

The Gourmet Pulpit

Preaching with Panache and Power

Revised Edition

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PREFACE

Every book requires the effort of many people and the original *The Gourmet Pulpit* is no exception. I know that I could not have completed that project alone. However, the book served its original purpose well. But time passes and new things are learnt along the way. Now is the time to update the material and revise *The Gourmet Pulpit*.

While there is much that has been retained from the original book, there are certain specific changes that make the revised edition different. The principal change concerns the exegetical method I am proposing. Over the years of teaching and study, I have continued to grow in my understanding of how to do exegesis. The exegetical method I am proposing in this revised edition is one that I developed over the past two years and first published in *Catalyst* in 2012. I believe that this updated exegetical method will enhance the preparation of sermons as it compels the preacher to pay closer attention to his or her own context as integral to the interpretative enterprise.

Other changes include additional sermon styles in the area of expository preaching and the integrative sermonic style proposed by Kenton Anderson. The refinement of expository preaching into a wider scheme of possibilities is helpful as it brings a finer focus on this very significant aspect of preaching. Likewise, integrative preaching can fine tune the technical ability of the preacher by providing another option.

Hopefully, the additions in this volume will complement the material presented in the original *The Gourmet Pulpit* and the users of this book will find much to help them with the task of preaching God's word. I pray that homiletics students everywhere will discover beneficial tools in this book and be able to use it for many years to come.

Introducing the Task

One of my favourite television shows is a cooking programme entitled 'Oliver's Twist'. The host of the show, Jaime Oliver, is a gourmet chef from the United Kingdom. Oliver's culinary skills are amply demonstrated in his ability to take the most mundane ingredients and produce a gourmet meal using these ingredients. What really catches my attention is the creativity of his dishes; he never seems to follow any recipe. Nevertheless, his dishes are so enticing that you actually begin to salivate simply by watching and you find yourself wanting to run off to the kitchen to test your own culinary abilities. While all analogies are imperfect by nature, I particularly like this culinary analogy because I believe that preaching is gourmet communication at its best.

However, we should begin at the beginning. The pages of history are littered with the names of great orators and communicators. It seems that for as long as there have been people, there have been communicators. Part of being human is the desire to pass on ideas, share thoughts, and allow others to enter one's mind. As a consequence of this, specialists have arisen throughout the centuries whose only job has been to facilitate this entire process. In Christian jargon we call such specialists 'preachers'.

As we scan the pages of the Bible and church history we encounter the names of many such preachers. Perhaps the first recognisable preacher in the Bible is Noah. After him comes a long line of preachers, most of whom we call prophets (in the Old Testament) and apostles (in the New Testament). However, the task was not limited only to these specialist prophets or apostles because we also meet other individuals who performed the task. In biblical terms, the ultimate preacher was Jesus, the master communicator. As we scroll down through the pages of church history we learn of inspirational preachers such as John Chrysostom, John Knox, Martin Luther, John Wesley, C. S. Spurgeon, Dwight L. Moody, Peter Marshall, Billy Graham, A W Tozer and many others. What differentiates these biblical and Christian preachers from their secular counterparts is the content of their communication.

In every form of communication there are three indispensable components. The process entails a communicator, an audience, and the content of the communication. Whether the communication is simply backyard gossip or valedictorian address or pulpit sermon, the three components essentially exist in concert at all times. To put this diagrammatically, we could posit that the process of communicating involves a communicator, a 'communicatee', and the communication itself.

Communicator ⇒ Communication ⇒ Communicatee

Figure 1

When we compare preaching with other forms of communication, it is quickly evident that the content is fixed in nature. Whether we speak of the content as biblical truth, Christian doctrine, or revelation, it is quite clear that this is the part of the process that remains largely unalterable. To put this differently, the message is unchanging. There is something rather absolute about the idea of truth, in so far as this relates to Christian faith, that preachers feel compelled to 'speak the truth and nothing but the truth.'

Having said this, it is equally important to recognise that the communicator and the communicatee are always changing. The character, personality, and ability of the communicator will affect the process. Similarly the disposition, personality, and receptability of the communicatee will also impact the process. Because of this, it is of paramount importance that those who seek to communicate the truths about God should diligently seek to master the art of preaching.

This book is an attempt to enable both professional preachers and so-called lay preachers to become better communicators of truth and in so doing place themselves on the line with the great

preachers of previous generations (biblical and historical). I am also convinced that there is no nobler task than this in effecting the growth of God's kingdom on earth.

There are three principal convictions that underpin my conceptual framework about preaching. First, I believe that there is an intrinsic revelatory chasm between God's word and us (see Isa 55:8-9). Jesus affirms this idea and tells us that the Spirit will teach us all truth (John 14:26). Likewise, Paul says that spiritual things are spiritually discerned (1 Cor 2:14). Preaching facilitates this process of discovering the infinite.

Second, I believe that the believer's natural instinct is to attempt to discover God and his will. Part of the drive of faith is the desire to learn all we can about God. This is why we study the Bible, go to church, and listen to sermons. There is an appetite for the infinite that comprises the faith and life of the believer. Preaching caters to this desire and enables the believer to learn more about God.

Third, I believe that preaching must always be missiological, by which I mean that preaching is a major tool in the growth of the kingdom of God. This is a tool that we use to attract people to the kingdom; it is a tool that we utilise to enable those attracted to the kingdom to continue to grow; and it is a tool that we employ to motivate citizens of the kingdom to become agents of its growth. Preaching is innately missiological.

As the title of the book suggests, my aim is not simply to inform but to facilitate the process of preaching with the view of creating gourmet preachers. A preacher once admitted, after comparing himself to another preacher, that he could never perform at the same level. In his words, 'I could never preach like that.' To return to the culinary analogy, it is highly likely that many preachers see themselves as simply throwing together a quick fast-meal for the sake of the job. I cannot but wonder whether those of us entrusted with the noblest of all communication should be so easily contented with mediocrity. I envisage that this book will challenge and inspire; that it will inculcate the desire to become gourmet preachers. I believe that our congregations deserve the best possible 'bread of life' they can obtain from us. I also believe that God expects us to rise above ourselves when we are called upon to preach his word. I trust that the material in this book will enable preachers to be the best preachers they can be.

Getting Started

In today's world we meet a plethora of terms about preaching. Terms such as liturgical preaching, holistic preaching, liberation preaching, life-situation preaching, theological preaching, and feminist preaching, pervade the literature on preaching. We also read about preaching that is based on communications theories or preaching that is built around language theory. The wealth of terminologies is both illuminating and confusing. Perhaps we should begin with some definitions to maintain perspective.

Where to Begin?

It is always helpful to start by trying to answer a rather obvious question, 'What is preaching?' Some definitions may focus on the preachers themselves. Philip Brooks says that, 'preaching is the communication of truth through personality' (cited in Elwell, 1984, p. 868). Similarly, Henry Sloane Coffin describes preaching as 'truth through personality to constraint conscience,' while Andrew W. Blackwood contends that 'preaching is divine truth voiced by a chosen personality to meet human needs' (Ibid.) Other definitions focus more on the effect of preaching. John Ruskins defines preaching as 'thirty minutes to wake the dead.' In *Essentials for Biblical Preaching*, Al Fasol states that 'preaching is orally communicating truth as found in the Bible in a way that applies God's Word to life today' (1989, p. 16). According to Blackwood, 'Preaching means interpreting life today with light from the Scripture so as to meet the needs of the hearer now, and guide the hearer in doing God's will tomorrow' (cited in Elwell, 1984, p. 868). Still other definitions may concentrate on the source of preaching itself, the Bible. Bishop Manning calls preaching 'the manifestation of the Incarnated Word from the written word through the spoken word,' (Ibid.) and G. Campbell Morgan refers to it as 'the proclamation of the Word revealed.'

I would like to offer my own working definition of preaching. If I were to distil the idea of preaching into a simple sentence or phrase, I suggest that, 'preaching is oratorical biblical communication.' The element of oration pertains to the skills and abilities of the preacher. Many times there are preachers who stand at the pulpit to expound the word of God but have learned little about oratorical skills. They have not learned the basics of voice manipulation, body language, or the language refinement that can enhance their message. The mistaken notion that all you need is a message and the willingness to share it accounts for so much of the anaemic preaching prevalent in the church today. The consequence of such skill-less preaching are congregations who often leave church still hungry for truth. They sense the truth but cannot quite catch the expected fire.

Preaching must always be biblical, by which I mean that it is the Bible which forms the substance of preaching. In a world that is disturbingly self-absorbed, the temptation is to preach feel-good or self-help sermons or social issues gospel. This is not to belittle the desire to tackle felt needs or current issues through our preaching. Rather it is to remind us that the Bible is not a self-help manual and cannot be used as corroborating evidence in our search for the good life. If we treat the Bible in this manner, our preaching would degenerate into the type of oratorical exercise where the full word of God is seldom heard. The preacher himself or herself would be inclined to preach sermons for the sake of popularity ratings or to soothe a congregation while ignoring the biblical call to be prophetic even when this is painful to the preacher and congregation.

Since preaching is essentially a form of communication, the process calls for a clear understanding of the three elements already highlighted in the introduction of this book. Some preachers pay little attention to their mannerisms and cannot comprehend why congregations do not warm up to them. Members at a certain church always commented that their pastor preached above their heads. On closer inspection it was observed that this was not so much a reference to his high theological stance but rather to the fact that this pastor did not make eye contact with his congregation during his preaching and in not doing so left his audience wondering about his actual

line of vision. Some preachers also pay scant attention to the congregation itself. They work out of the one-size-fits-all mentality and cannot figure out why certain congregations do not respond as well as others. At other times the preacher is unaware or ignorant of where his or her congregation is at and the sermons inevitably seem out of touch with reality. This issue of relevance (or irrelevance) appears to impact younger congregations much more acutely, judging by the volume of complaints that I hear from generation after generation of university students. It is insufficient to simply know the truth or have one's theology all sorted out. A preacher is a communicator and can ill afford to neglect any of the elements in that process.

Why Preach?

There are those who view preaching as increasingly redundant. They argue that preaching does not serve any real purpose and that it has been over-emphasised. It is true that preaching frequently occupies the most time in a worship service and many sermons are simply out of step with current realities and concerns. At other times preaching takes on the appearance of the theatrical and for many sermons become time-wasters. There are even those who think that preaching is a way to provide work for the pastor since he or she does not have enough work to do. I contend that preaching is crucial to the church's life and that without it the church would be crippled. Why do I say this?

First, preaching is a gap-filler in the church's spiritual education. There are several educational avenues for the church and these include such activities as Bible study groups, seminars, felt needs workshops, special interest groups study, and informal discussion sessions. Nevertheless, the most commonly accessed form of learning comes through the preaching of the church.

Second, preaching provides an opportunity and a platform for the pastor's vision for the church. During any given week it is virtually impossible for a pastor to meet all of his or her members and to share a vision with all members at once. The preaching session of the church offers the only genuine alternative.

Third, preaching serves as the platform for the church's agenda. This is a corollary of the previous idea and it is just as significant. The pastor's vision for the church frequently translates into a spiritual agenda for the church. Such an agenda tells the church where it is at and where it intends to go. This provides the church with a sense of identity and mission, elements crucial to its well-being.

Fourth, preaching is a principal tool of the pastor. It is as ludicrous to imagine a pastor without preaching, as it is to speak of a doctor without a stethoscope or a chef without cooking utensils. The only real question is not whether to utilise the tool but whether the tool is effectively employed.

Fifth, preaching is a principal form of gospel communication. As argued earlier, preaching has always been the chosen method through which to communicate God and his will to the church and world. Preaching is a time-proven method of communication and its role in the life and mission of the church is inestimable.

Last, preaching is a biblical injunction (Mark 16:15; Jer 1:17; etc.). Not to preach would be a direct violation of God's expressed will. If God sees this as his selected method of reaching the hearts and minds of people, preachers have no choice but to faithfully master its use. Arguably, this is the most important reason for preaching.

Grasping the Basics

The three basic components of preaching are hermeneutics, exegesis, and homiletics. In this chapter we will explore these three basics. The discussion here will be more of a summary view concerning these three areas as more comprehensive discussions can be found elsewhere. However, helpful sources are provided at the end of the book for those interested in further research. In this chapter we are primarily interested in the impact that hermeneutics, exegesis, and homiletics have on the church's preaching.

Planning a Menu: Understanding Hermeneutics

When preparing a gourmet meal, the first thing to do is to decide what kind of meal we want to make, Chinese, Indian, Italian, or fusion. Hermeneutics is the process of deciding what sermonic meal we want to put together. Hermeneutics has been most aptly described as the science of biblical interpretation. While this may sound rather technical, it is a significant part of what a preacher does and provides preaching with an interpretational platform. It is helpful to recognise that preaching is not merely about information dissemination; it is more appropriately about making sense of the Bible, that is, about interpretation.

Types of Hermeneutics

Historically, Christian theology has produced several types of hermeneutical models. The model that was employed for over a thousand years by the church is often referred to as the allegorical method. This paradigm maintained that biblical truth exists on multiple levels and to truly understand the Bible all levels should be explored. Two names quickly come to mind. Origen, the great church father from Alexandria (AD c.185-c.254) subscribed to a three level interpretational model analogous to the threefold anthropology of Christian theology. He suggested that since humanity is made up of body, soul, and spirit, truth likewise exists on the physical/literal, moral/psychical, and allegorical/intellectual levels (Dockery, 1992, p. 88).

A second approach to the allegorical method was that of Augustine (AD 354-430), the bishop of Hippo. He proposed four senses of Scripture: the literal which is the basic sense of the text, the allegorical which corresponds to faith or what the church should believe, the tropological/moral which corresponds to love or what believers should do, and the anagogical/spiritual which corresponds to hope or pointing to the church's future expectation (Ibid., pp. 145 & 158). The Augustinian model came to be known as the *Quadrivia* and became the standard hermeneutical paradigm for about a thousand years. It also served as the principal interpretational format throughout the medieval period of church history. Because of its innate subjectivity and abuse, the allegorical method was, largely, rejected by the Protestant reformers.

During the New Testament period, typological hermeneutics was widely employed. This is an interpretation model that views persons, places, events, and Scripture passages from the Old Testament period as typifying the messiah and as having been fulfilled in the life and ministry of Christ (Ibid., pp. 33-34). Typological hermeneutics continues to be used in biblical interpretation today.

Contemporary hermeneutics is greatly influenced by historical critical paradigms. It could be argued that this is the principal hermeneutics of contemporary biblical scholarship (Hasel, 1985, p. 5). This model concerns itself with the Bible as a historical document and expends substantial energy delving into such matters as authorship issues, redaction concerns, *Sitz im leben*, and comparative studies. Its popularity among scholars belies the fact that this hermeneutics tends to undermine belief in the inspiration of the Bible.

Dispensationalist hermeneutics is a fairly recent phenomenon but it has quickly become the predominant interpretational model for many churches, particularly on eschatological concerns. This model maintains that God's salvific work assumes different economies, one for Israel, another for the church. By and large dispensationalist hermeneutics argues for the primacy of Israel and views the church as an unintended contingency (Mathison, 1995, pp. 17-18). Eschatologically speaking, this means that all the biblical prophecies concerning Israel must be literally fulfilled. This accounts for such beliefs as the rapture and the final restoration of Israel.

Liberation hermeneutics is also a recent model and is popular in the developing world. This is the favoured interpretational model among Latin American, African, and Asian theologians. Liberation theologies are very earth-bound and maintain that God's salvific work occupies all facets of life; salvation is primarily about liberation (Elwell, 1984, pp. 635-637). With the Exodus narrative and the cross-event as the driving models, liberation theology subscribes to the total liberation of humanity: spiritual, physical, psychical, economical, and political. Since the developing world contains the bulk of the world's poor, it is easy to understand the appeal of such hermeneutics.

Perhaps the oldest interpretational framework is one that comprises grammatical and historical methodologies (Hasel, 1985, p. 5). Since the inception of the church such hermeneutics has taken the Bible seriously. It holds that the Bible is divinely inspired and that biblical revelation runs parallel to history. It also posits that the literal understanding of the Bible is the most appropriate one. This belief is accompanied by the conviction that the internal claims of the biblical data (about authorship, dating, and context) must be accepted as valid. While this model has not been employed continuously through history, it has always been a part of the hermeneutical landscape.

Every preacher should familiarise himself or herself with hermeneutical issues. Doing so enables the preacher to be a deliberate Bible interpreter and avoids the pitfall of accidental interpretation. Coming to terms with hermeneutical realities also allows the preacher to locate himself or herself within his or her particular tradition.

Preaching as Biblical Interpretation

As earlier stated, the preacher is also a biblical interpreter. Understanding hermeneutical paradigms makes the preacher a better interpreter. Every preacher may employ a variety of approaches as he or she seeks to convey God's word to the congregation.

Some preachers adopt a doctrinal approach and their sermons are tools for educating member about the beliefs and teachings of the church. Such preaching seeks to facilitate the faith positioning of their members and affords them reasons for continued membership and mission. In doing this, the preacher is interpreting the Bible from the standpoint of the church's theology.

Preachers may also adopt the gospel approach. The task then is not so much to project what the church believes in but the sort of general good news that will attract people to Christ and his word. Here the preacher is not so much espousing church dogma as expounding the Bible. The task is to discover biblical truth not merely to know church doctrine.

There are also preachers who specialise in one-subject or one-testament approaches. Such preachers may focus only on righteousness by faith or only on law or they may focus only on eschatology or only on liberation. Some Preachers may use only Pauline material for their sermons while others employ only the psalms. There are also those who preach only from the Old Testament or New Testament. Such preachers are one-dimensional.

Whatever the preferred approach, the preacher must be cognizant of his or her interpretative role. Members of the church ultimately look to the preacher as the one who unlocks the Bible for them. Preachers are theologians whether they know this or not. A preacher who understands this phenomenon will always endeavour to portray himself or herself as a person of the word of God. When this happens, preaching assumes a far greater significance than simply the need to entertain the church oratorically.

Preachers of God's word need to take this task of biblical interpretation seriously. As preachers, we are the doorway to greater knowledge and understanding of the intricate truths of the Bible. Most church members will never have the opportunity to rub shoulders with professional theologians. Their pastor is the closest they can come to that experience. In the present context of television and internet-based knowledge, church members are increasingly bombarded by information and shows that challenge their faith. Recent television programmes about the Gospel of Judas and the Da Vinci Code and the subsequent arguments that followed reveal just how exposed church members are to materials that appear to throw doubt on the Bible. Most members turn to their pastors for explanation and understanding. It is inconceivable that pastors in the 21st century can hide behind a cloak of ecclesiastical authority without adequate understanding of what it means to live in the information age. If ever there was a time when preaching ought to be interpretative, such a time is now. Preaching is about biblical interpretation and preachers are interpreters.

Our interest is not on theoretical hermeneutics *per se* but on the impact that hermeneutics has on preaching. To facilitate the use of interpretative framework for the development of sermons, I offer the following hermeneutical worksheets (blank and completed). The worksheets are not intended to be definitive but rather a working concept to enable the preacher to view his or her interpretative work.

Hermeneutical Worksheet

(The following hermeneutical worksheet was adapted from suggestions made by C. Raymond Holmes)

- What is the principal/big idea of the text?
- What is the intention of the text? To what human need does the passage address itself?
- What elements bind together the original meaning of the text and its contemporary relevance?
- What reactions and attitudes (to life, the world, the gospel, etc.) does the text elicit?
- Is the text functioning at the cognitive (i.e., serves to inform) or affective (i.e., touches emotions) level, or both?
- What is the message that is struggling to be re-spoken, the story to be retold?

Completed Hermeneutical Worksheet Based on Romans 5:1-2

What is the principal/big idea of the text?

The cross removes all barriers between God and man.

What is the intention of the text? To what human need does the passage address itself?

The passage addresses the issue of fear, one of the biggest human problems and offers Christ as the antidote to fear.

What elements bind together the original meaning of the text and its contemporary relevance?

The element that binds the text to the past and the present is that of God's grace which is demonstrated through Jesus and is appropriated by faith.

What reactions and attitudes (to life, the world, the gospel, etc.) does the text elicit?

The reactions and attitudes the text elicits: Do I really believe this? Do I accept it? Is this at odds with my life?

Is the text functioning at the cognitive (i.e., serve to inform) or affective (i.e., touch emotions) level, or both?

The text functions at both cognitive and affective levels. It teaches about God and it speaks about joy and peace. It informs about justification, faith, grace, and God's glory. It stirs emotions of joy, peace, hope, and confidence.

What is the message that is struggling to be re-spoken, the story to be retold?

The text is saying that all fears can be assuaged and overcome. The cross signifies that we are reconciled with God and we can experience peace and joy in Christ.

Preparing the Ingredients: Doing Sermonic Exegesis

The next step in gourmet meal planning is to prepare the necessary ingredients. This is the time when cutting, slicing, dicing, and cooking occurs. Similarly, exegesis is the next main component of preaching; this is the actual cooking process. If hermeneutics concerns itself with interpretation, exegesis seeks to answer a basic question, 'What is this text really all about?' Admittedly, there is no single exegetical method that can be considered 'the one'. Each method contributes something to the exegetical equation. I have provided a brief exploration of some available methodologies so that we may discover options and tools for our own study of God's word (for the full text of the material below, refer to Fanwar, 2012, pp. 54-68).

In order to attain a broad comprehension of Bible study or exegetical methods, we should learn what others have used and proposed. There are exegetical methods that are both scholarly and less-scholarly in scope. It is important to recognise the methodology that is used and to ascertain its strengths and weaknesses so as to get closer to the word of God.

Folk Exegesis

The term, 'folk exegesis', simply refers to those methods of Bible study that are employed by students of the word at the church level. Normally, such students do not have much technical training in exegesis or hermeneutics. However, they may spend a lifetime reading the Bible and striving to come to terms with its message. Some of these students may also include pastors and school teachers who handle the word on a daily basis but have not been to a seminary or received any specific training on Bible study methods. Folk exegesis also encompasses those who teach or study the Bible within the constraints of their theological traditions and as such may not sense the larger freedom of studying the word. Arguably, the majority of those who study the Bible belong to the realm of folk exegesis, but even in this arena there is a variety of methodologies used.

Devotional exegesis

It may be argued that one of the most commonly used systems of Bible study is the devotional method (Ehrman, 2009, p. 2). This method operates with a simple assumption in mind: the Bible is the word of God and can be understood by everyone who searches. Added to this is the conviction that Scripture is inspired and therefore is spiritually discerned. The concept suggests that those who are spiritual can understand the Bible. From this basic platform arises a simple methodology: pray, read the Bible, meditate on the word, and reach a conclusion or application.

One drawback of the method is that it inculcates a form of spiritual laziness that discourages any serious search for the deeper meaning of the passage. Those who use this method often ignore

the passage in its biblical, historical, and cultural contexts, treating the Bible as though it exists in some sort of spiritual vacuum without any external referent. More likely than not, they are more dependent on secondary material (devotional readings, commentaries, lectionaries, etc) for interpretation rather than upon serious search.

