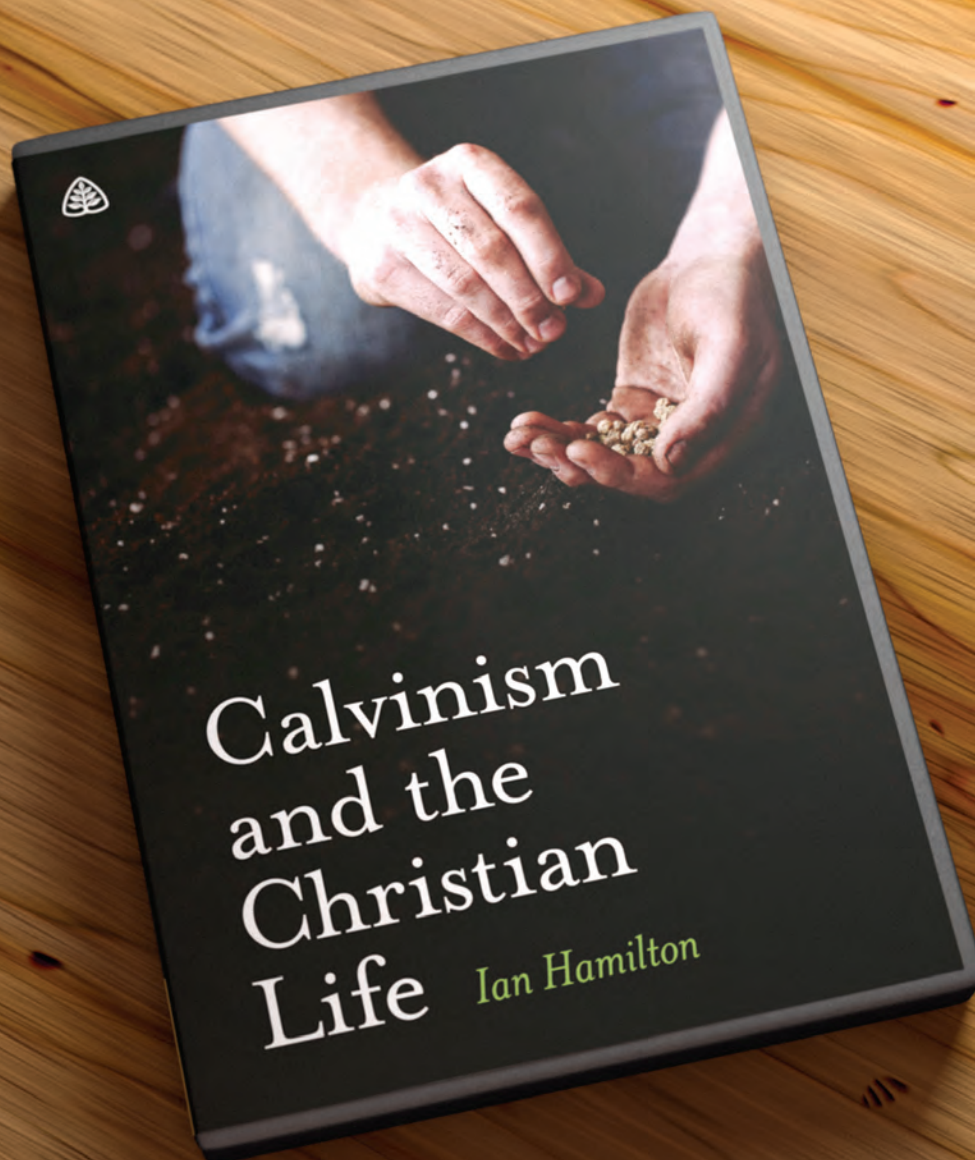
### CONCLUSION

Throughout this treatise, Origen’s intent is to direct his audience into the mysteries of a life of ardent and

continual prayer. During his lifetime, he led many into the church and away from the heresies that had gripped many within the ranks of the educated class. When the reader goes beyond what may be foreign within Origen’s words, his message that this life is a preparation for the glory that is to come in the providence of God, and that prayer is the means by which we lay claim to this providence, can be both heard and treasured. ♦







**NEW**

## **THEOLOGY FOR ALL OF LIFE**

It is impossible to encounter God's saving grace and not be powerfully and permanently changed. John Calvin knew this. In this new 6-part teaching series, Pastor Ian Hamilton demonstrates that Calvinism is biblical, God-centered Christianity with important implications for our daily lives. This theology is not simply academic. It is a theology for all of life—a theology in which the grace of Jesus Christ shapes everything.



Ligonier.org | 800.435.4343



## Help us strengthen believers to live distinctively Christian lives

### WITH EVERY GIFT YOU:

- Provide free audio, video, and written materials to preachers and teachers of God's Word.
- Keep at your fingertips a wealth of resources from some of today's best Bible expositors and teachers to answer questions and deepen your faith, while also bringing the gospel of Christ into homes around the world via [OnePassionMinistries.org](http://OnePassionMinistries.org).
- Continue providing a wealth of printed resources, including training materials for The Institute for Expository Preaching, *Expositor* magazine, teaching series, and much more to provide you and others with unparalleled content and training.
- Help train a new generation of biblical expositors through The Institute for Expository Preaching, OnePassion regional conferences, and our yearly national conference.
- Receive a monthly audio CD of a sermon from Dr. Steven J. Lawson and a subscription to *Expositor* magazine with your monthly gift.

VISIT OUR WEBSITE TO LEARN MORE

[ONEPASSIONMINISTRIES.ORG/MINISTRYCIRCLE](http://ONEPASSIONMINISTRIES.ORG/MINISTRYCIRCLE)



PRESENTED BY  
**ONEPASSION AND  
LIGONIER MINISTRIES**

## WHAT IS THE INSTITUTE FOR EXPOSITORY PREACHING?

In these truth-starved days, we must be bold in our proclamation of God's Word. There is a great need for pastors, teachers, and spiritual leaders to be better equipped and energized to preach the Scriptures.

In light of this great need, OnePassion Ministries has partnered with Ligonier Ministries to host events to equip and encourage anyone who teaches and preaches the Word of God. Our goal is to encourage pastors, church leaders, Bible teachers, and those interested in the ministry of biblical preaching to stand strong and to equip them to correctly exposit the Word of God.

Dr. Steven Lawson will gather with pastors, church leaders, Bible teachers, and anyone interested in the ministry of biblical preaching and teach multiple sessions on expository preaching. The Institute will normally take place over a two- to three-day period and will be an intense time of training and instruction in the discipline of expository preaching.

Please visit our website for more information or to register for an upcoming Institute for Expository Preaching

**[ONEPASSIONMINISTRIES.ORG/INSTITUTE](http://ONEPASSIONMINISTRIES.ORG/INSTITUTE)**

**EXPOSITOR**

**ONEPASSION**

P.O. Box 601649  
Dallas, TX 75360

NEXT ISSUE: The Puritans



## VISIT OUR ONLINE RESOURCE STORE

New resources are now available in our online store from the preaching and teaching ministry of Dr. Steven J. Lawson. Purchase CD Albums, MP3 CDs, *Expositor* magazine, and more.

VISIT OUR ONLINE RESOURCE STORE  
[ONEPASSIONMINISTRIES.ORG/STORE](http://ONEPASSIONMINISTRIES.ORG/STORE)

**EXPOSITOR**

NOV/DEC15 | ISSUE 8 | DELIVERING THE SERMON