Another drawback is the element of subjectivity that is brought to bear upon the text. At a recent meeting, I presented the full facts of the food laws in Leviticus. My audience comprised people who actually practise some of these laws but were unaware of the full extent of the laws. After the presentation, a member of the audience who apparently found this fuller exegesis difficult to accept, said to me, 'You almost convince me, but I still think that . . .!' This is an attitude that is engendered by the methodology.

We need to meditate on the word of God and learn its lessons. Nevertheless, if this is our primary method of study, it is possible that we may not be able to be true to the word!

Fantasy Exegesis

A classic example of fantasy exegesis involves the David and Goliath story. As a child I learnt the song, 'only a boy name David, only a little sling; . . . and five little stones he took . . .!' Generations of Christian children have grown up believing the song and never realise that most of the song is not in the Bible story. Not long ago, I heard a preacher wax eloquently about the miracle of David's victory over Goliath and 'wowed' his audience with grand embellishments of how a little boy was used by God to defeat a godless giant. His message was equally captivating: no matter how small or weak you are, God will enable you to achieve victory.

At first glance, both the song and the sermon seem biblical. However, closer inspection of the text reveals the following facts about the actual Bible story: David was already a soldier in King Saul's army at this point of his life (see 1 Sam 16); by his own admission, he had already killed a lion and a bear; he was old enough to ask what reward he will get for defeating Goliath (a wife!); he chose to fight without heavy armour to maintain his mobility against a lumbering giant; he used a long-range weapon (a sling) against Goliath's hand to hand combat weapons (which, incidentally, were extremely heavy and cumbersome); and he had the strength to wield Goliath's giant sword and cut off Goliath's head with it (can a small boy really perform such a feat?). Archaeological excavations have shown that sling stones are anything but little. If David was truly a small boy, his father, Jesse, would have been the worst father in the planet for sending this little boy alone to the battle front to carry food supplies and news!

There is no doubt that David's courage was fuelled by his knowledge of and trust in God. However, to present David as a little boy is to be untrue to the word.

Proof Text Exegesis

The proof text method of exegesis is a principal method of Bible study used by both scholars and lay members alike. Its premise is quite simple: pick all the verses that address a particular subject, put them together, organise them thematically, and then form a conclusion that this is a doctrine of the Bible. Denominational doctrines were born precisely this way and, regardless of our persuasion, are believed to be biblical truth. At the more technical level, this is considered a propositional approach to the truths of the Bible. For over two thousand years, Christian theology has been governed by this approach to the Bible and the methodology is so embedded in the Christian psyche that few members in the churches even bother to question its validity.

The proof text method has much to commend it. It is simple to construct and easy to use. History testifies to this and most pastors and Bible teachers utilise it to such an extent that many members think this is Bible study.

However, there are serious drawbacks with this system of study. First, the method tends to ignore not only the historical and social contexts of biblical materials, but also the biblical context

itself. For instance, the word 'save' represents a major concept in the Bible. To most Christians, the word 'save' refers to that act of God that delivers us from sin. A close examination of biblical data reveals that there are several Hebrew (*yasha, ga'al, padah*, etc) and Greek (*sozo, therapeuo, 'iaomai*, etc) words that are translated 'save'. The semantic range of each word differs from the others and from the English counterpart 'save'. These words include every form of deliverance and so the biblical concept of salvation connotes far more than just rescue from sin.

Second, those who use this method often pay little or no attention to the details of the texts they study. People are often surprised to discover that the fishermen disciples of Jesus were not poor but well-to-do entrepreneurs or that Bathsheba was not the first wife that David took from another man. Some will contend that it is only the message of the Bible that matters and knowing all its details is unnecessary. To say that is to belittle the inspiration of the Bible. We are left to wonder why God gave us all these details if he never intended for them to be learnt.

Third, the innate subjectivity of proof text conclusions has given birth to the multiplicity of denominational differences within Christendom. The plethora of churches, each one claiming to have the truth, makes the gospel unappealing to the adherents of the world's major religions and it is apparent that this state of affairs exists primarily because of this form of exegesis and its inevitable power to divide the Christian world.

Two important questions could be raised. Can the proof text method enable us to really know the true word of God? Or does it merely feed our desire to compartmentalise the ideas of Scripture into manageable bytes?

'Professional' Exegesis

A form of exegesis or study method that is sometimes encountered but for which no appropriate label exists, can be called 'professional' exegesis. This label should be used with a great deal of caution. There are many who study the Bible and formulate their understanding of what it teaches. Many of these are persons in other academic or professional disciplines. Often they are highly educated and trained to think critically. They may be educators or learned lay members in the church. Many of them may actually teach Bible in the local church setting. The combination of high education, experience, and status engenders a degree of confidence about their ability to speak authoritatively on biblical matters. Because of their station in life, they are also given opportunities to offer opinion on Scripture. Yet, many of them are untrained in the tools of biblical exegesis and hermeneutics.

What sometimes happens in this situation is that there are persons who speak with authority but whose conclusions may simply be, 'This is what I think the Bible means!' Instead of using the tools of the trade, they impose the tools of their own disciplines to interpret the Bible. Consequently we may observe various ways of reading the Bible from a psychological perspective because that is the discipline of the teachers. Others read the Bible as science manual because science is their field. Frequently, these people do not hesitate to second guess those with the training in exegesis and theological analysis.

This is not an elitist proposition, but a simple statement of a fact of learning: every educated person has an area of expertise and the world of learning works better when people stick to their areas of expertise. When a scientist who has not learnt the tools of literary analysis comments on the creation story of Genesis 1, there is a good chance he or she will not recognise the narrative techniques built into the story and will attempt to discover evidence for creation science (perhaps) at the expense of the story. Sometimes theologians themselves are guilty of this error because some of them do not hesitate to pontificate on material they have no expertise in.

It may be postulated that pastors, Bible teachers, and others involved in some form of teaching the Bible owe it to themselves and others to learn the proper tools of exegesis in order to be true to the word. Bible students of all shades also owe this same favour to themselves. At times

there is too much human opinion in the preaching and teaching of the word that many members of the church are unable to discern the word of God from the word of man.

Incomplete Exegesis

The influence of external factors in any approach to Bible study is difficult to estimate. Every reader or student is affected by what is learnt as a child or taught within their own faith spectrum. Truth is invariably associated with church dogma rather than any serious search of the word of God. Many denominations make dogma a test of faith and then use this ecclesiastical leverage to control what their members learn or think. In many ways the excesses of medieval Christianity have never truly departed from the Church. This is normally achieved in one of two ways, by subscribing to a creed or developing a statement of beliefs. Both have the same end result; they stifle genuine Bible study.

This scenario may be somewhat extreme but it does reflect an approach to the Bible that renders exegesis nearly always incomplete. However, this can happen in a more mundane manner. It is often bemusing to inspect the inordinate amount of attention that Joseph receives from those who preach or teach Genesis. Unnoticed by many readers, Gen 37-50, the longest narrative cycle in the book, highlights two of Jacob's sons, Judah and Joseph. Even scholars are sometimes misled and view these chapters as the Joseph Cycle or story or the Joseph narratives (Sailhamer, 1992, p. 206; Wenham, 1994, p. 344). However, a close examination of the chapters uncovers two principal characters, Joseph and Judah. In Gen 37 it appears that the rest of the family would bow and praise Joseph, but in Gen 49, the family bows to Judah. Judah is the last character introduced in Genesis (a common pattern in the book when dealing with those whom God chooses) and, on his death bed, Jacob acknowledges the supremacy of Judah (Gen 49:10). If the story is tracked further into the Bible, Ps 78:67-68 reveals the fact that God chose Judah and rejected Joseph. Further, in later times, the house of Judah is associated with the Messiah (Ps 78:67-68; Isa 2:1-4; Mic 5:2; etc), while the house of Joseph is associated with idolatry (Hos 11:1-12). Clearly, God had a short-term role for Joseph, but an eternal one for Judah. Sadly, most of the sermons, lessons, and even children's stories revolve around Joseph. Judah is the forgotten son, even though he is the chosen one of God (see Fanwar, 2007, pp. 14-31; and 2009, pp. 23-28).

Incomplete exegesis demonstrates the need to develop a synthetic or macro view of Scripture, one that will allow the reader to view all the details before making conclusions. At times it is perplexing to observe the incompleteness of biblical knowledge even among those whose job is to preach and teach the word of God. The need to be true to the word should underpin all exegetical and study methods.

Formal Exegetical Methods

There are many exegetical approaches among biblical exegetes, theologians, and homileticians that it is impossible to discuss all of them. A sampling of views should suffice to demonstrate just how diverse the field of study is

Marvin A McMinckle

McMinkle, pastor and professor of homiletics, suggests an exegetical method that is homiletical, with an eye on historical-critical methodology. He employs an alliterative technique for what he terms the 8 Ls methodology for studying the Bible. These steps are: limits (the unit), literature (dealing with form and genre), location (contexts), language (Hebrew and Greek), links (intertextual data), leads (narrative techniques), lessons (theological concepts), and life application (2001, pp. 1-8).

Lee J Gugliotto

Gugliotto has been a pastor and teacher and taught classes in biblical languages, theology, and hermeneutics. He employs the word 'analysis' to describe his proposed exegetical methodology. His analysis of biblical material involves six steps: contextual (dealing with biblical contexts), structural (pertaining to literary elements), verbal (about the languages), cultural (exploring the extrabiblical contexts), theological (discovering the concepts), and homiletical analyses (2000, pp. 20-21).

Ng Kah Seng

My late friend, Ng Kah Seng, was a pastor and theology professor for many years in Asia. He developed a six step exegetical method based on the acronym SEARCH—survey, examine, analyse, recognise, compare, and harmonise (1989, p. 6).

- S: step 1 in this method is about surveying the literary context, inclusive of the immediate biblical context as well as the literary aspects of the passage.
- E: step 2 examines the historical, geographical, and cultural backgrounds that impact the passage.
- A: step 3 requires analysing the linguistic, grammatical, and semantic elements of the passage.
- R: step 4 is for recognising the theological message of the passage.
- C: step 5 involves comparing the passage with other sources such as commentaries.
- H: step 6 is about harmonising the application of the message or theological idea with the intention of the passage.

Douglas Stuart

Stuart is a professor of OT studies. As an OT scholar, his exegetical steps clearly reflect the unique demands of OT studies. His exegetical method is rather comprehensive and has much to commend it. However, it may prove far too daunting a task for the average student in the pew and therefore may be limited to scholarly use. Nevertheless, it provides a useful paradigmatic comparison. The 12 steps suggested by Stuart (1984, pp. 23-43) are listed below and, for the truly daring, offer a comprehensive approach to Bible study.

- Text. To confirm the limits of the passage.
- Translation. To prepare a tentative translation of the passage in question.
- Historical context. To explore the historical background, social setting, historical foreground, geographical background that inform the passage, and an attempt to date the passage.
- Literary context. To examine the literary function and placement of the text and involves analysing the details of the text and authorship issues.
- Form. To identify genre and form, suggest a life setting, analyse the completeness of the form, and be alert to partial and broken forms.
- Structure. To determine the outline of the passage and the flow of thought within the passage.
- Grammatical data. To analyse the significant grammatical issues, orthography, morphology and other affinities that would provide a better understand of the text.
- Lexical data. To explore the lexical meanings of words, do word studies for the most crucial words, and identify any special semantic features prevalent in the passage.
- Biblical context. To analyse the use of the passage elsewhere in Scripture, its relation to the rest of Scripture, and its import for understanding Scripture as a whole.
- Theology. To locate the passage theologically and explore the theological contribution of the passage.
- Secondary literature. To investigate what others have said about the passage.

- Application. To produce a list of life issues, clarify the nature and possible areas of clarification, identify the audience of application, establish categories of application, determine the time focus of application, and fix limits of applications.

Craig C Broyles

Broyles is a professor of religious studies and his proposed methodology (2001, pp. 20-23) is a very comprehensive one and covers just about every aspect of exegesis that can be discussed. However, the method is rather scholarly and may not be as usable for those without theological training. Nevertheless, it is worth exploring as it provides a framework for a very comprehensive approach to Bible study.

1. Delimiting a passage. The need for a proper starting point to Bible study and exegesis and for discovering the limits of the passage or unit that is intended.
2. Translation and textual criticism. Once the unit is chosen, the next task is to translate the passage and consider the development of the text itself.
3. Meditation. To approach the Bible with spiritual intentionality by allowing the text to speak.
4. Literary analysis. To analyse the literary aspects of a text by considering the following items.
 - Theme. Every passage contains a theme or concept.
 - Structure. Biblical texts also have structure, the arrangement that reveals the pattern of thought within the passage.
 - Genre and social setting. The Bible is set in time and place and reveals the experiences and worldview of the time and place. The genre of the text and its social setting are integral to any study of the word.
 - Point of view, characterisation, style, mood, and selectivity. Every writer of the Bible exhibits a unique perspective and style. The writer's point of view or the mood of the text informs the passage. The manner in which the author characterises persons in the narrative can be uncovered.
 - Grammar and word analysis. Linguistics is a crucial aspect of exegesis since the Bible was not written in English but rather in Hebrew and Greek with limited portions in Aramaic. Understanding these languages often opens the reader to possibilities that are not readily available in translation. Linguistic analysis should include at least the following:
 - Grammar. For instance, Hebrew grammar does not function like English grammar and, recognising this, enables the reader to avoid fallacious interpretations.
 - Figures of speech. Figures of speech, whether simple word plays or complex idiomatic expressions, are not readily translatable and yet they can have a great impact upon the meaning of the text.
 - Word studies. In every language, words have a specific semantic range. For instance, the smaller vocabulary of biblical Hebrew results in larger semantic ranges for every word when compared with the semantic ranges of English words.
5. Context. To recognise a simple fact: that the Bible was not written in vacuum but in real time and space. Therefore, it exhibits different types of contextual issues.
 - Literary and generic. Context is internal to the text itself as each unit or passage contains literary elements that should be examined.
 - Historical and sociological. There are also historical and sociological considerations to be explored. It is helpful to explicate the time and culture of the biblical writers and the issues that were pertinent to them.
 - Traditional. This element concerns the path that a text has taken to its present form. It should be remembered that the Hebrew text has a different tradition from the Greek text. The way Scripture has been handled in Judaism and early Christianity should be considered as well.

- Intertextual/canonical. There are literary connections between the books and even individual units. There are shared words, grammatical and literary patterns that tie together text with text.
 - Biblical/theological. Furthermore, there are also conceptual connections that tie the Bible together into a holistic message.
 - Extrabiblical and cultural. Contextual analysis also calls for a look at the milieu of the ancient Near East, the world in which the Bible was written.
6. Compositional history. To study the compositional history of the text. This is a principal concern of critical studies that is often quickly brushed aside by those who study the Bible from a faith perspective. Nevertheless, it is a useful tool to consider and involves,
 - Oral transmission. Much of biblical scholarship today recognises that the biblical texts frequently were passed from person to person in an oral manner before they were recorded down in written form.
 - Literary sources and redaction. It is also possible that biblical texts employed materials from external sources and a certain amount of editorial work may therefore be involved.
 7. Theological implications and application. Scholars usually speak of the 'meant' and the 'means' when attempting to decipher the message of a text. The theology of a passage includes its meaning to the original readers and its application to readers today.
 8. Secondary literature. To examine the issue of secondary literature. The Bible is arguably the most studied book in human history and it is needful to consider what others have said about the text. The study of secondary literature incorporates two elements:
 - Current interpretation explores the most significant interpretations that are salient to the text.
 - History of interpretation looks at the journey of interpretation that impacts the text.

David Alan Black

Having examined OT scholarly approaches, it is helpful to also consider an NT perspective. David Black is a professor of NT theology and has authored books on NT Greek linguistics and criticism. From a conceptual point of view, few can match the simplicity of Black's methodology (1993, pp. 63-115). This method is rather comprehensive, but is fairly easy to use, even for those with little theological training.

- The view from 'above'. This perspective views the text in terms of historical and literary analyses.
 - Historical analysis surveys the historical context relevant to the text.
 - Literary analysis involves the ability to observe the larger literary context that impacts the text.
- The view from 'within'. Here the exegete views the text from the inside out and this entails certain components.
 - Textual analysis is an attempt to resolve any significant textual issues.
 - Lexical analysis attempts to determine the meaning of crucial words.
 - Syntactical analysis analyses the syntax and linguistic structures prevalent in the text.
 - Structural analysis helps to determine the structure of the passage or book.
 - Rhetorical analysis seeks to penetrate the significant rhetorical features embedded in the text.
 - Tradition analysis observes how many sources were used and the effect of these sources on the text.
- The view from 'under'. This is where the exegete views the text from a conceptual framework and places himself or herself in subordination to the message of the Bible.
 - Theological analysis is used to determine the key thought of the passage being studied.

- Homiletical analysis derives a homiletical outline from the text.

Wann Fanwar

In the original book, *The Gourmet Pulpit*, I had proposed a version of ‘sermonic exegesis’ which involves certain tasks or steps (Fanwar, 2006, pp. 23-32).

- Exegesis Step 1: Textual Analysis. The first step of exegesis investigates the text itself and does this with the following items in mind.
- Exegesis Step 2: Contextual Consideration. The second task of exegesis is to analyse the various types of contexts that are pertinent to the text.
- Exegesis Step 3: Literary Exploration. The next task of exegesis pertains to the literary nature of the Bible. As a book, the Bible displays literary characteristics common to all written literature.
- Exegesis Step 4: Theological Analysis. The final step of this exegetical method is to discover the conceptual framework of the text or book.
- Homiletical reflection. While homiletical reflection is not, strictly speaking, an exegetical step, it is an expected outcome for most pastors and preachers. Such reflection should include these ideas.

Four Course Meal: Four Quadrants Approach

Every exegetical method has points of commendation and areas that are difficult to replicate in certain circumstances. Having pursued this subject for a large portion of my preaching and teaching life, I am compelled to continue searching for a more effective method of studying the Bible. With this in mind, I make the following proposal hoping that fellow-searchers may find this a beneficial tool to use.

The Four Quadrants Approach is an exegetical system that views the various elements of the text as belonging to four areas within a circle. The four areas are: textual, contextual, conceptual, and practical.

Ingredients Needed: Textual Quadrant

When I am preparing a meal for friends or guests, the first thing I do is to select the ingredients that I want to use. I select them intentionally to fit the meal that I have decided to use. If I am making Italian, then I choose pasta, olives, an assortment of vegetables, and the appropriate cheese. The first task of exegesis is to choose a text, a biblical unit for study.

The first exegetical quadrant examines specific elements pertaining to the text. The first aspect of this quadrant is the language itself. Since the Bible was written in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek, it is essential to come to terms with these languages. The grammar, syntax, and idiom of these languages should be carefully studied because every language has its own idiosyncrasies that distinguish it from other languages. For example, Hebrew sentences utilise the ‘verb-subject-predicate’ structure, whereas English employs the ‘subject-verb-predicate’ structure, and Greek follows a case-driven structure. In Gen 1:1, the Hebrew literally reads ‘*in the beginning he created (verb) God (subject) the heavens and the earth (predicate).*’ This has to be rearranged in English as ‘*in the beginning God (subject) created (verb) the heavens and the earth (predicate)*’ to fit English syntax. Further, a people’s worldview and mindset are also couched in a specific language and misunderstanding these elements may result in unexpected mistranslations. To be true to the word requires careful consideration of these linguistic features.

Another textual element to explore concerns the literary nature of the text. The Bible is the word of God but it is also a ‘book’. As a book, the Bible contains literary elements such as narrative techniques, genre, poetics, and figures of speech. Hebrew narratives are characterised by brevity and lack of emotive language. Hebrew poetry is characterized by parallelism, while prophetic

material conjures up seemingly endless word plays. The Greek NT comprises many epistles (letters) and such literature displays specific literary elements that differ from other forms. The parables of Jesus require certain exegetical skills and ignoring these interpretative elements could give rise to concepts that are not true to the word. Translating and interpreting these varied features become challenging and demand careful attention.

Textual exploration also means that the history and culture that impact the text should be studied. The Bible was not written in historical or cultural vacuum. When exegeting the stories, laws, poems, and other biblical materials, the history of the times and the surrounding culture engender a more accurate reading. The biblical patriarchs lived in a world that was predominantly polygamous and tribal. Their questions and needs differ markedly from today's world. They lived in tents and retained a private militia for security. Today, people no longer live that way. Sometimes the desire to understand the application of Scripture produces a hasty approach to Bible study that results in faulty and indefensible conclusions.

The Guests: Contextual Quadrant

A good chef also considers the guests for whom he or she is preparing a meal. If I know that my guests are Americans who love to eat Indian food, I will prepare an Indian meal for them. However, I also know that most American cannot eat the heavy spices that Indians can. Therefore, I adjust the spices to suit the palate of my guests.

The second quadrant that impacts biblical exegesis directly pertains to the reader's context or situation. The Bible is studied for communicative purposes; it is the word of God that needs to be preached and taught. Every reader comes equipped with a complete experience of language, literature, history, and culture. There are linguistic and grammatical differences between the reader's language and that of biblical languages. In Hebrew, the first personal pronoun (*'ani*) can be used alone without any helping verb to convey the sense of 'I am'. However, in English, this is not possible and so the auxiliary verb 'to be' is attached to pronouns for a similar sense. A different system is displayed in the Thai language where the pronoun can even be dispensed with but is implied.

The reader's context also involves literature, history, and culture. In Thailand, not only do people speak a tonal language (Hebrew is guttural) but they have a distinctive history and culture. In the land of Israel, God's prophets had to contend with primal religions, whereas missionaries in Thailand encounter Buddhism, a largely monistic faith. In Bible times, people ate 'bread', while in Thailand people eat rice. The interchange between histories and cultures requires careful interpretation and application.

The textual and contextual quadrants intersect directly and the exegete should proceed intentionally between the two quadrants. While exploring the biblical text, the reader's context should also be examined. For example, in Gen 22, God asked Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac. To most modern readers this is an incredulous demand. As modern readers we have to contend with government regulations that would make a similar display today a criminal act. Should one of my married students announce that he or she was asked by God to sacrifice a child, the chances are that the student would end up in a psychiatric facility or worse, prison. Clearly the command of God cannot be taken literally as applying to us. Nevertheless, its message should be wrestled with. This type of reflection makes it possible to decipher the similarities and differences between the text and the exegete's context, which in turn fosters a more optimal interpretative framework. With such an approach, there is a greater chance of being true to the word.

The Meal: Conceptual Quadrant

Now that I know have selected the menu and ingredients and figured out who my guests are, I have to then put together the meal that they can appreciate. What I want to do is to help my

guests understand Indian food better. Recently I entertained some guests who loved Indian food but did not know the full spectrum of Indian cuisine. I cooked a garbanza curry in roasted black sesame seed paste. As expected, the curry was black. This is not a colour normally associated with Indian food, but it is one that you will find in the tribal area of India from which I come. My guests, who thought they knew what Indian food was, learnt something they did not know before.

The third exegetical quadrant looks at conceptual elements that are foundational to any text. These will include theological ideas, doctrinal truths, and thought motifs. These are the conceptual threads that run through the text and bind the text to the rest of God's word. Inevitably, exegesis produces theological results because the study of God's word is not merely an academic enterprise, it is a faith endeavour. Most people who study the Bible are attempting to understand God's word for them and desire to share it with others. This activity comprises the mission of the church and is implicit to the work of theologians, pastors, teachers, and church members. This is what occurs at every occasion where the Bible is studied. Believers everywhere are seeking to come to terms with the message of God; it is integral to being true to the word.

This quadrant also intersects directly with the first quadrant. While studying the text, its meaning becomes the principal focus of attention. This task is neither an afterthought, as is often the case, nor a pre-thought, as is evident in many study methods. It must occur simultaneous to the study of the text. It is also important to note that this quadrant does not intersect directly with the second quadrant. The meaning of the text is to be unveiled from within the text and cannot be derived from the reader's context. To return to Gen 22, in some countries, unwanted children are often 'sacrificed' at the altar of convenience (or even discarded) but such an approach to life does not resonate with the Genesis story. Conversely, those who come from cultures that place great emphasis on the rights of the firstborn (the family heir), God's demand may be met with a degree of cynicism. The conceptual framework of Gen 22 is the story itself. Recognising this allows the exegete to be true to the word.

To Eat or not to Eat: Practical Quadrant

When all is said and done, the most crucial part of the meal is its palatability. Basically, a chef has to consider this simple fact: Will the guests find the meal delectable? I love the Thai expression for a good meal, '*aroy maak*'. The final quadrant for biblical exegesis concerns practical matters. Most people who study, teach, or preach the Bible want to know how the word of God impacts real life. To be true to the word means to discover how it informs and impacts life. There are at least three types of practical considerations: homiletical, devotional, and applicational. Preachers study the Bible so as to unveil its message to their audiences; they use the Bible to prepare sermons. Biblical preaching is a principal form of communicating the word of God. Therefore, homiletical analysis is a natural practical consequence of studying the Scriptures. Others study the Bible to find some meaning to their lives; to understand their existence. They want to know how the stories or songs of an ancient text can help them with the issues of today's world. They look to God's word for inspiration and to express their devotion. They seek application of the theological and doctrinal ideas of the word to their specific situations. This is often the overriding concern of many Bible students. It may be argued that without this quadrant, Bible study is no more than an academic exercise.

This final quadrant intersects directly with both the conceptual and contextual quadrants, but not so with the textual quadrant. One of the chief abuses of biblical data is the short circuit approach that leads many directly from text to application. Such an approach is prone to numerous subjective interpretations and does not lend itself to a true-to-the-word approach. A shortcut into application of Gen 22 may mean that someone believes that God is asking him or her to sacrifice everything that is important. Such an interpretation is fraught with danger because it ignores what can be gleaned conceptually and contextually. Application should fit both the theology of the

passage and the context of the reader or exegete. Taking the time to carefully avoid quick application makes the final interpretation more true to the word.

The diagram below illustrates the four quadrants and the arrows within the circle display the paths of intersections that would yield the most productivity in Bible study. In this method, every quadrant intersects directly with two other quadrants at any moment. The paths of intersection are as follows:

- Textual quadrant intersects with contextual and conceptual quadrants
- Contextual quadrant intersects with textual and practical quadrants
- Conceptual quadrant intersects with textual and practical quadrants
- Practical quadrant intersects with conceptual and contextual quadrants

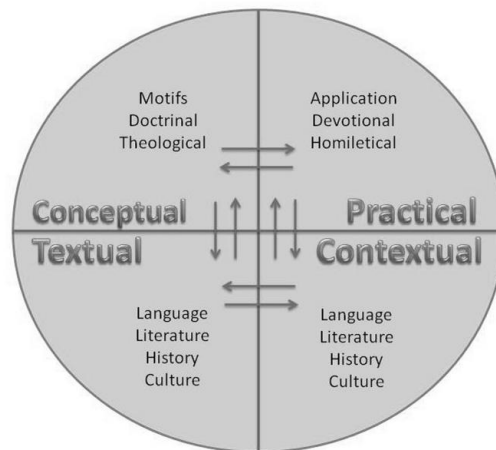


Diagram 1: The Four Quadrants of Bible Study

Using this system implies that Bible study does not proceed in a straight line but rather in lines that crisscross back and forth between quadrants. While investigating the linguistic and historical data of the biblical text, the parallel contextual data have to be explored, and the interplay of these elements has to be factored into the study. At the same time, the conceptual framework arising from the text surfaces and becomes part of the picture. Similarly, in digesting the conceptual scheme of the passage, the text itself provides the raw data for conceptual conclusions. While this is occurring, these same conclusions are informing the questions that arise from practical situations.

At this point, most students would want to know how to dissect each of the quadrants. The worksheet provided below is a suggestion to assist students and pastors who may want to try this exegetical method for themselves.

Four Quadrants Exegesis Worksheet

The following worksheet is a model for the application of the four quadrants method to actual Bible study. I propose that the best way to approach this form of exegesis is by asking the right sort of questions. Some of these questions are only suggestions and the pastor or teacher may discover other relevant question during the course of the study. Nevertheless, the suggested questions can provide a launch pad for using the method. A major departure of the four quadrants method from other exegetical method is the concept of intersecting areas of discovery, especially with regards to contextual issues.

Textual (Q 1)		Contextual (Q 2)	Conceptual (Q 3)	Practical (Q 4)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the text to study? • What language is the text written in? • What specific linguistic elements can be observed? • What are the significant words or phrases? 	Language	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is my language? • How is my language different from the language of the text? • What are the appropriate words in my context for the significant ones in the passage? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the principal idea in the passage? • Are there other texts that address the same concept? • What other ideas run through the text? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What does the text mean to me? • What area or need of life does the text apply to?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What figures of speech are present? • What are the unique idiomatic expressions? • What is the literary type? • How does the literary type inform the passage? • What is the structure? 	Literature	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are there similar figures of speech in my language? • Are there parallel idioms? • What are the similarities and differences between the text and my context in literary terms? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How did the original readers understand the text? • How should I understand the text now? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the message that needs to be re-spoken or retold?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who wrote the passage? • When was the passage written? • What was happening during the period? 	Historical	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the historical differences between the text and my context? 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What cultural elements are embedded in the text? 	Cultural	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What cultural elements in my context are similar to and different from those in the text? 		

Presenting the Meal: Performing Homiletics

A good meal is also about presentation. When we sit down at a dining table, the senses of sight and smell kick in. What we smell and see often determine our enjoyment of a meal. Every good restaurant knows this and so exerts considerable effort to make the food look good. The sights and smells entice the guest to eat. Having examined the need for an interpretative framework and studied the text thoroughly, the preacher is now ready to proceed to the third component of preaching, homiletics. Hermeneutics is concerned with principles of biblical interpretation; exegesis pertains to study methodology; homiletics deals with the communicative aspects, the presentation of the sermonic meal. It appears to me that far too often preachers rush from the text to homiletics without optimum use of the first two components. I recommend that the most productive approach must take all three components into account and they should be approached in the order presented here.

In speaking of homiletics, we are primarily concerned with things that directly impact the communication process. This pertains to the relationship between communicator (preacher) and 'communitatee' (congregation). As earlier argued, it is the Bible that determines the content of preaching. However, how this content transfers to the hearts and minds of the congregation is largely dependent upon the preacher. This is not to belittle the work of the Holy Spirit who is

ultimately responsible for how this entire process works. Nevertheless, God has always used human communicators to do his work. Therefore, it is important to review seriously the various ways that can enhance preaching.

Things to Consider

A preacher needs to look at various aspects of the work in as much as these impact upon the task. The first aspect to review is the preacher's use of time. In certain pastoral contexts, the preacher spends so much time with administrative duties that he or she has little time for sermon preparation. The inevitable end result is a half-baked sermon or a sermon without the accompanying exegetical effort. Such sermons do not provide the expected nourishment that the congregation deserves. These sermons often seem insipid and anaemic and the congregation is left with evaluations like this one: 'He doesn't preach very well, but he is a good man.' If preachers took more time to study their Bibles and prepare their sermons, their skill level will improve and with it will come a greater sense of depth and certainty among the congregation. If I may, I would suggest that each sermon requires a minimum of ten hours of study and preparation time before it is ready for public delivery. This is predicated upon a simple proposition: a sermon should first become food for the preacher before it can be nourishment for anyone else. That takes time! A question I would pose is this: Can the preacher really afford to give anything but his or her very best for such an important task?

A second aspect that must be examined is the use of Bible versions. It does not do any good to quote extensively from the Hebrew and Greek since most members will not understand what is being said. A judicious use of the original languages may provide some benefit. However, the more crucial need is for a Bible version that people can actually comprehend. The choice of versions that will suit the congregation should be taken into account. Church members who have grown up with the gospel may do well with the Authorised Version's Shakespearean English but people who did not grow up in the church often find this English rather exasperating. To borrow a phrase from the IT world, the Bible version used in preaching should be user-friendly. It is incumbent upon the preacher to be able to handle different versions. This principle holds true even for those preachers who do not use English as their primary mode of preaching. Most translations today offer more than one language version for use and a perceptive preacher will consider where the congregation is at in terms of its language skills.

Increasingly, in this age of technology, the use of presentations is becoming almost mandatory in preaching. Preachers who are unable to access presentations software for their preaching may find themselves becoming obsolete. Nevertheless, preachers must exercise some moderation in the use of presentations. Such presentations should be attractive and readable and the clutter effect should be avoided. Presentations need not contain every word of the sermon but only the significant ideas. They should also be unobtrusive and non-distracting. Overuse of presentations could mean that a funny animation is remembered whereas the sermon itself is forgotten. Moreover, preachers should not become dependent upon the presentations. The irony about working with technology is that the computer or the LCD projector could suddenly refuse to run. I attended a service where the preacher had his entire sermon on powerpoint presentations. For some unforeseen reason the projector refused to work and the sermon was held up for nearly twenty minutes because the preacher could not proceed without the presentation. Such dependency will diminish the sermon. Presentation that is well done is a great asset to preaching as long as it does not become the sermon itself.

An often-ignored aspect of preaching pertains to sermon type. A good chef knows that there are different ways to cook vegetables. He or she can boil, sauté, blanch, or steam them. These different methods do not change the vegetables but they provide methodological variety to enable the chef to draw out different flavours and create dishes with differing appeals. Some preachers think that there is only one way to preach while some get stuck with the most comfortable style that

they do not take the time to master other sermon types. The chapters that follow will deal directly with this issue. At this point it should suffice to say that there are many ways or styles of preaching. There are several sermon types. However, we should first examine some common elements in preaching.

Elements of Delivery

When all is said and done, the significance of the delivery itself cannot be underestimated. This is the point of contact between the preacher and his or her congregation. A number of intangibles impact the process; the most important of these is the presence of the Holy Spirit. There is not much that can be done about such intangibles. However, there are more tangible factors that can be addressed to make the delivery more effective.

The Voice

Arguably, the most important factor in preaching is the voice of the preacher. A good preacher learns to modulate his or her voice. Depending upon the need of the sermon, various tones could be employed (such as the preacher's tone or a conversational tone). At other times deliberate use of the monotone can also be effective. The preacher may also choose to mix up the various tones or form a hybrid tone. Each tone type conveys its own message and has its own impact. The speed of delivery is also worth paying attention to. A higher speed communicates energy, excitement, or passion. A slower speed conveys gentleness and mystery. Changing speeds as called for by the sermon can invoke varying emotional responses. Volume control also affects the delivery. Louder volumes are tailored for ideas that convey strength while soft volumes suit the gentler ideas better.

A preacher has to learn to project his or her voice. This is best done by flexing the diaphragm rather than by straining the vocal chords (which some preachers are prone to doing). Flexing the diaphragm allows for better control of both voice and breath. To create the necessary voice modulations, it is essential that breathing be controlled by means of the diaphragm. This is simpler than it sounds. Pushing the abdominal muscles out forces the diaphragm downwards while pushing them up forces the diaphragm upwards. To control breathing, push the abdominal muscles out, hold, and then slowly relax them. This will enable the preacher to control his breath and with it the voice.

Eye Contact

Another prominent aspect of delivery is eye contact. Some preachers are hesitant to look at the congregation. Eye contact allows the preacher to read the facial responses of the listeners. This enables the preacher to know whether he or she is getting through to or has lost the congregation. It also permits the congregation to feel that the preacher is talking to them personally. Eye contact tells the congregation that the preacher is actually talking to them rather than at them. The congregation tends to read the preacher's eyes and may conclude that he or she is sincere or passionate or not.

Body Language

Closely related to this is the use of body language. On the one hand, body language could be distracting; on the other hand, it could accentuate the sermon. The preacher's posture may be perceived as a sign of weakness or strength. Likewise, gestures can distract or augment the sermon. Clothes and hair have a similar impact. A badly dressed preacher may be seen as a disgrace to the God he is representing. Clothes with loud colours draw too much attention to the preacher. Body

language may convey either laziness and slovenliness or a sense of professionalism. Perhaps it is important to keep this in mind: Catch attention but do not draw attention.

Movement

The movement of the preacher is another point of contention. If the preacher does not move at all, he or she may be perceived as being static. However, if the preacher's movement is excessive, the congregation may feel dizzy and agitated. Some moderation is required. More to the point, movement should be congruent with the sermon. At some points it may be helpful to stop while at some other points moving about enhances what is being preached.

Cultural Sensitivity

A final point pertains to cultural sensitivity. As the world becomes more global and the church becomes more multicultural, cultural sensitivity becomes more of an issue. Certain hand gestures may be acceptable in one context but may be viewed as offensive in another. Body language is also interpreted differently in different contexts. In one incident, a pastor was bowing for prayer with hands folded in front. A lady in the audience asked out loud whether the pastor was hiding something with his hands.

More significantly, the use of language is sometimes a sore point for many listeners. English is now more or less the universal language of the world, however this creates special problems. There are several forms of English and each form employs unique colloquialisms or slang. There are some things that can be said in the UK but which make little sense in the USA. Some expressions are understood in India but not in the Philippines. A couple of examples will illustrate the point. The word 'raw' means 'uncooked' to Americans but it means 'not ripe' to Indians. The phrase 'last time' means the most recent occurrence of an event to Indians but it means anything in the past to Malaysians.

Ben Nimmo demonstrates how the movement from one language to another can become a source of embarrassment and misunderstanding. For instance, a Spanish sigh (a breathy 'hui') is a vulgar word in Russian. Or, the English postprandial phrase 'I'm full,' translates literally as 'I'm drunk' in German. This phenomenon has already affected the car industry. The Anglo-German car Vauxhall/Opel Nova translates as 'won't go' in Spanish while the Czech car Skoda means 'what a pity' in Polish (2006). All who have studied German have discovered that 'gift' means 'poison.' A similar occurrence can be observed in my classroom when I would say a word in English, which has a corresponding sound in Malay, and my Malaysian students would burst out laughing.

Cultural sensitivity also requires careful examination of the use of religious jargon. Christians love the word 'justification' because it invokes thoughts of God's salvific work. However, to those who are not Christian, 'justification' means to find a pretext to excuse wrongdoing. Preachers should pay attention to cultural issues and how these may affect their preaching.

In summary, there are three components to preaching: hermeneutics, exegesis, and homiletics (see the diagram below).

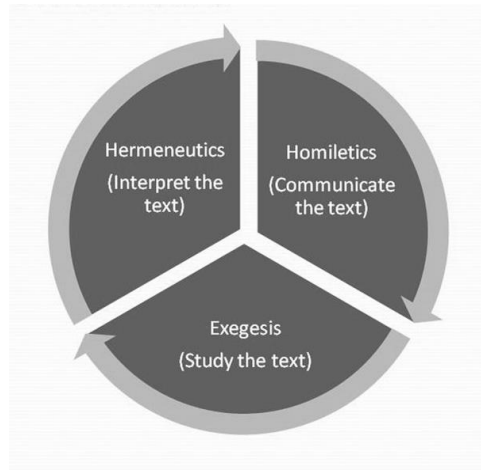


Diagram 2: Three Sermonic Components

As biblical interpreters, preachers must concern themselves with hermeneutics. They should learn the basic foundational issues that underpin any attempt to interpret the Bible. The preacher must be a student of the word and this demands serious Bible study, which can be obtained only through a thorough exegesis of the word. The preacher must also carefully attend to all aspects that impinge upon the process of communication. When adequately combined, these three components set the path to gourmet preaching. Every pulpit should be a gourmet pulpit.

Making a Point

One way to prepare a meal is to set out the menu according to food groups. A meal could comprise of rice (carbohydrate), vegemeat or gluten curry (protein), and steamed vegetables and fruit (vitamins, minerals, and roughage). Such a meal is straightforward in its simplicity. Arguably, the most commonly used sermon style is the deductive sermon. This type of sermon is utilised widely by preachers who are topical and doctrinal in their approaches. It is the simplest sermon type to learn. Deductive sermons begin with the big idea. The preacher frequently tells his congregation that the sermon of the day will cover a certain idea, topic, or doctrine. For instance, the sermon of the day may be about grace or God's love or the doctrine of last things. Having stated this principal idea, the preacher then proceeds to smaller ideas that comprise this big idea. This sequence is crucial to the deductive sermon. The congregation is informed about the destination before they are told how to get there.

I will try to illustrate this deductive style from other facets of life. My son-in-law works for a construction company and they rebuild or refurbish houses for a living. I also have a brother-in-law who is an architect. When someone wants a house built, they engage the services of an architect and he sketches out what the house will look like. Then the builders come in and put the house together brick by crick, tile by tile, cable by cable, room by room. There is another way to view this analogy. Recently I visited a newly built home of some friends in Michigan. As we drove into the driveway, I was rather struck by this impressive building. Of course, all that I could see was the building façade. When we entered the house, my friend took us on a tour of the house and I was able to view the various rooms of the house.

In keeping with the culinary analogy of this book, we can look at a deductive sermon in terms of food. Let's suppose that I want to make a salad, say *Somtam* (a Thai papaya salad) or *Gado Gado* (an Indonesian salad) or *Raita* (an Indian salad). My first step is to choose the salad I want to make (determine the primary idea). Then I think of the necessary ingredients, select them, and put them together to make the salad. Let's suppose that I have chosen to make *Raita*. That is my salad of choice. *Raita* requires cucumber, tomatoes, onions, chilis, coriander, and curd (yoghurt). I chop and dice the ingredients, toss the dry ingredients together, and blend the curd in. I have my *Raita*.

In the Bible we also find this type of approach used. God comes to Moses and says, 'Build me a sanctuary that I may live among you' (Exod 25:8). After stating this big idea, God proceeds to break down the various components comprising a sanctuary. The Sanctuary analogy also operates along deductive lines.

Deductive sermons begin with the big idea and this is followed by the smaller ideas that support it. Such a sermon first presents the main concept and then supports this with other ideas. A deductive sermon may look something like this.

- I. Introduction (prepares for the main idea)
- II. Main/Big/Central Idea (the principal concept in the sermon)
 - A. Supporting Idea 1 (a smaller idea to support the main idea)
 - B. Supporting Idea 2 (another idea to support the main idea)
 - C. Supporting Idea 3 (yet one more idea to support the main idea)
- III. Conclusion (usually a reiteration of the main idea)

Deductive Sermon Worksheet Sample 1

Sermon Title: 'Grasshopper Complex'

Sermon Text: Numbers 13:26-33

I. Introduction: *There are tragic consequences whenever God's people find themselves on the borders of the promised land.*

II. Main Idea: *On the borders or the promised land, God's people may suffer from the Grasshopper Complex.*

1. Supporting Idea 1
Believing that the promised land may be out of reach.
2. Supporting Idea 2
Turning negative energy against legitimate leadership.
3. Supporting Idea 3
Being convinced that Egypt is preferable.

III. Conclusion: *Grasshopper Complex may prevent us from entering the promised land.*

Deductive Sermon Sample 1

The following sermon is based on Num 13:26-33 and explores the struggle of Israel for entry into the promised land and how this struggle is reflected in our own spiritual struggles.

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Grasshopper Complex

Israel is on the verge of entering the promised land. They stand at the very gates of Canaan. The land is theirs for the taking. Yet, for a brief moment they find themselves in no-man's land; that place between here and there; that place between what was and what is about to be. At this place Israel is afflicted with the Grasshopper Complex. Today, God's church is also on the verge of entering the promised land. The heavenly Canaan is just in sight. Yet, the church finds itself in no man's land. Tragically, there are repercussions, results, of being in no man's land, to having a Grasshopper Complex.

First, there is the possibility of believing that the promised land may be out of reach. So close, and yet so far away! Moses had sent out twelve spies into Canaan. They had travelled undetected for forty days and returned with an initially promising report. But their actual report is more sombre. They frighten the Israelites with tales of giants and heavily fortified cities (13:28-29). Their self-assessment is that they felt like grasshoppers in the presence of the Canaanites. 'We seemed like grasshoppers in our own eyes, and we looked the same to them' (13:33). This defeatist sentiment convinces them that they could not take the land. Canaan is right in front of them but out of reach. Instead they spread a bad report among the Israelites so as to discourage any attempt to enter the land. Such is the result of the Grasshopper Complex!

Does God's church suffer from a similar self-assessment? Today we look at the events around us. Wars are raging in various places; diseases are taking millions of lives; natural disasters are increasing in frequency and intensity; and terrorism is on the rise. Furthermore, we look at the long delay in Jesus' return and we cannot help but wonder whether we will ever get there. This mentality displays itself in an unusual way. While I was growing up, the number of sermons on the return of Christ dominated the sermonic landscape. These days such sermons have greatly diminished, almost as if we are quietly putting to rest the hope of ever reaching the promised land. It is true that in some circles of the church, the hope of the return of Jesus appears to glow brightly. However, this does not appear to be the case with the church at large. Today, the sermonic landscape is cluttered with feel-good sermons and any serious attempt to preach on the last days is often viewed as scare tactics at work.

At a seminary class, students asked a guest lecturer, a Jewish Rabbi, how it is that Judaism is able to cope with unfulfilled expectations. His pointed answer was that a religion is measured by its

ability to cope with such a delay. He intimated that to lose heart when faced with such uncertainty means that faith is not real. On the borders of Canaan Israel loses faith. Can the same be said of us?

Second, there is the very real possibility that the pent-up frustrations that are engendered by such attitudes lead to negative energy in the church. In Numbers 14 we discover that the Israelites direct their negative energies against Moses and Aaron. 'All the Israelites grumbled against Moses and Aaron' and 'they talked about stoning them' (14:2, 10). All of a sudden it is the leaders' faults. Their own lack of faith or unwillingness is not entertained. Somehow it is Moses' responsibility. They fault him for bringing them to die in the desert and even wish they could return to Egypt (14:3-4). We must wonder whether this is simply a question of being discouraged! There is something sinister in the whole episode. It is as if the Israelites are projecting their own failure to obey God upon Moses and finding reasons to blame him. Instead of trying to figure out how they could enter the land, they convert their energy into something negative, almost murderous. Again, the result of the Grasshopper Complex!

Is it possible to see a similar turning of negative energy against church leaders? There are many private ministries in God's church. Many of these are clearly assets to the church's mission. However, there are some private ministries who seem bent on reforming the church and target their angst and frustrations against the church's leaders. They discourage members from returning tithe to the Conference. They trick members into believing that somehow the church has abandoned its beliefs and that the leaders of the church are responsible for this. Once I received a circular that was directed to pastors. It said that if pastors still receive salaries from the Conference, they are abandoning their call since the church is no longer right in God's eyes (according to them, of course). A leader of one of these groups once said at a meeting that if members' consciences no longer permitted them to return tithe to the Conference, they could send it to his ministry. I once presided over a church business meeting precipitated by a group in the church who were unhappy with the local Conference. Their agenda (which, thankfully, was defeated) at the meeting was to get the church to break off from the Conference. A youth ministry group set itself up as the direct competitor of the church's Youth Department and advertised that it wanted only 'quality attendees' at its meetings. What mischief can occur at the gates of Canaan!

Third, and rather tragically, this state of affairs may engender the idea that Egypt is preferable. The Israelites ask themselves, 'Wouldn't it be better for us to go back to Egypt?' (14:3). They say to one another, 'We should choose a leader and go back to Egypt' (14:4). Imagine that! They quickly forget the harsh labour imposed by the Egyptians; they forget the years of slavery; they even forget the death decree and the massacre against their children. How tragic, the effect of the Grasshopper Complex!

It is so easy to feel self-righteous and say to ourselves, 'We would have never done that!' But I wonder! The opposite effect from the turning of negative energy against God's leaders is the comfortability of the church with the world. If we truly believe that Jesus could come back at any time, why do we spend so much on our lives (individually and corporately)? Is it possible that we now prefer to build our promise outside the borders of Canaan? The attraction of Egypt is immense: the houses, the cars, the credit cards, the clubs, the money, and the pleasures. This is not merely an individual problem; it is also a systemic condition. At times we seem driven more by worldly measurements of life than by heavenly ones. We strive ever so hard for social acceptance of our institutions. We pursue recognition of our work wherever we can. We camouflage our distinctiveness for the sake of worldly acceptability. In and of themselves, these things are not wrong. Nevertheless, when they become our driving motivation for personal and institutional existence, we've got to do some serious introspection. There is the strong possibility (to use a biblical adage) that we are busy building our earthly treasures at the expense of heavenly treasures.

In short, the Grasshopper Complex may prevent us from entering the promised land. It makes us believe that the promised land may be out of reach. It causes us to turn our negative energy against God's appointed leaders. It even convinces us that Egypt is preferable. At this juncture in time it is important for God's church to examine itself carefully. Where are we at? Are we

caught in no-man's land? Are we showing signs of the Grasshopper Complex? May we rigorously determine that we will shun the Grasshopper Complex!

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Deductive Sermon Worksheet Sample 2

I. Introduction: *This is a study of Qoheleth's view of life as presented in Ecclesiastes 11.*

II. Main Idea: *Qoheleth urges us to celebrate life.*

1. *Negatively, we must recognise the things that ward off our enjoyment of life.*

- a. *The uncertainty of life*
- b. *The inevitability of life*
- c. *The speculation of life*
- d. *The ignorance of life*
- e. *The realism of life*

2. *Positively, we must learn to live above life's limitations.*

- a. *Live enterprisingly not timidly*
- b. *Live generously not miserly*
- c. *Live diligently not slovenly*
- d. *Live joyfully not ruefully*
- e. *Love godly lives not pretentious ones*

III. Conclusion: *We ought to celebrate life.*

Deductive Sermon Sample 2

The following sermon is based on Qoheleth's reflection of life as recorded in Eccl 11.

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Carpe Diem

Qoheleth, the Preacher, had made a thorough investigation of life. He had looked at life as seen by those who live without hope in God. He had confronted the pessimism and futility of life. He had experienced the emptiness and meaninglessness of life. Ultimately, questions that demand an answer arose: How do we counter the overpowering pessimism of life? How do we fill up that which is empty? How do we discover meaning in that which is futile?

In Eccl 11, Qoheleth provides the answer. He tells us that we should celebrate life, that we should seize the day. Carpe diem!

Negatively, this means that we should recognise those things that ward off our enjoyment of life. First, there is a great uncertainty about life. We 'do not know what disasters may come upon us' (11:2b) or what action of ours will succeed (11:6b). Life brings its share of disasters and crises. There are unexpected twists and turns. We are faced with the absence of any absolute guarantee.

Second, there is a degree of inevitability about life. When clouds are full of moisture, precipitation occurs. When a tree is cut down, it will remain where it falls (11:3). Life's inevitability may be due to genetic composition and this is what makes us tick. It may be due to cultural disposition and this is what conditions us. It may also be due to the tyranny of time and this is what limits us.

Third, life's enjoyment is limited by the speculation that surrounds life. 'Whoever watches the wind will not plant; whoever looks at the clouds will not reap' (11:4). We often speculate about the effects of the past and reminisce about the 'golden yesteryear' and regret the 'lost moments.' We speculate about the precariousness of the future and see the future as either a 'glorious vision' or simply a 'dim tomorrow.' We even speculate about the distress of the present and we view it as 'potential opportunity' or 'torturous today.'

Fourth, life is inhibited by ignorance. We 'do not know the path of the wind, or how the body is formed in a mother's womb' and we 'cannot understand the work of God' (11:5). Our ignorance may be due to insufficient knowledge, what we do not know. It may be due to our ignorance about the mysteries of life, what we cannot comprehend. It is certainly our ignorance about God and his work, what we cannot explain.

Last, we are unable to enjoy life because of the realism of life. We all know, that one day we will get old or that we may have to face God's judgement (11:8-9). Since we cannot change the future, we often feel that our lives are inconsequential. In the words of an old song, 'Que serah, serah; what ever will be will be.' Life often appears empty and we all dread the thought of having to give an account of our lives.

Positively, *carpe diem* means that we must learn to live above life's limitations. Qohelet urges us to live enterprisingly rather than timidly. He says, 'Cast your bread on the waters, for after many days you will find it again' (11:1). He is saying that we should always attempt great things even when that may seem out of place. Vincent van Gogh is attributed with saying: 'Man is not on this earth merely to be happy, nor even to be simply honest. He is there to realise great things for humanity, to attain nobility and to surmount the vulgarity in which the existence of individuals drags on.' We should also attempt unexpected things and view life as an adventure. We should not be content with stereotypes and status quo but rather we should grasp every possible opportunity to grow. We should not be content with mediocrity but rather strive to excel. As an old Burmese proverb states: 'He who aims at excellence will be above mediocrity; he who aims at mediocrity will be far short of it.' We should carry an optimistic mind-set because we can look out of our windows and see either the stars or the mud.

Qohelet encourages us to live generously rather than miserly. We should live to give, not to hoard. In *Living on the Ragged Edge* (2004, p. 317), Charles Swindoll writes: 'Don't put your bread in deep freeze, it'll dry out. Don't store it up in the pantry or seal it in the baggie, it'll mould. Don't hoard it, thinking that it needs protecting, release it.' As my Dad used to say, we should live with an open hand rather than a clenched fist. We should live to bless rather than to want blessing for 'we make a living by what we get out of life, but we make a life by what we give.'

Qohelet tells us that we should live diligently rather than slovenly. He says, 'sow your seed in the morning, and at evening let not your hands be idle' (11:6a). We should perform every task as though it is the most important task we will ever do. We should grasp every opportunity as though it is the only one we will ever have. We should use every moment as though it is the only one we will ever see. We should treasure every friendship as though it is the only relationship we will ever know. As someone once said, 'The heights of great men reached and kept, were not attained by sudden flight; for they, while their companions slept, were toiling upward in the night.'

Qohelet wants us to live joyfully rather than ruefully. He says that we should enjoy all the years of our lives (11:8), that young people ought to take pleasure in their youthfulness (11:9a), and that we should banish all anxiety and troubles (11:10). We should enjoy life to the hilt. We should take pleasure in every moment we've got. We should live with a carefree attitude. We should not only pursue happiness, we should also create happiness. In the words of J M Barrie, 'Those who bring sunshine into the lives of others cannot keep it from themselves.'

Qohelet reminds us that we should live godly lives rather than pretentious ones (11:5b, 9c). We should remember that God cares, that he is always at work in our lives. We should take care how we live because God watches over us. We should recognise that we are ultimately accountable to God for our lives. We should live assured that God has our best interest at heart.

In a far country lived a band of minstrels who travelled from town to town, presenting music to make a living. They were not doing well and times were hard. There was little money for common folk to come and listen and attendances were falling. The band met one evening to discuss their plight. 'I see no point for opening tonight,' one said. 'To make things worse, it is starting to snow. Who will venture out tonight?' 'I agree,' another disheartened singer said. 'Last night we performed for just a handful. Fewer will come tonight. Why not give back their meagre fees and cancel the

concert? No one can expect us to go on when just a few are in the audience.' 'How can anyone do his best for so few?' inquired a third. Turning to another sitting beside him, he asked, 'What do you think?' The man, older than the rest, looked at his troupe: 'I know you are discouraged. I am too. But we have a responsibility to those who might come. We will go on. And we will do the best job we can. It is not the fault of those who come that others do not. They should not be punished with less than the best that we can give.'

Heartened by his words, the minstrels went ahead with their show. They gave their best performance ever. When the small audience had left, the old minstrel called his troupe together. In his hand was a note, handed to him by one of the audience. 'Listen to this my friends!' There was something electrifying in his tone of voice, which made them turn to him in anticipation. Slowly the old man read: 'Thank you for a beautiful performance.' It was simply signed, 'Your King.'

Qohelet says that we should celebrate life. We do so by recognising those things that inhibit the enjoyment of life and by learning to live above life's inhibitions. Carpe diem!

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Getting to the Point

Another meal could be prepared differently while utilising the same ingredients. The various ingredients could be mixed up so that the guests have to try and figure out what is food. At a meal in my house, I made mashed black beans mixed with other items. My guests, who had never eaten beans this way, were curious about what the dish was. One guest actually thought it was fish paste. With this kind of meal, we have to figure out what is in a particular dish.

The opposite of the deductive sermon is the inductive sermon. As the name suggests, this is a sermon type where the congregation is moved from the common to the uncommon, from the known to the unknown, from smaller ideas to larger ideas. In their book, *Inductive Preaching: Helping People Listen*, Ralph L. Lewis and Gregg Lewis discuss extensively this type of preaching. The ideas of Lewis and Lewis are based upon learning theories and they demonstrate that most of us learn in inductive ways (1983, pp. 28-31). The authors also provide a most helpful survey of what they call 'The Story of Induction' in chapter four of their book (Ibid., pp. 47-55). Further, they assert that this was Jesus' preferred method of teaching.

Jesus trusts the people and the inductive process of learning from experience, accenting common life, accepting the people with respect, assuming the role of guide, friend and confidant. . . . Jesus shares the process with them. He never pushes the people. He doesn't push his proposition. He gently guides. He instructs, teaches, and trains them (Ibid., p. 78).

They supply eight sub-types of inductive sermons, comprising of enumeration, exploration, biography, narrative, analogy, causal relation, problem-solving/question and answer, and elimination (Ibid., pp. 84-102). The authors even demonstrate how the deductive and inductive styles could be blended into an 'unbeatable combination' (Ibid., pp. 103-120). Clearly, Lewis and Lewis have developed inductive preaching into a virtual art form.

Despite the significance of Lewis and Lewis' work, their overall approach is somewhat cumbersome and a little too complex for most preachers. I offer a somewhat simplified method for putting together an inductive sermon, with the help of some life analogies as backdrop.

As a college junior, my hiking friends and I decided to climb a rather steep mountain, *Matheran*, in the central part of India. We had learnt that the view from this peak is spectacularly panoramic. So off we went in search of this scenic view. From the foot of the mountain we were unable to obtain such a view. However, with each successive step in the climb the panorama begins to unravel itself. Finally, we stood at the top of the mountain and from there caught sight of the most spectacular panorama we had ever seen. An inductive sermon works in much the same way, it takes you from a low to a high point.

I also want to revisit the culinary analogy employed in this book. Every once in a while I like to dabble in the kitchen. Sometimes I would open the refrigerator door and examine the contents inside with no specific food dish in mind. Then I would pick up different ingredients and decide that I could possibly try something out. I cut some things, dice others, cook or steam some items, and sauté others. Then I put them together and have my food dish. Once someone was watching me do this and asked, 'What are you making?' My answer was that she should wait and see. When I was done she exclaimed, 'Wow, that looks and smells really good!' An inductive sermon entices the listeners to stay until the end. Only then do they discover where the journey has taken them.

I imagine that the priests had a similar experience whenever they entered the Sanctuary. At first all they could see were the simple curtains and furniture of the courtyard. Next they see the Holy Place with all its elaborate trappings. Finally they enter the Holy of Holies and are struck with its awesome grandeur. Only then was their view complete.

An inductive sermon takes its listeners on a similar journey. The journey is like a spiral that transports the listener to ever revealing thoughts and ideas until the full panorama comes into focus.

Some known fact/story leads to a thought; another one leads to a second thought; a further illustration leads to a third concept; then all of them combine to present the panorama, the central/big idea. I propose that inductive sermons need no introduction and the central idea itself is the conclusion (as will be demonstrated below). I suggest the following simplified structure for inductive sermons.

- First Illustration (could be a story/fact/object/statistic)
 - Leads to Idea 1 (this presents a partial view)
- Second Illustration
 - Leads to Idea 2 (again this is only a partial view but one which augments the view of Idea 1)
- Third Illustration
 - Leads to Idea 3 (a further partial view but one that enhances the view offered by Idea 1 and Idea 2)
- Central/Main Idea (this is the idea that the previous ideas are leading to)

Inductive Sermon Worksheet Sample

Sermon Title: 'Change!'

Sermon Text: John 3:1-15

- Illustration: *Story of putting on weight*
 - Idea 1: *Some changes are unexpected and undesired – embrace them*
- Illustration: *Story of daughter's birth*
 - Idea 2: *Some changes turn our world upside down – embrace them*
- Illustration: *Story of daughter getting married*
 - Idea 3: *Some changes are inevitable – embrace them*
- Main Idea: *Most important change occurs when we encounter God.*

Inductive Sermon Sample 1

John 3:1-15 is the text for the following inductive sermon.

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Change!

Throughout my years in college I was a scrawny kid who weighed only 50.5 kilograms (kgs). My genetic inheritance comprises of a set of genes from people who were solidly built and another set from people who were very slight in structure. I believed that I had inherited the latter and thought that I would never have to worry about the former. I was rather happy with this state of affairs because I convinced myself that I had been spared the robust genes with the negative potential that they represented. A year after completing college, I was married. For nearly two years I maintained my weight at the 50 kgs mark. Then something quite unexpected and completely undesired happened during the second year. In the space of a few months I went from 50 kgs to 80 kgs. I could barely believe my own eyes. Over the next twelve months I had to change clothes size twice. My waist went from a size 26 to a size 36. My collar measurement went from a 14½ to a 16½. Imagine my dismay at all of this. I had convinced myself that I would never have a problem with weight, but here I was experiencing exactly what I had dreaded most. Over the next year, I expended a lot of energy vainly attempting to reverse my weight problem. While I was able to keep it under control, I was never able to return to the 50 kgs level. I still have not. *I learnt that some changes are unexpected and undesired.* Some changes catch us unaware and we find them totally unacceptable.

It eventually dawned on me that the only thing I could do was to embrace the changes that had come to me.

As a college student, I knew that I wanted to get married but I was also certain that I did not want children. I am the second child in a somewhat large family and I watched the struggles my parents had with so many children. This sort of convinced me that having children is not very smart. My wife however wanted many kids. Well, we both had to compromise: one child! The day my daughter was born, I was filled with much trepidation. Knowing myself, I wondered how I would feel. Would I be elated? Would I become paralysed with the responsibility that fatherhood entailed? Would I be a good father? Would I resent the changes this would bring? My daughter was a caesarean baby and I saw her before her mother did. The nurse took this bundle of life from the womb and presented it to me (through the operating room window) before she had been cleaned. I took one look at this blood-covered, slimy looking infant and knew instantly that I had gambled wrongly! Or did I? When the nurse had cleaned my daughter, she brought her to the waiting room and placed her in my arms. I looked down at this child, my child, and my world turned upside down. I knew at that moment that this little gift from God would become the centre of my life and that I would love her more I could possibly ever imagine. I knew instantly that I would love my child more than life itself. *I learnt that some changes turn our worlds upside down.* They hit us hard and leave us breathless in their wake. That's what happened to me when my daughter was born. *Again, there was only one thing to do: I had to embrace this change while having my world spun on its head.*

About twenty years went by and then the thing I had feared most as a father happened. I was sitting by the living room window, late one afternoon. I watched as my daughter and her boyfriend walked up the driveway towards the house. Their whole demeanour told me that this was to be a momentous encounter. The two of them were obviously rehearsing a rather significant speech. I knew that my future son-in-law was not in the frame of mind to actually speak to me, even though my daughter had apparently told him that this was something he had to do. I sat there with bated breath, wondering what I would say. My daughter, with the same sense of comfortability she always displayed towards her father, walked in, sat down next to me, and said, 'Papy, Brennan and I would like to get engaged, and Brennan has a letter for you.' Her about-to-be fiancé was too rattled by this whole episode to hold any meaningful conversation with me. I had anticipated this and, putting up my sternest face, I accepted the letter and told them I would get back to them. To make a long story short, two years later my daughter was married. Once more my life had changed in the most dramatic way possible. Now I had to deal with a new fact, that I was no longer the main (or only) man in my daughter's life. I had known all along that this would happen and in one sense I was prepared for it, yet not totally. *Some changes are inevitable and we can see them coming from a distance. Again, all we can do with these types of changes is to embrace them.*

A highly educated theologian named Nicodemus came to Jesus one night. His intention was simply to engage Jesus in some theological discussion (John 3:1-2). Instead of politely dealing with his queries, Jesus went straight to the heart of Nicodemus' unstated inquiries. He told Nicodemus that, 'unless a person is born again, he cannot enter the kingdom of heaven' (John 3:3). Nicodemus was totally taken aback with this pointed statement of Jesus. He attempted to sidestep the issue (whether out of ignorance or unpreparedness is difficult to judge). His retorts take on the appearance of the ludicrous. He asked if a grown man had to re-enter his mother's womb (John 3:4). Jesus patiently explained that this meant a spiritual birth, a birth by the Spirit and with water. According to Jesus, this experience is analogous to the experience we have with the wind. It is unexpected; it turns our worlds upside down; and it is inevitable. For those who come to Christ; it is life changing. Poor Nicodemus! He did not get it! 'How can this be?' he asked (John 3:8). Do you sense a hint of exasperation in Jesus' next remarks? I can! 'You are Israel's teacher, yet do you not understand?' (John 3:10). Jesus went on to point out to Nicodemus that this new birth experience will completely change his life and that it is the most important change that one can experience.

The true impact of what Jesus said, can only be understood when we come to terms with what happens in verse 15. Jesus said, 'that everyone who believes in him may inherit eternal life.' In

other words, embrace the change; embrace the new birth; embrace the kingdom of God. *The most important change of all is the change of the new birth that Jesus offers through the unction of the Holy Spirit. The most appropriate way to respond to any change is by embracing it. Therefore, we must embrace the new life that Jesus offers.* That is what faith is made of. We cannot understand how the Spirit works. It will do not do us any good to expend our selves in trying to explicate his work. The best way to enjoy the wind is to stand outside and allow it to caress our faces and rustle our hair. Likewise, the best way to enjoy the new life in the Spirit is to believe in Jesus and embrace the life that he offers.

Some changes are unexpected and undesired. Some changes may turn our worlds upside down. Some changes are inevitable. The change that the Spirit causes is truly the most important. Embrace the change!

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Inductive Sermon Worksheet Sample 2

Sermon Title: 'God Must Be Crazy'

Sermon Text: Hosea 1:1-11

- Illustration: *Movie 'The Gods Must Be Crazy'*
 - Idea 1: *Is God crazy because he plays dirty tricks on people?*
- Illustration: *The Asia Tsunami of December 2004*
 - Idea 2: *Is God crazy because he is capricious and sadistic?*
- Illustration: *The story of Hosea and Gomer*
 - Idea 3: *Is God crazy because he makes people do irrational things?*
- Illustration: *Exposition about God's love and rage*
- Main Idea: *A God who would love as much as he does is indeed 'crazy'.*

Inductive Sermon Sample 2

'God must be Crazy' is an inductive sermon based on Hos 11:1-11.

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God Must Be Crazy!

At this stage in my life I believe that God is *crazy*. Some of you reading this will say to me, 'You are crazy for saying such things about God.' I will respond by saying that if you do not think so after reading this sermon then you are the one who is crazy.

In 1981, a movie, in Afrikaans, was released and it carried a very captivating title, 'The Gods Must Be Crazy.' The movie tells the story of Xi, a Junt-wasi tribesman (bushman) who lives in the Kalahari. Xi and his little clan go about their lives in harmonious pursuit of the basic necessities. One day, a careless bush pilot tosses a Coca-Cola bottle out of his little airplane. The bottle falls in the clearing that doubled as home for Xi and his people. The tribe is astonished to see this shiny object that fell from the sky and assumed that it was a gift from the gods. However, as they explored various possibilities, they could not find any specific use for the bottle. Yet everyone in the tribe wants to possess the bottle. This brings disharmony to the tribe. Xi concludes that this must be some kind of trick from the gods, and a rather bad trick at that. So he picked up the bottle and goes in search of the ends of the earth so he can return the bottle to the gods. *Is God crazy because he delights in playing dirty little tricks on his people? Is God some sort of a cosmic trickster? Is this why God is crazy?*

On the 26th of December 2004, the world awoke to the havoc caused by the so-called Asia Tsunami. A 9.0 earthquake in the Indian Ocean unleashed a watery fury such as the world had never witnessed before. In a few hours the tidal waves had lashed the coastal areas of 12 countries and, according to the latest count, taken the lives of over 200,000 people. People of all the great religions of the world are now left to ponder the reasons (if any) for such mayhem and destruction. *Maybe God is crazy because he is capricious and sadistic and enjoys watching humanity suffer. Is this why God is crazy?*

In the first three chapters of the book of Hosea, we read the story of a man, Hosea, who marries a woman named Gomer. Hosea's wife proves to be very unfaithful. The couple has three children but it appears that none of them belong to Hosea. Gomer is not satisfied with one man and her life is punctuated by one fling after another. Finally, she tires of her family and abandons her children and her husband. She becomes a prostitute. It did not take long for Gomer to get into financial trouble, and she ends up in the slave market. Hosea goes to the market and, using a fairly large investment, buys Gomer back and restores her as his wife. The odd thing about this story is that Hosea does all of this because God commanded him to. *Could it be that God is crazy for sometimes making people do incredibly irrational things? Is this why God is crazy?*

I think that none of these reasons measures up to the craziness of God as portrayed in Hosea 11. The first thing to note about this chapter, are the many special things God had done for Israel. God actually lists his actions on behalf of his people.

'When Israel was a child, I loved him' (vs 1). God loves Israel as a father loves his children. This love compels God to deliver Israel from slavery in Egypt. '. . . out of Egypt I called my son' (vs 1). Like a father, God is there to assist Israel in their development. 'It was I who taught Israel to walk, taking them by the arms; . . . it was I who healed them' (vs 3). Picture if you can God, like a father, sitting by the bedside of his sick child keeping watch through the night, waiting for the fever to break. He gives them love and unburdens them. 'I led them with cords of human kindness, with ties of love; I lifted the yoke from their neck and bent down to feed them' (vs 4). God does everything he could think of to make life better for Israel.

Like a rebellious teenager, Israel flaunts the goodness of God, tossing it back in his face. Their response is that of a genuine ingrate. When God calls to them, they attempt to run away instead (vs 2). 'They sacrificed to the Baals and they burned incense to images' (vs 2). They reject his love and look for it elsewhere. They are consciously ignorant of all his providence (vs 3). Finally, God has to deal with the ultimate rejection. 'My people are determined to turn from me' (vs 7). Israel is willingly ungrateful and turns their back on all that God is doing for them.

Any father who has had to contend with a rebellious teenager in his family can commiserate with God. Amidst this glaring ingratitude and rebellion, an exasperated God vents his frustration and anger. He informs Israel that he must punish them. This means being conquered by foreign nations; it means that their cities would be destroyed; and that their plans would be terminated (vss 5-6). As we read this denouncement of God, we are filled with a sense of foreboding. We have to ask, how angry is God? What hope is there for Israel? How can anyone come face to face with such divine rage and survive?

To our surprise we discover that wherever God's rage exists, his anguish is not far behind. Again, like a father, God's exasperation is tinged with agony. In vs 8 we read some rather strange and unexpected words from God. 'How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, Israel? How can I treat you like Admah? How can I make you like Zeboiim?' Admah and Zeboiim were among the cities that went up in smoke along with Sodom and Gomorrah in the great conflagration described in Genesis 19. While the anger of God demands the punishment of recalcitrant Israel, his heart agonises over such a fate. Upon further reflection, God repents. He changes his mind. This could not happen! He could not do this to his own! 'My heart is changed within me; all my compassion is aroused. I will not carry out my fierce anger, nor will I turn and devastate Ephraim. For I am God, and not man' (vss 8-9).

This anguish of God is also depicted in other biblical texts. In the Song of the Vineyard (Isa 5:1-7) God agonises over the unfruitfulness of Israel. He recounts all the hard labour he has performed to ensure that Israel was a fruitful vineyard. He even plants the choicest variety of grape. However, when he goes to harvest the grapes all he finds are sour grapes. God wonders what more he could have done for Israel. Days before his death, Jesus likewise is filled with anguish over the fate of Jerusalem, a city that would not respond to the divine touch and hurtled uncaringly towards its own destruction (Luke 19:41-44).

Neither the hurt nor the rejection nor the ingratitude nor the rebellion could keep God from his beloved Israel. Such love is truly unfathomable. To love as God does is to be truly *crazy*. The Bible assures us that God is so insanely in love with his people that he will do anything for them. 'For God loves the world so *insanely* that he gave his only Son . . .' (John 3:16). *God is crazy because he is irrationally in love with us*. He could make do without us. He does not need us. He could wave his creative wand and completely replace us with far superior beings. Instead he persists in loving us along with the hurt, rejection, and rebellion that are our 'thanks' to him.

Anyone who would love as God does is truly *crazy*. A God who would love such as you and me is indeed *crazy*. Yet this is the most comforting thought in the universe: God is *crazy* about me. Our prayers should be that we might somehow learn to reciprocate his love.

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Telling a Story

Every reader soon discovers that the Bible contains a large number of stories. Most of these are stories of people; they are biographies. Since the Bible contains so many of these stories, it is inconceivable that this material should not be part and parcel of preaching. However, we must wonder whether these biographies can be used appropriately or with sufficient skill. It is a known fact of life that not every person is a storyteller. While some people are born with the ability to bring even the most mundane events to life, others end up butchering the most exciting stories. This necessitates the need for preachers to learn how to utilise the biblical biographies with the optimum effect.

In order to re-tell the biblical stories, it is important to understand how the stories were first told. Since our interest in biblical biographies is largely sermonic, we shall consider how these stories actually work in the Bible. We shall focus on the biblical presentation of various characters or personalities. It is crucial to remember that the characters we meet come to us through the eyes of the biblical writers. Shimon Bar-Efrat, in *Narrative Art in the Bible*, contends that the 'views embodied in the narrative are expressed through the characters' (2004, p. 47). He argues that the biblical writers mould and shape the characters, a process known in literary terms as characterisation. To Bar-Efrat, this shaping process involves two techniques: direct and indirect shaping (Ibid., p. 48).

Direct shaping is carried out in two ways. First, the characters are shaped through descriptions of outward appearance. While most of the time there are few detailed physical descriptions in the biblical stories, when they do exist (see Gen 27:11; 29:17; 1 Sam 9:2; 10:23; etc.), they serve to advance the plot of the story or to explain its course (Ibid., p. 48). Second, the characters are shaped by means of statements made about their inner personality (see Gen 6:9; 13:13; 1 Sam 2:12; etc.). Sometimes we meet statements about character traits; at other times we read about mental states (Ibid., p. 53). There are occasions when information about moods (see 2 Sam 6:8; 12:5; 13:21; etc.) is provided (Ibid., p. 58). These direct characterisations can be performed by the narrator or the principal character or even by the supporting cast. The ultimate outcome of such characterisation is to direct the narrative.

Indirect shaping is done via speeches and action recorded (Ibid., pp. 64-86). It is quite evident that the biblical authors do record speeches and actions by the principal protagonists in a story or even by the supporting cast. However, these are at a premium; their use is highly selective. Such speeches or actions reveal something about the persons involved. They also assist the development of the plot.

Preachers who wish to use biographical material from the Bible have to come to terms with these various techniques of characterisation. To ignore them may lead to a misinterpretation of the characters. The story of Joseph is extremely instructive. There are many preachers who present Joseph as the paragon of virtue and a victim of his brothers' envious rage. However, a closer inspection of the characterisation techniques of Gen 37 reveals something a little different. Joseph is portrayed as a boy who brought 'false reports' about his brothers to his father (vs 2). A close reading of vs 8 shows that Joseph taunts his brothers by endlessly talking about his dreams. Again, when Joseph goes searching for his brothers, he wears his special robe (vs 25), a move that is either unwise or a deliberate attempt to rile the brothers. A biographical sermon on Joseph would have to take these characterisations seriously rather than impose an outside reading on to the story.

R. Larry Overstreet, in *Biographical Preaching*, maintains that there are two types of biographical sermons: the historical biographical and the character biographical (2001, p. 15). He states, 'the historical biographical sermon emphasizes the record of the person's life' (Ibid., pp. 15-16) while the 'character biographical sermon emphasizes the inner nature of the person' (Ibid., p. 17). The author supplies the following table to demonstrate the differences between the two (Ibid., p. 19).

	Historical Biographical	Character Biographical
Emphasis	The record of the person's life	The inner nature of the person
Development	According to recorded events (<i>what</i> he or she did)	According to motivating factors (<i>why</i> he or she did it)
Structure <i>Main Divisions</i>	Major periods of the person's life	Major characteristics of the person's life
<i>Subdivisions</i>	Details of the person's life	Details of the characteristics of the person's life
Assets	Deals directly with life in its development	Reveals insight into human nature; sets forth character traits of people most used/least used by God

Table 1: Comparison of Biographical Materials

These two categories of Overstreet allow for two different types of biographical sermons. One is the narrated type where the preacher relates the life of a biblical character in the historical sequence presented in the Bible. The preacher looks back at the story from his or her point of view. The preacher may also assume the role of the biblical narrator and relate the story from the standpoint of someone contemporaneous to the events. Further, the preacher may also play the role of an external observer and present the story from that perspective.

Another way of doing biographical sermon is by employing dramatic monologues. According to Chris Baldwick, *Concise Dictionary of Literary Terms*, dramatic monologue describes 'a kind of poem in which a single fictional or historical character other than the poet speaks to a silent 'audience' of one or more persons' (1996, p. 62). The meaning is also extended to 'plays in which only one character speaks, in the form of a monologue or soliloquy' (Ibid., p. 62). The sermonic use of dramatic monologue fits this latter meaning.

'Dramatic' implies the use of drama elements, props, costumes, and other objects. 'Monologue' implies that the preacher is assuming the role of the character in the story and he or she is speaking as if he or she is that character. Monologues occur in the first person (the use of 'I' speeches) and the speech can be either directed to the audience or the audience plays the role of polite 'eavesdropping'. Overstreet refers to the former as 'speech monologue' while the latter he calls 'situation monologue' (Overstreet, 2001, p. 146). In the second type of monologue, the preacher may be talking to himself or herself, to God, or to some imaginary person. Whichever one is used, dramatic monologues, when properly performed, have a rather radical impact on the congregation as their appeal is both cognitive and affective.

Narrated Biographical Sermon Worksheet Sample

Sermon Title: 'The Truth About Ruth'

Sermon Text: Book of Ruth

Introduction: *Short commentary on the significance of the story of Ruth*

Ruth: The Plot:

- Scene 1: Ruth's Plight
- Scene 2: Ruth's Redeemer-Relative
- Scene 3: Ruth's redemption Request
- Scene 4: Ruth's Redemption

Ruth: The Gospel

1. *Go'el* must be a blood relative
2. *Go'el* must be able
3. *Go'el* must be willing

Conclusion: *It is not how great a sinner I am but how great a Saviour he is that matters.*

Biographical Sermon Sample 1: Narrated Type

The entire book of Ruth is the basis for this biographical sermon. The story of Ruth is the first instance in the Bible where the concept of *go'el* (kinsman-redeemer) appears and serves as the narrative foundation for the biblical concept of 'redemption'.

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The Truth about Ruth

One of the most evocative stories in the Bible is the story of Ruth. While scholars may debate the literary genre and authorship of the book, the story touches everyone who reads it. This is the story of a young woman caught up in a set of rather trying circumstances, whose family loyalty is tested to the limit, but who succeeds against all the odds. It is a story with a happy ending, almost like a fairy tale. It is also a story of someone who discovers God and whose life is turned in the right direction because of this God. But we should begin at the beginning.

Ruth: The Plot

The book has the feel of a short novel and as such we learn more by following the plot of the story.

Scene 1: Ruth's Plight

The story begins with a man called Elimelech. The name Elimelech means, 'God is king.' Yet when we meet Elimelech, he is taking his wife, Naomi, and his two sons, Mahlon and Kilion, to Moab, a foreign country where Yahweh is not king (1:1, 2). The move is precipitated by a rather severe famine in Israel (1:1). We also learn that Elimelech comes from the little town of Bethlehem, which means 'house of bread.' Yet here is an Israelite family exiting the land of promise because there is no bread.

In Moab, things turn for the worse quickly. First, Elimelech dies and then the two sons die (1:4-5). The two boys had married Moabite women and now all three women are left widows. Unable to cope with these tragedies, Naomi decides to return to her homeland. Perhaps she had learned that the famine there was waning. One daughter-in-law, Ruth, decides to accompany her mother-in-law back to Israel. Her stated intention, recorded in 1:16-17, is the stuff of legends.

The reality however is much more stark. Ruth finds herself a foreigner in Israel, and to complicate matters, she is a foreign widow (2:10). Both of these conditions would have placed her in a very precarious position. She is finally reduced to the level of a servant, a gleaner in the fields, for the sake of survival (2:3, 13). Such is Ruth's plight.

Scene 2: Ruth's Redeemer-Relative

Enter Boaz! He is introduced as a *go'el*, a Hebrew term for someone who is a blood relative with special responsibilities for redeeming the situation of relatives in dire straits (2:1). We notice that Boaz is a man of substance; he is wealthy (2:1). He is a kind man; he makes sure that Ruth is properly taken care of (2:8-9) and even invites her to share his lunch with him (2:13-16). His kindness extends beyond mere actions. Boaz praises Ruth for her devotion to Naomi (2:11-12). He tells Ruth: 'Yahweh will reward you; Yahweh under whose wings you seek refuge.' What high praise for a disenfranchised widow.

Scene 3: Ruth's Redemption Request

When Naomi learns of Ruth's 'good fortune,' she quickly puts in motion a plan to ensure the survival of the family. At harvest time, she instructs Ruth to follow an ancient custom that would allow her to claim her redemption. Ruth finds herself in Boaz's tent, sleeping at his feet; much to his chagrin. She acknowledges her situation. 'I am your servant' (3:9a) she says to Boaz. Ruth expresses her need. 'Spread out your wing over me' (3:9b) she utters. And she claims his grace and her redemption. 'You are *go'el*' (3:9c). 'You are my redeemer! You are my redeemer-relative!

Scene 4: Ruth's Redemption

As a man of honour, Boaz instantly assumes responsibility for Ruth's redemption. He finds a way past any prior claim to her (4:1-8). He convinces the redeemer-relative with stronger claim to forego his rights. Having done this, Boaz sets out to reverse Ruth's prior conditions (4:13-15). Boaz and Ruth are married and a son is born. Ruth is no more a widow; she is no more childless; she is no more a foreigner; she is no more a servant!

Ruth: The Gospel

If we stop here, then Ruth's rags-to-riches story would be no more than an interesting fairy tale. The presence of this little book in the Bible clues us to the idea that there is much we can learn from it. What does it teach us about salvation? What sense are we to make of this redeemer-relative idea?

First, for someone to be *go'el*, he or she must be blood relative. There has to be a strong genetic link between redeemer and redeemed. The family ties must be uncontestable. Boaz is Ruth's (and Naomi's) *go'el*. He is related to them by blood and marriage. The Bible presents Jesus as our redeemer and insists upon the idea that his redemptive act is predicated upon his humanity. John 1:14 says, 'the Word (Christ) was made flesh and dwelled among us.' Jesus was born of a human mother and lived a human life. In Christian terminology we call this the incarnation. Heb 2:11, 17-18 emphatically claims that Jesus had to be 'made like his brothers in every way.' Before Jesus could be the redeemer of the world, he had to establish the family bond with humanity, with you and me.

Second, *go'el* must be someone who is able. The ability of the *go'el* to provide this redemption is very much at stake in the story of Ruth. This is why we are told that Boaz was a man of substance. In this story, he had to have the capability of providing Ruth with her redemption. His wealth, his status, his position made him a truly able *go'el*. Heb 7:25 states that Jesus is 'able to save completely.' Our redemption is made possible because the redeemer is the creator God with all that that entails. Christ is able to marshal all the resources of heaven on our behalf. He can call upon his myriads of angels to extricate us from distress. He can access limitless sources of power and energy to effect our redemption. He is El Shaddai (God Almighty); he is Yahweh Tsebaoth (Lord of Hosts); He is Yahweh! He is Lord, King, Creator, and Redeemer. This knowledge compelled the apostle Paul to claim: 'I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me' (Phil 4:13). This contention, that Christ is a truly able *go'el*, underpins the biblical idea of salvation.

Third, and most important of all, *go'el* must have the willingness to redeem. Boaz was willing to redeem Ruth. Similarly, Jesus is willing to redeem us. Heb 10:9-10 testifies to the intentionality of the redemption that Jesus procured. If we read Revelation 13:8 correctly, we realise that the plan of redemption was not an afterthought for God. It is part and parcel of his dealings with us. The significance of this willingness of *go'el* is best understood against this fact: *go'el* takes great risks in fulfilling this act of redemption. According to Levirate laws, Boaz risked his inheritance and name to Ruth's dead husband. When Jesus left heaven, he risked his own existence for our sake. Jesus risked the contamination of sin; he risked being overcome by human frailty; he risked eternal damnation. Despite all that, Jesus came to earth so that anyone who wishes for eternal life may have it. This is the heart of *go'el*.

A redeemer must be a blood relative. A redeemer should be able to effect redemption. A redeemer should be willing to risk whatever it takes to make redemption possible. Jesus did all of these so that you and I can have eternal life in his kingdom. In the words of a little song by Mark Lowry: 'I don't know what a sinner you are; but I know what a Saviour He is.'

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Biographical Sermon Sample 2: Dramatic Monologue 1

Because the next sermon is dramatic monologue, there is no sermon outline for it. To some extent this will depend on the creativity of the preacher.

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Through Joseph's Eyes: An Extraordinary Plan through an Ordinary Man

My name is Yosef. My story is quite unique as I am certain you will discover. But let me begin with that fateful day. My son, Yeshua, had reached the age of twelve. Now he was ready to travel with us. My wife, Miriam, and I decided it was time to take him to Yerushalaim for the great Passover, the Pesach. We set out from Nazareth along with many other pilgrims.

After about a week on the road, we finally arrived at Yerushalaim and headed straight for the Temple. What a magnificent sight it was! There at the top of the Temple stairs stood the High Priest, resplendent in his gorgeous robes. He was inviting us to give our gifts to Yahweh. All around the Temple precinct stood the Levites and they led us in a litany of praises to our God Almighty.

Before I go any further, let me take you back to the beginning of all this. I was having a very sleepless night. My fiancée had just told me that she was pregnant. I knew I was not the father. More frightening was the story she had concocted. She claimed that God had gotten her pregnant. Now, I love Miriam very much. But how could I believe such a story? I could not sleep! As I tossed around in bed my bedroom was suddenly filled with a bright eerie light and there next to my bed stood an angel.

I was terrified. But the angel spoke to me: 'Yosef, do not be afraid. Take Miriam as your wife because the child in her is truly from God. This child will save many from sin and you shall call his name Yeshua.' I did not dare to disobey such a vision. I hastily married Miriam the very next day. And as the angel had said, we had a son.

My son, Yeshua, was born in a most inauspicious manner. We were compelled by a Roman imperial decree to go down to Bethlehem for census taking. Miriam was heavy with child and the trip was hard on her. When we reached Bethlehem, Miriam told me it was time. I desperately tried to find some accommodations but the only place available was a shepherd's stable.

We had only been there for a few days when something, which left me absolutely speechless, happened. To Miriam and my dismay, one evening a group of very important looking foreigners came to our humble stable. You could tell they were rich. I was horrified when they knelt

down before my little son, Yeshua, and began to worship him. They said that a star had led them to us, and that this little boy was the new king of Israel. I could hardly believe my ears! How could this really be? I wondered what Miriam was thinking!

That was twelve years ago. This is now! Our first family Passover was over and we set out for home. Halfway through our journey, Miriam and I discovered that Yeshua was missing. I almost died. I had lost God's son. How can I ever live with myself? We quickly hurried back to Yerushalaim.

I was aghast when I saw Yeshua in the midst of this very august audience. What did a twelve-year old boy have in common with such learned men? My mind was swimming and I barely heard Miriam blurt out, 'Son, why have you treated us this way?' His answer shocked and puzzled me. 'Mother, don't you know that I must be about my father's business?'

My father's business? Somehow I knew that he was not speaking about me! What was his father's business? How am I involved in that business? Or am I just a player in this drama?

Over the years I have reflected upon these events. It did not take long for me to sense that Yeshua was not an ordinary child. Yet I could not figure out what made him special. What was he about to do? What did he stand for? My people had hoped and prayed for a Messiah, a deliverer, to come for so long that part of me dreamed that maybe, just maybe, Yeshua was the Messiah. Nevertheless, much of me could not entertain this possibility. I could not wrap my mind around the idea that the Messiah could come from such and insignificant family as mine, or from a town of total insignificance like Nazareth.

However, I knew this much. God had chosen me to help him in some way and that the plan of God involved my son Yeshua. I confess to being unable to really fathom what this plan was. I harboured all sorts of doubts and questions about this entire enterprise. But I could not run away from the simple conviction that God had chosen me, an ordinary man, to do something extraordinary. Imagine what might have happened if I had not listened?

Friends, our God is a truly great and marvellous God. I believe that he displays his plans in some rather unusual ways. Many of you are like me, ordinary people. You are probably saying to yourselves, 'God doesn't really need me. What can he do with such an ordinary person?' I wonder if some of you think that you have to be important, rich, or successful to be used by God.

Perhaps we should rethink our ideas. It is true that God used some rather impressive figures in the past. People like Moses, David, and Solomon were truly outstanding individuals. Nevertheless, this does not detract from the fact that God also uses lots of very ordinary people, many whose names are not even recorded. It seems to me that it is not the recognition of the name or its incognito status that determines a person's usefulness to God.

My thought for you is simple. If God used me, Yosef, an unknown carpenter from an insignificant town, can he not also use you? Who are you to question the wisdom of the Almighty? It is now abundantly clear to me that for every outstanding figure in God's kingdom, there are hundreds of ordinary workers. Their names may not be recorded in some book; their contributions may be undisclosed to human eyes; and their successes may be known only in heaven. Yet, through each one of them, God is surely and truly accomplishing something extraordinary.

What the extraordinary thing that God will do through you is, I cannot tell. This I do know, God's work always produces extraordinary results. Therefore, my counsel to you is to keep yourself close to God and open to his call. And when he needs an ordinary servant like you, he will call. Then through you he will accomplish something extraordinary. God bless!

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Biographical Sermon Sample 3: Dramatic Monologue 2

This sermon is particularly suited to musical rendition. It is also a dramatic monologue but could be rendered as a musical.

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Mary Magdalene

My! How the years have flown by. Everything is still so vivid in my mind that it appears it had all happened just yesterday. But . . . no, it has been a while now. Yet, how can I ever forget? How can I ever forget him, the one person who touched my life as no one else could? After all these years, it still seems like a dream. I can scarcely believe what has happened to me. Hmmm . . .

I was just an innocent child at Bethany. My parents died early and I never really knew them. The only family I had, were my brother, Lazarus, and my sister, Martha. They were both good people, but I really missed my parents. At times I thought that God was punishing me for some unknown sin for taking my parents so early from me. While the years dulled the pain of that loss, I still missed them so much, especially my father.

When I was old enough, Lazarus and Martha took me to Synagogue. I can still recall my very first visit. I was so excited that my brother, bless his heart, had to remind me that women must be especially quiet in Synagogue. 'Why is that so?' I thought to myself. Not that I really cared then, mind you. I was somewhat surprised when Martha and I were ushered up to the gallery. 'Are women always treated so differently?' I mused. I was so frustrated that I could not really see what was going on below, with the curtain and all . . .

Somehow, through the cracks I caught sight of him, the Hazan. He was handsome, with a full beard; he looked so dignified and learned; he was so fatherly. Everyone called him Simon. Little did I realise what was about to transpire. Simon seemed really interested in me and at first I was very happy to have a father figure in my life. But somehow, one thing led to another, and, before I could blink my eyes, my life had turned upside down. Using his considerable ecclesiastical leverage, Simon forced me to keep silent.

I was so ashamed of myself that I ran away. All I could think of was to get as far away from Bethany as I could. I don't know how long I travelled, but eventually I found myself in Magdala. I was hungry, I was tired, I was penniless. I tried to find a job, I really tried, but no one would hire a strange girl; besides, I had no skills. What was I to do?

I did learn something from Simon. I learned what it is men wanted most. In desperation, I figured that I might as well make a living somehow. Soon I had a lot of friends, men friends, who seemed to need my special touch. And Magdala was a good place for this. I was soon wealthier than any other woman, or man, in town. Of course, all the women avoided me and, sometimes, even called me names. But . . . life was good and I didn't care. After all I was now well-known; I was Mary of Magdala.

One day I heard about this exciting new preacher. Not that I was religious or anything like that. Who in my profession went to Synagogue? Those Synagogue people; why they would stone you first before they let you in. But my friend said that I should go and listen to this man. 'He is something special,' he said. You know I was as curious as everyone else, and so one day I went.

There he was, by the seaside; there were thousands of people. I was dumbfounded. Where did all these people come from? 'What is his name?' I asked someone. 'Jesus,' I was told. 'Where's he from?' 'Nazareth.' Nazareth? How interesting!

At that moment he turned and our eyes met. His face was ruggedly handsome; his eyes seemed to penetrate right into my soul. I promise, I felt that he could read my thoughts. I remember squirming uncomfortably. Then he began to speak; in that strong yet gentle voice of his. I can't remember everything he said that day. This I do remember: my life was turned upside down, yet again. While I did not get to speak personally to him for some time, I knew then, as I know now, that no one knew my heart better than he did.

I knew at that moment what I had to do. But executing it, well, that was something else. I wanted to leave Magdala right away and get a new start. I wanted to return to Bethany and see how my brother and sister were doing. But one excuse after another kept me from following through on

this newfound sense of self worth. I visited Jesus several times. Not once did I feel judged or condemned. It seemed almost as if he carried each of my failures. Even then I knew that no one would ever love me so much.

The time finally arrived. I picked up my belongings, especially my treasured, and very expensive, alabaster jar filled with pure nard, and headed home, for Bethany. All along the way I wondered about the reception I would receive. What would Lazarus and Martha say? Was Simon still around? What would the neighbours say? Had they heard about my life? Had they met Jesus?

I was unprepared for the homecoming. It seemed that everyone had met or heard Jesus and their lives were as transformed as mine was. I even heard that Simon had met Jesus. In fact, it appears Simon had contracted leprosy and then was healed by Jesus. I was strangely relieved to hear that, but I wasn't anxious to see Simon. I wanted to keep that chapter firmly closed.

It seemed that my stay home would be a happy one after all, but it wasn't. I can't say how soon after I arrived home that it happened. It seemed that time had stood still. All of a sudden, without warning, the sky caved in and I found myself in a black hole. My brother fell very ill and there was nothing anyone could do about it. We tried all the treatments available, but he kept deteriorating. Jesus was far away, he was always so busy, and at first we thought it best not to burden him. But in total desperation, we sent a message to Jesus. I will never forget the resentment I felt when the messenger brought back news that Jesus was not coming!

How could he treat me this way? Did I mean nothing to him? Is this the kind of love he so profusely spouted in his sermons? Why? Why? My mind went numb with pain as I watched my beloved brother deteriorate and then pass away. I remember thinking, 'Surely, even God couldn't be this unfair! But then again, maybe he was!' Was this the sort of religion that Jesus taught? Why wouldn't he help us? Are we not his friends? Hadn't he been a welcomed guest at our home? Couldn't he do me this one favour?

With heavy hearts we laid Lazarus to rest in the family tomb. As they rolled that stone over the entrance, I felt as if my world had closed in around me. This new beautiful sunshine I had experienced was now overcast with dark clouds. Would I ever find my way out of this shadow land again? Every day I visited my brother's tomb, hoping against hope for a miracle. I was angry with Jesus and yet, strangely, hopeful.

Four days later we heard news that stirred up all my anger and hope. Someone ran breathless to our house and told Martha and me, 'Jesus is in town! Jesus is in town! He wants to see the tomb!' My anger welled up inside me as I quietly thought, 'How dare he come now! How truly cold-hearted!' Yet, I found myself running to him, almost magnetised by the mere thought of his presence. My sister had gotten to Jesus first. By the time I reached him, he was already at the tomb. Still overcome by a sense of betrayal, with tears rolling down my face, all I could do was blurt out, 'If you had been here, my brother would not have died!' He looked at me, and there were tears in his eyes, and his voice trembled as he softly asked, 'Where have you laid him?' Everything became a blur from there.

The next thing I knew? There was Lazarus, outside the tomb, and he looked as if he had not been anywhere. My mourning suddenly turned into dancing and my tears of pain became tears of joy. How can I possibly forget that moment? I recall the thought that crossed my mind: when Jesus is four days late, he is still on time.

It was then that I knew I had to do something special for Jesus. I had to redeem myself and thank him properly. But I was troubled. His disciples were telling us that Jesus' mood had turned drastically sombre and he was sounding almost suicidal. I pondered these developments in my heart. None of them made any sense. But I thought it best to leave it alone.

Not long after this I learned that Simon was throwing a big banquet to honour Jesus. Of course I knew I would not be invited. Yet, something inside told me this would be the best time to express my gratitude. Would a better time present itself? I was convinced it would not. All I had to do was figure out a way to crash that party!

When I walked into that room, I could feel hundreds of eyes turn my way. I felt as if I would burn up. I knew what most of them thought of me, especially Simon. But, I did not care. I had a mission and I would not be deterred. When I got to Jesus (what a long walk it seemed), I fell sobbing at his feet. I broke my favourite jar of nard and poured it all on his feet and wiped them with my hair. All my past sins seemed to well up inside me and I felt as though I might explode. Then Jesus touched my arm and looked into my eyes, and, you know what, I knew then everything was all right! I am sure I heard a chuckle in his voice as he told those party animals that my little act would be retold time and time again.

That was the darkest Sabbath I have ever known. Time stood still. I thought that my heart stopped beating. How could this have happened? How could God have allowed this to take place? Where is the justice in all this? Is this how his kingdom was to end? How could Jesus have permitted those unclean Gentiles to manhandle him that way? Why did our Council of elders turn so violently against him? What wrong did he do? Why didn't he use his powers? Why? Oh, why?

The questions churned round and round my mind. I was too stunned to weep. All I could do was watch as he breathed his last on that cruel instrument of death. Why, we couldn't even give him a proper burial because of the approaching Sabbath! What was the use of Sabbath when God had turned away his face as he did?

It was Sunday morning. It was still dark. I had to get there to be sure! Peter and John were also there and to our dismay the tomb was open and there was no one around. In numb disbelief, I stared into that dark space as if somehow I could conjure up his body on the stone. Tears were running down my cheeks and I could feel myself grasping for some straw of hope. 'What had happened here?' I thought!

That's when I promised myself that I would never forget him! Will you remember my Jesus?

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Painting Word Pictures

Most people who cook rice think of rice as white. However, this need not always be the case. The Theology Club at Asia-Pacific International University holds monthly dinners. At one of these gatherings, I made a rice dish. Many of the students were 'shocked' to see that the rice was multi-coloured. Colour is part of our lives and the world around us and should also be part of preaching. Arguably, most sermons target the cognitive side of our being. They aim at teaching and informing, especially when the element of truth is factored in. Preachers are frequently driven by the need to speak the truth about God and it is easy to lose sight of the fact that most people need more than information. Our members also look for inspiration. The affective side of their being has to be 'tickled' or else all the information they receive does not bring about the expected result. As someone once said, 'The gospel must not only be taught, it must also be caught.' To put it another way, preaching must target both the head and the heart.

Understanding this has a profound impact upon preaching. A preacher who seeks to be faithful to his or her task must not only be cognizant of this fact, but he or she must work at developing this aspect of preaching. I believe that the secret to reaching the affective side of our listeners lies in the words, the bread and butter of preaching.

A word of clarification is necessary at this juncture. To reach the affective side of the congregation, preachers must realise that the senses have to be brought to bear upon the sermon. By this I mean that the congregation should be able to see, smell, hear, touch, and taste (metaphorically speaking). This experience can be achieved by using audio-visual aids. However, the more dramatic effect comes through the words and the sensory impact that words have.

I once listened to a sermon entitled 'Stay in the Boat.' The preacher was a master with words, especially in getting the words to excite the senses. His sermon was based on the story of Jesus and the disciples caught in a violent storm on the Sea of Galilee. When he described the effect of the storm on the boat, most of us listening to him had our own virtual storm experience. We actually could 'feel' the boat rock and our bodies reacting to the violent waves. The preacher used his words to paint pictures that were so real that our senses responded to them.

Another very powerful form of preaching is what I would call the descriptive sermon. This is the type of sermon that seeks to engage the congregation affectively. It may be argued whether the descriptive sermon is a true sermon type. Nevertheless, it is sufficiently distinctive to warrant separate treatment. At the very least, I am referring to descriptive elements in a sermon with the intention of evoking affective/sensory responses. If the sermon is about the great banquet that Christ is preparing for his people in heaven, the congregation should feel hungry by the time the sermon is done.

The descriptive sermon concentrates on the use of language rather than the structure of the sermon itself. For this type of sermon to work, there has to be a degree of fluidity. This does not mean that instruction is absent, rather it is to recognise that listeners also need inspiration. They need to be moved; they need to be aroused. When I think of the power of descriptive speeches two examples come to mind: 'The Creation' presented by Wintley Phipps and a poem by James Weldon Johnson called 'Go Down, Death.' As you read these pieces, I am sure that you can see how (coupled with the proper vocal presentation) profound their impact can be.

The Creation

And God stepped out on space, and he looked around and said, 'I'm lonely. I'll make me a world.' And as far as the eye of God could see, darkness covered everything, blacker than a hundred midnights, down in a cypress swamp. Then God smiled, and the light broke and the darkness rolled up on one side, and the light stood shining on the other, and God said, 'That's good.'

Then God reached out and took the light in his hands, and God rolled the light around in his hands until he made the sun. And he set that sun ablazing in the heavens, and the light that was left from making the sun, God gathered it up in a shining ball and flung it against the darkness, spangling the night with the moon and the stars. Then down between the darkness and the light, he hurled the world and God said, 'That's good.'

And God himself stepped down. And the sun was on his right hand, and the moon was on his left. The stars were clustered above his head, and the earth was under his feet. And God walked and where he trod, his footsteps hollowed the valleys out and bulged the mountains up. Then he stopped and looked and saw that the earth was hot and barren. So God stepped over to the edge of the world, and he spat out the seven seas. Then he batted his eyes, and the lightning flashed. He clapped his hands, and the thunders rolled, and the waters above the earth came down. The cooling waters came down.

Then the green grass sprouted, and the little red flowers blossomed. The pine tree pointed his finger to the sky, and the oak spread out his arms. The lakes cuddled down in the hollow of the ground, and the rivers ran down to the sea. And God smiled again. And the rainbow appeared and curled itself around his shoulder. Then God raised his arm, and he waved his hand over the sea and over the land. And he said, 'Bring forth. Bring forth.'

And quicker than God could drop his hand, fishes and fowls, and beasts, and birds swam the rivers and the seas, roamed the forests and the woods, and split the air with their wings. And God said, 'That's good.'

Then God walked around, and God looked around on all that he had made. He looked at his sun, he looked at his moon, and he looked at his little stars. He looked on his world with all its living things, and God said, 'I'm lonely still.'

Then God sat down on the side of a hill where he could think. By a deep, wide river, he sat down with head in his hands. God thought, 'I'll make me a man.' Up from the bed of the river God scooped the clay, and by the bank of the river he kneeled him down. And there the great God almighty, who lit the sun and fixed it in the sky, who flung the stars to the most far corner of the night, who rounded the earth in the middle of his hand, this great God, like a mammy bending over her baby, kneeled down in the dust, toiling over a lump of clay till he shaped it in his own image. Then into it he blew the breath of life. And man became a living soul. Amen.

Go Down, Death! (by James Weldon Johnson)

(Please note that this poem is used here only for illustrative purposes, not because it teaches any truth.)

Weep not; weep not; she is not dead.
She is resting in the bosom of Jesus.
Heart-broken husband, weep no more;
Grief-stricken son, weep no more.
She only just gone on.

Day before yesterday morning,
God was looking down from his great, high heaven,
Looking down on all his children.
And his eye fell on sister Caroline,
Tossing on her bed of pain.
And God's big heart was touched with pity,
With everlasting pity.
And God sat back on his throne,
And he commanded that tall, bright angel
Standing at his right hand,

'Call me Death.'

And that tall, bright angel cried in a voice
Like a clap of thunder,
'Call Death. Call death.'
And the echoes sounded the streets of heaven
Till it reached away back to that shadowy place
Where Death waits with his pale, white horses.
And Death heard the summons,
And he leaped on his fastest horse,
Pale as a sheet in the moonlight.
Up the golden street Death galloped,
And the hooves of his horses struck fire from the gold,
But they didn't make no sound.
Up Death rode to the great white throne
And waited for God's command.

And God said, 'Go down, Death.
Go down, down in Yamacraw,
And find sister Caroline
She's borne the burden in the heat of the day,
She's labored long in my vineyard,
And she's tired, she's weary.
God down, Death, and bring her to me.'

And death didn't say a word,
But he loosened the reins on his pale, white horse,
And he clamped the spurs to his bloodless sides,
And out and down he rode,
Through heaven's pearly gates,
Past suns and moons and stars.
On Death rode, leaving the lightning flash behind.
Straight down he came
While we were watching round her bed.
She turned her eyes and looked away.
She saw what we couldn't see.
She saw old Death.
She saw old Death coming like a falling star.
But Death didn't frighten sister Caroline.
He looked to her like a welcome friend.

And she whispered to us, 'I'm going on.'
And she smiled and she closed her eyes.
And Death took her up like a baby,
And she lay in his icy arms,
But she didn't feel no chill.
And Death began to ride again.
Up beyond the evening star,
Into the glittering light of glory,
On to the great white throne.
And there he laid sister Caroline

On the loving breast of Jesus.

And Jesus took his own hand
And wiped away her tears,
And he smoothed the furrows from his face,
And the angels sang a little song.
And Jesus rocked her in his arms
And kept a-saying,
'Take your rest. Take your rest.'

Weep not. Weep not.
She is not dead,
She is asleep.
She is sleeping in the bosom of Jesus.

Descriptive Sermon Sample

Every preacher should master the use of words in whatever language he or she preaches. Every preacher should aspire to reach this level of mastery so that he or she is able to paint pictures with his or her words and evoke a sensory and affective response from the congregation. Below is a sermon sample for the descriptive sermon type. The sermon utilises Rom 8:28 as the primary text.

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God Is in Control

One of the most consistent truths in the Bible is that God is in control. No verse of Scripture epitomises this more than Rom 8:28. 'In everything, God works for good for those who love him.' The verse makes an amazing claim. It seems to be saying that nothing can happen to us outside of the realm of God's control.

However, many things happen in life, which conspire to make us doubt this truth. In mid-2002, my wife and I boarded a Singapore Airlines flight for Singapore. As is our custom, we had ordered vegetarian meal for ourselves. We settled into our seats as the aircraft roared down the runway, and soon we were airborne. The flight would take us over the Gulf of Siam, across the Malaysian peninsula, and into Singapore. Because of the season, I fully expected some turbulence on the way.

Little did I guess what awaited us! About forty minutes into the flight, it was time for the meals to be served. As is the practice on international flights, those who ordered special meals are always served first. The cabin crew began their service and my breakfast was placed on my tray top. By this time, I was hungry enough to eat a hearty meal. Quickly I opened the cup of orange juice and unwrapped my cutlery. I hesitated from opening the main entrée, as it was rather hot.

While I was doing all this, the seat belt sign suddenly came on and the pilot began his announcement. 'Ladies and gentlemen,' he started, 'please fasten your seatbelts; we are about to . . .' He did not get to finish the sentence. The next thing I knew, the aircraft, a Boeing 777, had made an unexpected jump into the air (I never found out how high) and within an instance had plummeted down about the same distance. It all took only a few seconds.

Nevertheless, the results were dramatic. Imagine what happens when gravity suddenly goes missing! My food tray took off and disappeared down the aisle. My cutlery went flying in every direction. My hands felt like rubber and I was unable to stop this from happening. To my horror, I watched as my cup of orange juice took off, straight up. I gazed at this flying cup, moving in slow

motion, as it reached near the aircraft ceiling, turned over, and spilled (still in slow motion) its contents all over me. I was instantly bathed in orange fragrance.

At the same instance I felt this vice-like grip clawing at my arm and I heard this horrible shriek, 'We're going to die! We're going to die!' I turned and saw my wife, ashen-face, clinging on to my arm until I feared my arm would be dislocated. All I could think of at that moment was, 'I hope they have some replacement breakfast.'

I could not help but ponder this question. We are people of faith, but why were we so fearful? Did we believe that God is in control?

In November 2002, my wife and I were on another Singapore Airlines flight from Chicago to Singapore. We were scheduled for a two-hour stopover in Amsterdam. The flight from Chicago to Amsterdam was expected to last about eight hours. The first seven hours were incident free.

About an hour from Amsterdam, the seatbelt sign came on. The pilot's voice came over the intercom and he informed the passengers that there was a really bad storm over Amsterdam and that the landing might become rough. What he said next left me with a sense of unease. 'We may have to abort the landing,' he stated. 'Abort? Go where?' I remember thinking.

Within minutes of this announcement, the plane began to rock from side to side. With each passing minute the rocking became ever more severe. It started to plummet up and down. For nearly an hour the aircraft, a Boeing 777, was jumping up and down and from side to side. I had never ever been airsick prior to that moment. All of a sudden, I began to sense the rebellion in my stomach as its contents were fighting each other for an exit point. It took all my will power to hold them down.

Again and again, the pilot informed us of our predicament. Soon I could see from the window the tarmac of the runway. This was a fearsome sight. One moment it appeared that the wing (over which I was seated) was about to hit the runway, but the next it had disappeared into this grey mass. This went on for about 30 minutes before the pilot was able to land the aircraft; it kept rocking.

Through all of this, my wife was clawing my poor arm, screaming her favourite in-flight song, 'We're going to die! We're going to die!' the Asian passengers were trying ever so hard to remain stoic, but I could see their fears in their whitening knuckles. The Dutch passengers puzzled me.

I had heard that the Dutch were not the most religious people in the world. I wondered what they would do. To my amazement, the Dutch contingent (which made up nearly half of the aircraft) turned into an impromptu choir. When the plane rocked in one direction, they went 'Ooo!' When it rocked the opposite direction, they went 'Aah!' When it catapulted up, they went 'Whee!' and when it fell down, they went 'Yeah!' When the aircraft finally landed, they applauded the pilot amid shouts of 'Amen' and 'Hallelujah.'

Again, I could not help but ponder the question. Why are we who claim faith afraid? How is it that the Dutch were so calm? Were they simply camouflaging their fear with singing? Did the white-knuckle Asians accept their fate stoically?

I also wondered whether faith changed my reactions to some of life's scarier moments. I had to ask myself, did I really believe that God is in control? If I believe this, does it matter what happens to me? If God is truly in control, then is he not the one who decided the ultimate outcome of my life?

To compound these questions, I have to wonder in what way does believing in God impinge upon my view of life and death? As I analysed the fear I felt in these two incidents, I have to admit that the fear existed because I was not ready for anything really drastic to happen to me. After all, I have my plans and dreams; I have my hopes and desires; and I have my schedule of things. Surely, God is not so rude as to unnecessarily intrude into my world so radically.

Having contemplated all of this, I have to accept this fact: God is the one in control, not just of history but, more to the point, my life. My struggle is not that there will not be moments when I may feel some trepidation. My struggle is to allow God to wreak his havoc while performing his magic. That, to me, is the ultimate test of faith.

Perhaps when I can accept the demand of this truth, then I can fly into any storm and still enjoy the tranquillity of soul that such a magnificent promise offers.

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Unravelling a Plot

One of my most enjoyable times as a cook happens when I make food but my guests cannot figure out what it is until they actually eat it. When this occurs, I will keep them in suspense before revealing to them what is in the dish. In a sense, this is what narrative sermonic style does. The narrative sermon is a sermonic style developed by Eugene Lowry in *The Homiletical Plot: The Sermon as Narrative Art Form*. This is both the most exciting and the most difficult type of preaching. Most preachers think of narrative preaching as telling stories. Lowry's model is not about telling story but rather that the sermon itself is *the* story. He states, 'Plot! This is the key term for a reshaped image of the sermon. Preaching is storytelling. A sermon is a narrative art form' (1980, 15).

Lowry suggests that a sermon must have a plot, like a story. A plot may be described as

the pattern of events and situations in a narrative or dramatic work, as selected or arranged both to emphasize relationships—usually of cause and effect—between the events and to elicit a particular kind of interest in the reader or audience, such as surprise or suspense (Baldwick, 1996, p. 170).

These plot elements are clearly observed in the classroom drama genre of movies. Films such as 'To Sir, with Love' (Sidney Poitier), 'Dead Poet's Society' (Robin Williams), and 'The Emperor's Clothes' (Kevin Kline) depict the various movements of a plot, from tension to resolution to consequences. Likewise, a sermon will contain these elements of a plot. In other words, 'a sermon is a narrative plot' (Lowry, 1980, p. 16).

For Lowry, this sermonic plot is comprised of five stages of development. 'The stages are: 1) upsetting the equilibrium, 2) analysing the discrepancy, 3) disclosing the clue to resolution, 4) experiencing the gospel, and 5) anticipating the consequences' (Ibid., p. 25). Lowry offers a quicker way to learn the five stages by using captions: Oops!, Ugh!, Aha!, Whee!, and Yeah! (Ibid., pp. 28-73 for full discussion).

To come to terms with this idea of plot, let us examine Matt 26:20-50. We shall attempt to explain Lowry's five stages with the help of this passage.

Oops! This is the first stage, the upsetting of equilibrium stage. In this stage a tension is introduced. This tension creates a sense of discomfort for the audience and compels the audience outside the box. The 'Oops!' could come from outside the text. However, it is best to let the text supply the 'Oops!' In our chosen passage Jesus' statement, 'One of you will betray me' (vs 21), accomplishes this. Oops!

Ugh! This is the stage where the discrepancy is analysed. What this stage does is to heighten the tension of the 'Oops!' It takes the listeners on a downward spiral of emotive and cognitive responses. It prepares for the hoped-for reversal. In our passage, every disciple is treated as a potential traitor (vs 25). Every disciple wonders about his own potential for betrayal (vss 22, 25). The disciples were warned about their potential for treachery (vss 31) despite their professed love for Jesus (vss 33, 35). As events transpired, the disciples failed to be there for Jesus when he needed them most (vss 36, 38, 40, 45). We learn, that only a friend can betray. Ugh!

Aha! Now we are ready for disclosing the clue to resolution. Having experienced the 'Ugh!' we are driven to seek a resolution, a reversal, and an explanation. This principle of reversal is

embedded in our passage in Jesus' words, 'Rise, let us go. Here comes he betrayer' (vs 46). All their fears are now reversed. Aha!

Whee! This is the stage where the gospel comes into focus. After all the bad news of stages 1 and 2, we are now ready for some good news. This is where the biblical message comes into play. The main exposition of the passage now takes centre stage. Here the passage sermon allows the congregation to sense the presence, work, and love of God. In our passage, the disciples discover that they were not traitors (vss 46-48). They also learnt about divine acceptance in the midst of human failure (vs 46). Jesus assures them of his abiding presence (vs 32); he encourages them to pray (vs 46); and he engages them in mission (vs 46). The disciples witnessed grace at work (vs 50). Whee!

Yeah! Now we are positioned to anticipate the consequences. Closure is finally provided to the tension raised in Oops! The congregation is motivated for change, service, and mission. They can now respond, 'Yeah!'

Lowry's model can also be depicted pictorially in terms of a loop that heads down then reverses direction (as in the figure below).

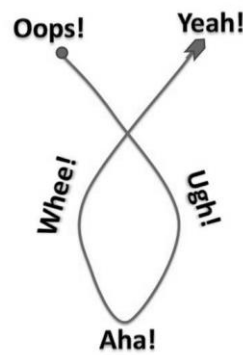


Figure 2

Perhaps a personal experience may be of some use in coming to terms with this idea of narrative sermon or sermonic plot. My encounter with *durian* (a fruit unique to Southeast Asia) illustrates what I am saying about the narrative sermon. The first time I was introduced to the fruit, I was struck by this powerful odour that almost knocked me over. To augment the sense of displeasure, I looked at that hard, thorny cover of the fruit and watched all the work it took to get to the rather slimy flesh inside. I could not help but wonder why anyone would want to waste his/her energy with such an ugly, foul-smelling fruit. My friends convinced me to give the fruit a chance, to taste. 'Just a small bite,' they said. To my surprise the fruit tasted rather good. Its taste is rather difficult to define but the more of it I ate the more the fruit got to me. I did not become a *durian* addict but the fruit certainly has left its mark on my life.

A narrative sermon has the potential to evoke all the cognitive and emotive responses that my run-in with *durian* had. Nevertheless, I recognise that this type of preaching does not come easily. Therefore, I believe that a narrative sermon must begin with a sermon worksheet. While this may appear somewhat mechanical to some, it certainly helps to ensure that the plot is a complete one.

Narrative Sermon Worksheet

Stage 1: Upsetting the equilibrium – Oops!

Stage 2: Analysing the discrepancy – Ugh!

Stage 3: Disclosing the clue to resolution – Aha!

Stage 4: Experiencing the gospel – Whee!

Stage 5: Anticipating the consequences – Yeah!

Narrative Sermon Worksheet Sample 1

Sermon Title: ‘Surely, Not !!’

Sermon Text: Matthew 26:20-50

1. Upsetting the equilibrium – Oops!
Story of a letter with ‘You are a traitor’ statement and vs 21
2. Analysing the discrepancy – Ugh!
Vs 21—every disciple a potential traitor
Vss 22, 25—every disciple thought he was a traitor
Vs 31—disciples were warned of their potential for betrayal
Vss 33, 35—every disciple professed undying love for Jesus
Vss 36, 38, 40, 45—disciples failed to be there when it mattered most
3. Disclosing the clue to resolution – Aha!
Vs 46—‘Rise, let us go! Here comes the betrayer’
4. Experiencing the gospel – Whee!
Vss 46-48—disciples discovered they were not traitors
Vs 46—disciples learnt divine acceptance in the midst of human failure
Vs 50—disciples witnessed grace at work
5. Anticipating the consequences – Yeah!
God’s grace is greater than human failures

Narrative Sermon Sample 1

This sermon is based on Matt 26:20-50. It captures the agony of the disciples when they learnt that one of them would betray Jesus.

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Surely, Not !!

I was marooned in a seemingly forsaken place, or so it felt. I did not know anyone. The place was isolated from life. The nearest village was miles away and I had to walk several kilometres to the nearest bus pickup point. There was no running water or electricity. The amenities of life I had so taken for granted were noticeably absent. Most traumatically, I was far away from home. I had chosen to come to this place to teach and the other teachers and students were nice enough. But there was no one to really talk to. I had never felt so lonely!

I began to look forward to the letters from family and friends. Those were moments of pure ecstasy and release. For a short time each week I could pretend that I was far away among people I really knew and in the hustle and bustle of the city life I knew so well. Those letters were my life line.

But all that changed one day. I looked at the envelope. The return address told me that it was from someone I really cared about. With great anticipation I ripped open the envelope and began devouring the contents of the letter. The mood and words in the letter began to depress me. And then a line jumped out at me and (if words could) grabbed me. It said: ‘You are a traitor!’

Me? A traitor? How can this be? Why would someone I love so much say such a horrible thing to me? Impossible! Surely, not !!

I can now fully resonate with the disciples as, quite out of the blue, Jesus blurted out these words: ‘I tell you, the truth, one of you will betray me!’ (vs 21).

In these words of Jesus, every disciple discovered that he was a potential traitor. In a generalising way that we would find abhorrent, Jesus had turned all of them into possible traitors. I can imagine the sense of shock and disbelief that hit the disciples. Their faces turned ashen grey. Their demeanour became sullen and downcast. Their joy at celebrating the beloved Passover totally deflated. I must confess that Jesus' timing was really terrible. Even if what he said was true, could he not have waited till at least after the supper was over? Why ruin their robust appetite so dramatically? Yet there it was, 'One of you will betray me!'

When Jesus uttered these words, the disciples' world turned upside down. Now they began to think of themselves in an unpleasant new way. Every disciple suddenly thought of himself as a potential traitor. And each one took turn to vehemently disavow such a possibility. 'Surely not I, Lord?' (vs 22). Even Judas Iscariot, the true traitor, made the same claim. 'Surely not I, Lord?' (vs 25). Filled with a sudden rush of conflicting emotions, the embattled disciples could not be certain of their own motives. Perhaps some high-speed introspection occurred. For, it must be recognised, how well do we really know ourselves? Is it possible that we might actually do such a dastardly act, given the right circumstances? I am certain that the disciples sensed this possibility, a feeling made all the more acute by their disavowal. Perhaps also, at the back of their minds was the suspicion that someone in the group could actually do this. After all, how well did they really know each other? How well do we ever really know those around us or even those we live with? Given the right set of circumstances, could somebody we love actually betray us?

Perhaps open betrayal was not the main failure of the disciples. Maybe Jesus, using such hyperbolic language, was giving them warning of a more incipient danger. While the specificity of only one traitor is made known, the disciples were warned that they could all potentially fail Jesus. He told them: 'This very night you will all fall away on account of me' (vs 31). Certainly it only takes one disciple to openly betray Jesus, but, are there other ways of letting Jesus down? As the story would pan out, when the mob came to arrest Jesus that night the disciples, without exception, fled. Jesus did not label all of them traitors, but he certainly warned that they were all potential failures. In the final analysis, did the eleven fail Jesus any less than Judas did?

The disciples' position in this tragic episode was further compounded by their insistent claim of undying love for Jesus. First it was Peter who said: 'Even if all fall away on account of you, I never will' (vs 33). Peter went even further in his vain attempt to profess this undying love for Jesus. "Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you!" (vs 35). All the other disciples joined in this disharmonic refrain. All were equally anxious to prove that they could and would never let Jesus down (vs 35). Yet the events that transpired that night would reveal the disciples' 'betrayal.'

It is true that only Judas betrayed Jesus, but when it mattered most, all the disciples failed to be there for him. Jesus begged the disciples to pray for and with him (vss 33-39). That was the darkest hour of his life. As he began to feel the full impact of the sins of the world, Jesus felt the need for some seriously committed human fellowship. What Jesus needed most that night, were his friends. To their disgrace, the disciples not only failed to grasp the enormity of Jesus' struggles, they actually fell asleep just when he needed them most. Imagine the pain in Jesus' voice as he asked them, 'Could you not keep watch with me for one hour?' (vs 40, also vs 45). I am about to give my life for you! How about one hour, just one hour for me! Was the act of uncaring sleep any less a betrayal than the kiss of Judas?

Perhaps betrayal does take different forms and the most common form may simply exhibit itself in a lack of caring. Someone really needs us but we are asleep instead. We know we should be there for others but we find excuses for being elsewhere. We know we should stand by our friends but we find the experience too demanding. Maybe, just maybe, it really is easier to simply fall asleep. This is also true in our relationship with God. We do not have to run to the authorities to betray Jesus; we simply have to 'sleep.'

But I dare say that the most difficult lesson for the disciples and for us is the simple fact that only a friend can betray someone. If someone is an enemy, animosity is the expected relationship. However, we do not expect our friends to turn against us. We certainly do not expect our loved ones

to betray us. Whether you think of betrayal in the Judas sense or in the sense of the sleeping disciples, only friends can perform such an act. I imagine this was what pained Jesus even more deeply. To realise that the eleven failed him was far more hurtful than the selling out of Judas. As I read the episode, I sense that Jesus was fully prepared for Judas' horrible act. I also sense a measure of surprise at the inability of the eleven to stand by him. I can almost feel the tremendous sadness in Jesus' voice when he returned from prayer the third time and found the disciples still sleeping and asked them, 'Are you still sleeping?' (vs 45).

When I first read this episode, I was filled with a sense of revulsion at both the treachery of Judas and the indifference of the eleven. Yet upon more careful reflection I have come to the realisation that, under the circumstances, I might have acted just the same. I might have been Judas or one of the eleven. I dare say that this is the most sobering introspection humanly possible.

What a tremendous relief it must have been when the disciples heard these words from Jesus: 'Rise, let us go! Here comes the betrayer' (vs 46). A huge load must have rolled off their shoulders. They were not traitors after all!

The eleven disciples discovered that they were not traitors. While this must have been good news they surely were saddened to learn that Judas, one of them, was the traitor (vss 46-48). They must have watched in dismay the manner of his betrayal and this must have sent shudders through their spines as they contemplated the possibility that it could have been one of them. Perhaps this made their innocence all the sweeter. What good news it must have been for them.

Furthermore, they also learned about divine acceptance in the midst of human failure. Jesus said to them (when he could have just as easily abandoned them to their own devising), 'Rise, let us go!' Throughout this encounter we witness a God who would not let his people go. Earlier that night Jesus had assured the disciples of his abiding presence with them (vs 32). He would not abandon them even if they should fail him. Jesus had encouraged them to 'watch and pray' (vs 41). He had sought to protect them from themselves and from their potential failures.

Most significantly, he had engaged them in mission when he asked them to get up and go with him. Their failure to be there for him was not used against him. Their potential treachery was not measured against them. The only thing Jesus cared about was to keep them engaged with him and with his mission. This was love at its very best. This is a picture of a God who refuses to give up on his people. We may fail him and we may even betray him. His style dictates that he never leaves us alone or treats us as we deserve.

That fateful night the disciples not only saw love at work, they witnessed grace at work as well. When Judas and the mob arrived at Gethsemane to forcefully arrest Jesus, the betrayer planted a kiss on Jesus as a sign of guilt. In such a dark relational hour, Jesus still referred to Judas as 'Friend' (vs 50). Imagine the disbelief of the eleven! Friend? How could Jesus call him friend? Why reward a traitor with such empathy? But that is the way of Jesus. That is the way of God. That is grace!

Every disciple of Jesus needs to learn this all-important lesson: God's grace is greater than our failures. It is because of grace that we have hope. It is because of grace that we have salvation. It is because of grace that we have eternal life. Everything that the gospel brings, every piece of good news we possess, is made possible because of grace. We should think of grace as God calling us friends even when we betray him. Grace is the glue that binds us to Jesus. Grace is the unbreakable bond between a Father and his children. Grace is the power of God to redeem the unworthy, the unloving, and the treacherous.

God's grace is encapsulated in a simple Hebrew word that appears in some rather significant promises. The word is *'azb*, which means 'to leave, to abandon, to forsake.' This word can be applied to different levels of abandonment. At its simplest level it means 'to leave,' whereas at its most advanced level it means 'to forsake' or 'to betray.'

When it comes to the advanced form of abandonment, God makes these promises: Ps 27:10 says that your mother and father may abandon you, but the Lord will take you up. Ps 37: 25, 33 promise that God will not abandon his people to their enemies.

The most important text in my estimation is Deut 31:6, 8. In this passage God makes an astounding promise: 'I will never fail you or abandon you.' The two types of 'betrayals' present in Gethsemane will never be seen in God. Unlike Judas, Jesus will never betray us. Also, unlike the eleven, Jesus will never fail us. There never will be a time when he will not be there for us.

This is why every believer can say with assurance that we may fail him, but Jesus will never fail us. We can say that we may even betray him, but Jesus will still call us friend. 'Surely not I, Lord!' The only guarantee is that it is surely not HIM!

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Narrative Sermon Worksheet Sample 2

Sermon Title: 'Late, Yet on Time'

Sermon Text: Isaiah 40:28-31

1. Upsetting the equilibrium – Oops!

God is frequently late!

2. Analysing the discrepancy – Ugh!

When God comes to Abraham to announce the birth of Isaac, it was too late for Abraham and Sarah.

When God sent Moses to deliver Israel from Egypt, the death decree had already been carried out. It was too late for hundreds of babies.

When God finally makes an appearance to Job, it was too late as Job had suffered devastating losses.

When Jesus came to Bethany, Lazarus had been dead for four days.

3. Disclosing the clue to resolution – Aha!

Paradoxically, God is always on time!

4. Experiencing the gospel – Whee!

Isa 55:8-9: God is on a different thought level

2 Pet 3:8: God is on a different time scale

Jer 29:11: God is on a different intentionality level

Rom 8:28: God is on a different control dimension

Isaac is born to Abraham and Sarah

The Israelites are delivered from Egypt

Job receives more than ample compensation

Lazarus is resurrected

5. Anticipating the consequences – Yeah!

Isa 40:31, presents the most important lesson of faith, to wait upon God. When God is late, he is still on time.

Narrative Sermon Sample 2

This sermon tackles the story of Lazarus' resurrection. This is Jesus' most astounding miracle and the story is tailor-made for narrative sermon. The base text for this sermon is Isa 40:28-31.

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Late, Yet On Time!

Have you noticed that God is frequently late? As I've grown older in faith, I've become more aware that God follows a different time, almost as if he runs by a different clock. He is frequently late.

For the sceptical among you, allow me to elaborate. Some people are uncomfortable to speak about God in rather common ways. There is a degree of artificiality about our faith that does not permit many to see God in ways that are natural to life. Consequently, some cannot bring themselves to speak of God in ways that may appear common or negative. For those of you who are so inclined, I ask for your indulgence as we examine the evidence.

When God appeared to Abraham in Gen 18, it was with the intention to tell Abraham that he and Sarah were to finally have a son. Unfortunately, Abraham was 99 years old at the time and Sarah was 89 years old. Both knew that it was already too late. They knew that it was physiologically impossible for them to have a child. The irony of the situation was not lost on Abraham and Sarah because they both burst out laughing. I can just imagine them saying, 'God, it's simply too late!' God was late.

The 80-year old Moses had lived in exile for 40 years when at a burning bush he was startled by God. The dreams and hopes he had had 40 years prior to this had most likely evaporated. His people, the Israelites, had been in bondage, slaves of Egypt, for over a hundred years (or more). During this period a death decree had been proclaimed against the Israelites, and the resulting pogrom led to the death of hundreds or thousands of infant male Israelites. Moses himself had been miraculously preserved from this decree. Why does God come at this late hour to attempt a deliverance of his people? Is it possible that Moses' hesitancy was partially driven by his doubts about God's sense of timing? I think I can almost hear Moses mutter, 'God, you are late!' God was late.

Job had experienced monumental tragedies. He had lost all his material possessions; all his children had perished violently; his wife might have walked out on him; and his friends had turned into ardent accusers. Slowly but surely, Job began to sink into despair and despondency. That's when God appeared to Job. Wasn't it too late? Can you hear Job lament, 'God, you're too late'? God was late.

Mary and Martha watched their brother, Lazarus, fall ill, his life force deteriorate, and die. They had sent desperate messages to Jesus to come and help but he did not. Four days after Lazarus' burial, Jesus appeared. Can you feel the pain of the sisters when they saw Jesus? Out of desperation, they cried, 'Lord, if you had been here, you could have helped Lazarus. But you are too late!' When Jesus asked that the tombstone be rolled away, Martha protested, 'Lord, he's been in there for four days!' Again, God was late.

Arguably, the most commonly asked questions of faith have little to do with God's existence or providence. The most troubling questions for God's people inevitably have to do with his sense of timing. Far too frequently, God is late. And so God's people are often left to cry out, 'When, O Lord? How long, O Lord? Why were you not here when we needed you? Why did you not come? Why are you so late?' How many of us have asked these questions? When, in 1996, while on a Bible camp, my best friend went swimming in the sea and did not return alive, I was compelled to ask these questions. And I still do!

Yes, God is frequently late. Yet at this juncture I am struck by a totally paradoxical truth. God may be frequently late, but he is always on time! How can that be, you ask? Again you must allow me to elaborate

I would like to take you back to some important passages of Scripture, passages that enable us to grasp God's sense of timing. We must do this in order to deal with this incredibly paradoxical truth: God is frequently late, but he is always on time!

In Isa 55:8-9 God reminds us of a fundamental truth. He says, 'My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways . . . As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.' This tells me that God operates on a different thought level. He has a vantage view that we are incapable of having.

2 Pet 3:8 says, that 'with the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day.' Obviously, God runs by a different clock. He functions on a totally different time scale. His time is not our time.

In Jer 29:11, God makes a wonderful promise. 'For I know the plans I have for you; plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.' You see, God functions at a very different level of intentionality. Unlike you and I, he has only good plans. This is further corroborated by Rom 8:28. Paul writes, 'We know that in everything, God works for the good of those who love him, who are called according to his purpose.' This forces a conviction upon us that says that whatever happens to us fits a design. God is in control of our lives and he alone knows what is truly for our best.

Abraham and Sarah thought that God had appeared too late, but because God came, Isaac was born. Moses may have entertained similar thoughts about God's timing, but because he came the Israelites were delivered from Egypt and we are left with the story of the Exodus, the greatest tale of deliverance in human folklore. When God came to Job, a tenfold restoration ensued. All the losses that Job experienced were more than amply compensated. Mary and Martha were certain that Jesus was too late. However, he came and because he did, Lazarus was raised from the dead.

In each of these stories, and others like them, God is quite obviously late. That is what we see. That is the human perception of his actions. That is the view we are allowed to have. If we examine our own lives we will notice all the times that God was late, or that we were certain he was. This view of reality is the most trying one for God's people. We frequently struggle to make sense of all this.

Nevertheless, the curtain has been drawn aside for us. We do have a preview of God's side of the reality. He is always on time. God's intentionality toward and heart for his people mean that he is always on time. From his vantage place and with his love always directed at us (his people), he can, and does, ensure that he is truly on time, regardless how our clocks read.

Yes. God is frequently late, but he is always on time!

Armed with this truth, we can now turn to the most important lesson of faith. Isa 40:31 states: 'Those who wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall rise up on wings like eagles. They shall run and not be wearied; they shall walk and not faint.' Faith discovers its strength, not in the busyness of life or in the preponderance of effort, but rather in the tranquillity of soul that enables us to tune in to God's frequency. For it is in waiting upon the Lord that we learn the lesson we most need.

God is frequently late, but he is always on time. Therefore, wait on the Lord and you shall find strength.

In the words of a song about Lazarus by C. Aaron and Roberta Wilburn:

When he's four days late and all hope is gone,
Lord, we don't understand why you've waited so long.
But his way is God's way; it's not yours or mine;
And isn't it great, when he's four days late,
He's still on time.

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Narrative preaching requires a great deal of skill, and like any skill-related activity, practice makes for better sermons. This sermon type is both challenging and rewarding. Its innate strength is its ability to shock and awe (to borrow a military phraseology). It engages the congregation whether they know it or not and elicits the most profound responses. Preachers who practise this form of preaching will find the experience very satisfying.

Uncovering a Text

Some consider that preaching reaches its zenith in the sermon form called expository. If, by expository we mean the exposition of a biblical passage, then it could be argued that all preaching is innately expository. As William Sangster once suggested, expository is about the content not the style of preaching. The most influential exponent of expository preaching is Haddon W. Robinson. In his now classic work on the subject, *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages*, Robinson defines this type of preaching as follows

Expository preaching is the communication of a biblical concept, derived from and transmitted through a historical, grammatical, and literary study of a passage in its context, which the Holy Spirit first applies to the personality and experience of the preacher, then through him to his hearers (1980, p. 20).

Robinson's definition is multifaceted and is arguably the most complete definition of preaching (expository or otherwise) that exists. Robinson agrees with Sangster when he states that expository preaching 'at its core is more a philosophy than a method' (Ibid.). In perusing through the book, it is clearly evident that Robinson places great emphasis on the exegesis of the text. Two chapters of the book concentrate on the exegetical task that preachers should engage in.

With this in mind, perhaps it is better to think of other labels for the sermonic styles that are being proposed in this chapter. However, I think it best to retain the label of 'expository preaching' with some clarification. Another approach to this style of preaching is to examine the difference between this and the previous styles. As earlier stated, I think that all preaching is innately expositional in nature. Nevertheless, expository preaching does something with the text that is not called for in the other sermonic styles. In expository preaching, every detail of the text is carefully attended to. In expository preaching every part of the passage is brought to bear upon the sermon.

To revisit the culinary analogy in this book, an expository sermon is like a food dish at a restaurant. The name of the dish is printed in the menu. However, that tells customers little about the food itself. In the more uptown restaurants, the menu item is often accompanied by a description of the dish. Where this is not practised, the customer inevitably will ask the waiter questions about the food. A knowledgeable waiter will enumerate for the customer's benefit the various components that are in that food dish. Similarly, expository preaching seeks to uncover the whole text and everything in it that impacts its message. To put it another way, expository preaching allows the congregation to see both the forest and the trees that comprise the text.

Benefits of Expository Preaching

While this type of preaching may seem somewhat complex and may actually require more intensive exegesis, it is accompanied by some decided benefits. First, is the benefit of delimitation. Frequently preachers wander all over the biblical landscape that there is little sense arising from their preaching. Forcing ourselves to limit our sermon to a specific texts/passage brings into our preaching the same intentionality that is a significant part of scholarly research. The preacher is more likely to be viewed as being truly professional.

Second, expository preaching engenders a more focused educational process for the congregation. Taking the task of biblical interpretation seriously, the preacher is able to use his/her sermons the same way that a teacher utilises lesson plans. In this way the preacher can take his/her congregation through a progressive learning experience. Church members do not only need truth to satiate their spiritual thirst, they also need information so they may be better assured of their skill in biblical knowledge. This approach to preaching engenders confidence in both the word of God and the preacher as the exponent of that word.

Third, expository preaching lends itself better to the development of a sermonic calendar. Far too often we encounter preachers who approach their work without a game plan. Every week they go through a sermon search, wondering what they could preach in church that week. I am convinced that preaching that is both educational and inspirational must be more intentional. Expository preaching fosters this intentionality because preachers will quickly realise that they cannot preach on Genesis 1 and then leap into Revelation 19. For perceptive congregations, the obvious question, 'What happened to Genesis 2?' begs an answer. Expository preaching allows the preacher to systematise his/her preaching.

Pitfalls in Expository Preaching

Expository preaching enables the preacher to avoid some unnecessary homiletical pitfalls. Mark L. Strauss, in 'How Not to Preach! Or, Three Errors for Young Preachers to Avoid,' highlights two such pitfalls (2005). One is to preach less than the text, the other is to preach more than the text. This means that preachers may sometimes say things that are not in the text. To do so is to be unfaithful to the word of God. The more intense exegesis that expository preaching calls for, becomes a safeguard against such errors.

Another common pitfall in preaching is proof texting. Despite the popularity of this approach to the Bible, it is also the easiest way to abuse Scripture. Proof texting, as an approach, places all biblical texts on any given subject on the same level. Essentially, this method assumes that every text that refers to a particular motif/concept must have an equal impact upon that motif/concept as any other text. To do this is to fail to contend with the multiplex nature of the Bible and its data. Expository preaching helps preachers not to mix 'apples and oranges' (to use a culinary phrase).

Moreover, expository preaching serves as an antidote to text desertion. Every now and then I hear sermons where the preacher announces his text for the day but by the time the sermon is over nothing had been said about the text in any meaningful way. Expository preaching forces the preacher to stay to the text and in doing so prevents himself or herself from digressing into things not covered by the passage. The biblical passage being preached from governs the conclusions made and the information communicated.

Structure of Expository Sermons

If expository preaching is totally text-based, then it follows that it is the text that governs the form of the sermon. I think that there is no set structure for expository sermons. We can structure deductive, inductive, narrative, and biographical sermons fairly easily. However, the same cannot be so easily done for expository sermons.

Any careful exegesis of the selected passage will unveil the structure that is embedded in the text. Those familiar with structural analysis of biblical passages know that the passage's structure exists on two levels, linguistic and thematic. The thematic structure type lends itself to preaching. Rather than impose an external structure upon the text, expository sermons ought to simply follow the structure of the text that arises from the study of the passage. Even though there is no hard and fast rule one way or the other, yet it seems that if the structure of the sermon is analogous to the structure of the passage, this makes good homiletical sense.

I contend that there are at least three different ways to do expository sermons. One way is to follow a passage verse by verse in a manner similar to a Bible commentary. Another way is to follow the structure of the passage itself because, in the words of an old adage, 'structure is the vehicle of meaning.' A third type of exposition is referred to as the Whiting Method (named after Arthur B. Whiting) and is essentially a sermon based on word study.

Commentary Expository

When we scan the homiletical landscape, we discover that there was ‘preaching’ in the first century Synagogue. Such ‘preaching’ was called the *darashah*. Technically speaking, this was a form of biblical commentary. This style of preaching was adopted by the early church for its worship services (see Fanwar, 2004, pp. 24-28). We see this form of biblical exposition in all the Bible commentaries that are written. I suggest that expository preaching may be viewed as ‘commentary’ sermonic style. In this chapter, the phrase ‘expository preaching’ embodies the idea of commentary of a text.

The commentary type of expository sermon lives up to its billing; it looks and feels like a Bible commentary. This type of exposition follows the flow of the passage and comments on the chosen text piece by piece or line by line or verse by verse. The main task of commentary expository is to find the crux verse and use it to establish the main idea for the sermon. This type of sermon is highly didactic but it provides an in-depth look into the word of God. While this may not be the preferred preaching option, it serves a useful purpose when a need arises for exploring a text at great depth.

Commentary Expository Sample

A commentary sermon on Ps 23 would look somewhat like this:

- Vs 1: comment on this
- Vs 2: comment on this
- Vs 3: comment on this
- Vs 4: comment on this
- Vs 5: comment on this
- Vs 6: comment on this
- Main Idea: God takes care of us

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Commentary Expository Sermon Sample

Sermon Title: Surprise!

Sermon Text: Matthew 2:1-15

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Surprise!

Today is 22 Dec 2012. Surprise! We are still here. Those who followed the Mayan calendar thought the world would have ended yesterday, 21 Dec. But here we are; the Mayans were wrong; the world has not ended.

There are many surprises in life. We are only a few days away from Christmas. The nativity stories are well-known. But how often do we pay attention to the unexpected elements in the stories? Today we shall examine one of these stories and discover the surprises embedded in them. Our story is found in Matt 2, the visit of the Magi at the birth of Jesus. Unnoticed in the narrative are the elements and events that should leave us saying, ‘How did that happen?’

The first surprise is the visit of the Magi. Verse 1 tells us that the wise men came to Jerusalem ‘unexpectedly.’ These were not Jews. They were Gentiles, foreigners from a faraway land. If anyone should visit the baby Jesus, should we not have expected the Jews? The Jews had the Torah; they were the covenant people; they subscribed to a messianic hope. Surely they should have

been the ones looking for the Christ child. However, to our surprise, it was these strangers who were searching. They came unexpectedly while everyone in Jerusalem was sleeping or simply busy with the routines of their lives. The nativity stories reveal again and again that no one was ready for the messiah even while they all prayed for one. If Jesus were to return today, would his people today be sleeping while total strangers arise to meet the Lord?

The Magi made their way to the palace of Herod, the king of the Jews. This was a natural move on their part. As strangers, looking for the one born to be king of the Jews, would not the palace be the perfect venue. So they came to Herod's palace and asked where the one born to be king of the Jews was. While the Magi were guided by a star, they did not know the precise location of the manger. Their inquiry hit Herod and his courtiers like a tonne of bricks. According to verses 4-6, all the people of Jerusalem, along with Herod, were 'deeply disturbed'. They were dismayed to hear this news; it was a shock to them. Here is our second surprise. These were the Jews who for centuries had been waiting for the messiah. Their prophets had preached about this for ages. They had chafed with resentment at Roman rule and prayed constantly for the coming of the great deliverer. During the first century, every Jewish mother prayed that if she had a baby boy, he would become the messiah. Messianic hope; messianic expectation; messianic theology! Call it what you may. They should have known. Why were they disturbed? Herod's dismay is explainable. This was a ruler who did not take kindly to competition. He had murdered his wife and sons because of suspicions that they were his competitors. We understand Herod being disturbed; but the people? They did not like Herod, an Idumean pretending to be Jewish. They ought to have been rejoicing. To our surprise, they were dismayed instead. Were Jesus to return today, as some had hoped, would we rejoice or be dismayed?

Since Herod did not have an answer to the Magi's question, he summoned the chief priests and scribes to give him an answer. These were the pastors and theologians of their day. These were the clergy of the Jews whose main job included a thorough knowledge of the word of God, of the Torah and the prophets. They did not fail in their interpretation. They knew exactly where Jesus was to be born. They cited Micah's prophecy which had predicted, some 800 years before this moment, that the messiah would be born in Bethlehem. They were spot on with their knowledge and interpretation. They knew! Imagine our surprise when we learn that they did not do anything about it. They did not rush to Bethlehem as the shepherds did. They did not go in search of the Christ child as the Magi did. They carried on with their duties as if nothing auspicious had occurred. Could the same thing happen to God's people today?

Surprise number four pertains to the movement of the star that had led the Magi. When it reached Bethlehem, the text says it 'stopped where the child was' (vs 9). Its movement was precise. There was no wasted motion. However, with all that we know today about astronomy and physics, this was a massive event, the sort that could have actually precipitated the type of cataclysm that so many thought would bring the world to an end. Yet, an unaware nation, a people heavy with sleep, did not notice what happened. Only the wise men did. What a tragedy!

Our next surprise comes in the form of the response to the birth of Jesus. Herod asked the Magi to return to Jerusalem to let him know where the child was. His reason seemed legitimate. In fact the wise men were nearly fooled by his cunning and only an angelic warning prevented them from unwittingly causing the death of Jesus. Herod feigned interest and said, 'I will worship him' (vs 8). Nothing could have been further from the truth. His apparent religiosity camouflaged his murderous intent to rid himself of this competitor. As the story continues, we are all too familiar with the tragic events that would engulf Bethlehem later as Herod transformed his intention into state policy. Contrast this with what the Magi did. In verse 11 we learn that these strangers, when they found Jesus, 'they worshipped him'. Were Jesus to make his appearance among us today, would we feign religiosity or truly turn to him in worship?

Every new born deserves a birthday gift. With so few visitors at the birth of Jesus, we are pleasantly surprised to learn that these visitors from a distant land had gifts for the newborn child. But we are almost shocked at the nature of their gifts. Gold, frankincense, and myrrh. All these were

expensive items. These men gave Jesus and his family a massive financial injection. Jesus was not to begin life as a pauper. God ensured that his Son would start out his human life as the king he came to be. What are the gifts we bring to the Lord? Are they befitting a king?

The final surprise in this narrative has to do with the warning of the angel. When Herod realised that the wise men were not returning to Jerusalem, he came up with another plan to find the newborn king of the Jews. Simply get rid of all male children in Bethlehem under the age of two and, in one way or another, this usurper to his throne will be dealt with. Herod did not contend with the angels who surrounded the baby Jesus. Verse 13 tells us that an angel 'suddenly appeared' to Joseph and Mary and instructed them to leave for Egypt in order to escape Herod's evil plot.

God has many surprises for his people. His ways are not always predictable. I am certain that there will be a surprise for you this Christmas. I know there will be many surprises for you in the coming year. This is assured; this is the way God deals with his people. Perhaps the big surprise in 2013 would be the actual return of Jesus.

However, my challenge to you today is not so much to be aware of the surprises God may send your way. You and I should be a surprise to someone today. Someone out there needs our help. Be a surprise. Someone out there needs food or money. Be a surprise. Someone needs a friend. Be a surprise. Someone is lonely or heartbroken. Be a surprise. Perhaps in becoming a surprise to someone, we become truly like our Father in heaven. God grant you a peaceful 2013.

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Structural Expository

A structural exposition of any passage would follow the structure of the passage. A principal concern of this sermon type is to figure out the thought arrangement of the text. Next, the preacher seeks to comment on the various segments of the passage, while also attempting to establish the main idea of the passage. It is important to remember that the structure of the text should be allowed to reveal itself rather than force one upon the text. The singular advantage of this sermon type is that the preacher does not need to wrestle with sermon structure as he or she will simply follow the structure of the passage.

If we take Ps 23 and look at it structurally, this is what we may see:

- Part 1: Vss 1-4 God as Shepherd
 - His actions – vss 2-3
 - My reaction – vs 4
- Part 2: Vss 5-6 God as Host
 - His actions – vs 5
 - My response – vs 6
- Main Idea: *God comes out to care for us and he invites us in so he can provide for us.*

Structural Expository Sermon Sample 1

Sermon Title: 'Simple Gifts!'

Sermon Text: Psalm 128

Structure:

1. Pilgrim Psalms (Pss 120-134)
2. Ps 128 Stanza 1: vss 1-4
 - Begins with statement of blessing
 - Ends with statement of blessing
3. Stanza 1: Three Simple Gifts
 - Work

- Spouse
 - Children
4. Ps 128 Stanza 2: vss 5-6
 - Begins with benediction
 - Ends with benediction
 5. Stanza 2: Two Imperatives
 - 'Look to the good of Jerusalem'
 - 'Look to the good of your grandchildren'
 6. Final thoughts
 - God's best blessings are the simple gifts
 - God commands that his blessings are shared and enjoyed

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Simple Gifts!

Ps 128 is part of a discrete sub-collection in the book of Psalms (chs 120-134) sometimes referred to as the Pilgrim Psalms. In the superscript of each of these psalms is the Hebrew word *Ma'aloth*. The precise translation of this word is unclear but the idea of 'ascents' seems most acceptable. Whether this refers to the ascent of the singing Levites at the temple, or the temple steps, or the journey of pilgrims is debateable. It seems more than likely that these psalms were some sort of pilgrimage hymnbook whose songs were sung by Jewish pilgrims on their way to the temple during the great festival days.

Of greater significance than this historical survey is the literary structure of the collection. Ps 120 is a petition psalm. It opens with the cry, 'I call to the Lord in my distress.' The psalm tells us that pilgrimage commences by recognising human distress. The final psalm in the collection, Ps 134, is a praise psalm. These two psalms provide the spectrum of experience that every pilgrim should have. Pilgrimage begins at the foot of the mountain (so to speak) but carries the pilgrim to the heights of praise and adoration. At the centre of this collection are Pss 127 and 128 with the predominant theme of blessing. Since Ps 128 is a song, it is most helpful to study it as a song. The song is composed of two stanzas, vss 1-4 and vss 5-6.

Stanza 1: Vss 1-4: Three Simple Gifts

This stanza begins with a statement of blessing: 'Blessed are all who fear the Lord' (vs 1). It also ends with a statement of blessing: 'Thus is the man blessed who fears the Lord' (vs 4). The word 'bless' is used three times in this stanza and the imagery employed evokes ideas of blessing. Clearly the idea of blessing permeates the stanza.

In the stanza, three simple gifts are discussed. The first blessing is that of work. 'You will eat of the fruit of your labour; blessings and prosperity will be yours' (vs 2). While we may not all be able to relate to the agricultural imagery of the psalm, we can all relate to the idea of hard work, as one of the common threads of human existence. In today's world, work is often seen as a necessity of life. Most of us think that we work so that we may have life, or at least the things to own that we would like to call life. Work is honourable because God himself ordained work as part of human life at the time of creation. Nevertheless, not many of us see work as a blessing. The psalmist however views work, even hard work, as a blessing. If we stop momentarily, we too can see the logic behind his words. What would life be like if we did not work (with all that that implies)?

The second blessing is that of someone you can share your life with, a husband or a wife. The psalmist says, 'Your wife will be like a fruitful vine within your home' (vs 3a). A better translation is, 'Your wife will be like a fruitful vine in the private parts of your house.' The obvious double entendre in the verse is most illuminating. The psalmist was trying to capture poetically the most

intimate human relationship known to mankind. To be able to share your life with someone like this is truly a blessing.

The last blessing listed by the psalmist is the blessing of children. Continuing the agricultural imagery of the poem, we are told that children will be like 'olive shoots encircling your table' (vs 3b). For many of us in the twenty-first century, with the small nuclear families that are our lives, this idea of many children may seem somewhat incongruous. Nevertheless, anyone who has held his/her child/children in their arms can easily resonate with such sentiments. Children are truly a blessing from God.

A lady once said to me, 'How come no miracles ever happen to me?' Maybe some of us feel the same way about blessings. Perhaps the problem is not with the miracles or the blessings but with our perspective. We wait for those great, special moments when we can say that God has truly demonstrated himself in our lives. However, such moments are so rare that we go through life uncertain whether God is really involved with us. I think that the psalmist is countering such a view of life. He is saying, 'Look at the simple, ordinary things of life. God is already at work there.' A pilgrim has to learn that God's best gifts are also his simplest ones.

Stanza 2: Vss 5-6: Two Imperatives

It is one thing to receive gifts, or even recognise your gifts, it is quite another to know what to do with the gifts God grants. The second stanza in the song is shorter but is no less important. Stanza 1 lists three gifts. Stanza 2 provides two imperatives. The psalmist tells us what we should do with our gifts.

Following a pattern similar to Stanza 1, this verse begins and ends with a benediction. 'May the Lord bless you from Zion' (vs 5a) opens the stanza. 'Peace be upon Israel' (vs 6b) closes the stanza. This envelope of benediction is foundational to the imperatives embedded within.

To capture the sense of the original text, a literal translation is utilised here.

The first imperative reads: 'Look to the good of Jerusalem' (vs 5b). Jerusalem was the centre of God's kingdom in the Old Testament. It symbolised everything that was held to be dear about the covenant and the election of Israel. To the ancient Israelites, Jerusalem was far more than a place in a map. For them it was the very embodiment of their connection with God. Today, God's people do not look toward any particular place to do this. The same idea however is encapsulated in the concept of Church. Today, God's Church is Jerusalem. To us the psalmist is saying, 'Look to the good of the Church.' This command informs us that God's kingdom must dominate our lives. God's Church is not merely an annex or even an appendix to our lives. God's Church is intended to be central to our lives. Through his Church, God's kingdom lives in us. The reason for the blessings is to enable us to be a blessing to God's Church.

The second imperative reads: 'Look to your grandchildren' (vs 6a). A second centre of life is the family. These, I believe, are the two barest essentials to life, the pilgrim's life. God expects us to care for our families. He gave us families and it is for their good that the blessings are given.

We need to explore this idea of 'look to . . .' a little further. The phrase works in two ways. On the one hand, it implies that we must work for the good of the intended object. On the other hand, it calls for a sense of pleasure and enjoyment in the object of this act. When the psalmist says, 'Look to the good of the Church; look to the good of the family,' he is really saying, 'Work for the good of the Church and family; delight in your Church and family.' These are the two essentials of a pilgrim's life. As such they must be the focus of a pilgrim's efforts and pleasures. Granted, both of these things can cause pain and heartache; they can drive us up a wall; and they can make us miserable. Sometimes it may be tempting to distance ourselves from both. However, a pilgrim does not do that. He/she works for the good of Church and family and he/she delights in family and Church.

So what is Ps 128 teaching us? God's best blessings are the simple gifts. God commands that his blessings are to be shared and enjoyed; to borrow a phrase, 'pay it forward.' This is how blessed pilgrims live, not for themselves but for their families and Church. God bless!

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Structural Expository Sermon Sample 2

Sermon Title: 'Trust His Heart'

Sermon Text: Hosea 11:1-11

Introduction

- The Pain of God (vss 1-2)
- The Perplexity of God (vss 3-4)
- The Purpose of God (vss 5-7)
- The Passion of God (vss 8-11)

Conclusion

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Trust His Heart

If we wish to know God's will we can refer to his law. If we wish to understand his mind we can study his revelation. But how do we handle his heart?

I have but one intention today: To usher you into the presence of Almighty God and allow you to feel his pulse, to sense the rhythm of a heart powerful enough to sustain a universe yet sensitive enough to touch one fragile creature.

What does God feel? What really matters to him? What makes him happy? What saddens him? Perhaps in becoming cognizant of the pulsing of his cosmic heart we may discover its rhythm in our own hearts.

Our prism for understanding the heart of God is Hos 11. The prophet ministered during the 9th/8th century BC. That was an age of apostasy, an age of open rebellion against God by his special elect people, Israel. Prophet after prophet was sent in a futile attempt to stem the tide of sin and evil that was propelling Israel to its ultimate doom.

By virtue of his personal experience, Hosea, more than any other person, understood perfectly the heart of God. His wife, Gomer, had proven to be as unfaithful a spouse as could be found. It appears that at least two of their children were not Hosea's. Gomer's trysts finally led her to leave her husband and children. She eventually ended up in a slave market. Following instructions from God, Hosea went to the market, bought his wife back, and restored her to her rightful place as his wife. Through his eyes we will now gaze into the heart of God.

The Pain of God

The first discovery we make relates to the pain of God. We first meet God's pain in Gen 6:5. As God looks down upon a world so overcome by evil that it was virtually irredeemable, we read, 'God's heart was filled with pain.' This pain of God is analogous to Eve's childbirth pains and Adam's pain in toiling the ground. The same Hebrew word is employed in all three episodes.

We can sense God's pain through the agony of the Father in the parable of the lost son (Luke 15) as one son rudely demands his share and leaves home and another son angrily accuses the father of unfairness and favoritism. Again we hear God's pain in the voice of Jesus as he weeps over rebellious Jerusalem (Luke 19:41-44). 'O Jerusalem! If only you knew . . . !'

I imagine that every time his children slalom down the precipice of sin, God's heart convulses with agonising pain. As the apostle Paul put it, each time any of us sins, Christ is again put through the agony of crucifixion. Here in Hos 11, God cries out, 'My heart is troubled within me!' (vs 8). God is in pain. His heart is in pain. He is in pain because of us!

The Perplexity of God

Our second discovery concerns the perplexity of God. Again, as God ponders the fate of the antediluvians in their headlong pursuit of evil, we read, 'God regretted he had made mankind' (Gen 6:5). Lest we trivialise this statement unduly, consider this: A good God had created a perfect world which then openly rejects his governance. I think that we find here a statement of divine perplexity.

We also encounter this divine perplexity in the Song of the Vineyard, Isa 5:1-7. As God reflects on the unbending rebellion of Israel, he is driven to ask, 'What more could have been done for my vineyard than I have done for it?' I invite you to feel the perplexity of God in the classic courtroom drama of Mic 6. In utter desperation, the Lord asks his people, 'What have I done to you? How have I burdened you?'

Here in Hosea, God again agonises over the maddening conduct of Israel. Hear the exasperation of God: 'When Israel was a child I loved him . . . I taught Israel to walk . . . I healed them . . . I led them with cords of kindness . . . I lifted the yoke from their neck and bent down to feed them. But the more I called to Israel, the further they went from me . . . My people are determined to turn from me!' (vss 1-7).

God muses, 'Israel, how can I give you up? How can I let you go?' (vs 8). Promises galore! Threats of judgements abound! Yet God's people seemed intent on being contrary. No wonder even the Lord is perplexed!

The Purpose of God

Our third discovery pertains to the purpose of God. Despite the pain and perplexity, God's purpose remains singular and steadfast. 'I cannot give you up!' (vss 8-9), he says. A century later, God repeats his intention in Jer 29:11-12. 'I know the plans I have for you; plans to give you hope and a future.' God had promised Israel that they would be his treasured possession (Exod 19:5-6). The promise was repeated to the Church (1 Pet 2:9-10). God would not abandon his purpose.

Here's the clincher: 'God is not willing that anyone should die, but for all to come to repentance' (2 Pet 3:9). He would endure pain, he would camouflage his perplexity, in order that he may accomplish his purpose. God's intention is always salvific!

The Passion of God

Our fourth discovery concerns the passion of God. Behind the veil of divine purpose lies the heart of a God driven by passion for his creation and for his people. This is the God who proclaimed on Mount Sinai: 'The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, full of compassion . . .!' (Exod 34:6-7) This is the God who said to Israel, 'I did not choose you because of your numbers or greatness . . . but because I love you.' (Deut 7:7-9) Here in Hosea, this God assures Israel: 'All my compassion is aroused' (vs 8).

About this God it is written that he 'loves the world so much that he gave his only Son . . .' (John 3:16). And, due solely to this divine act of giving, we discover that there is nothing in the entire universe that can 'separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord!' (Rom 8:38-39).

Such passion compels God to co-exist with a disobedient race. Such passion enables him to attempt saving a world full of ingrates. Such passion leads him to offer his very life for a people filled with unmitigated hatred for him. God's heart beats with a deep passion for you and me!

In the words of a song by Eddie Cahill and Babbie Mason:

God is too wise to be mistaken;
God is too good to be unkind;
So when you don't understand,
And you don't know his plan,
When you can't trace his hand,
Trust his heart!

God's heart feels great pain because of us. God's heart is sometimes perplexed by our conduct. God's heart is driven by a singleness of purpose for our salvation. God's heart is filled with an undying passion for our well-being. Trust his heart. Feel its steady pulse. Sense its constant rhythm. God's heart beats for you and me. Trust his heart!

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The Whiting Method

The Whiting method bases a sermon on the discovery made through word study. Every biblical passage contains words with greater weight in terms of significance and meaning. When a sermon text has been selected, we need to discover the most important word(s) in the passage. After this is done, we then study that word and its use in that passage and elsewhere in the Bible. Next, we compare these passages and draw the common elements together. Last, we construct the main idea to be preached which arises from this study. The Whiting Method (for a full discussion of the method see House & Garland, 2007, pp. 45-73) may be represented in the following Figure.

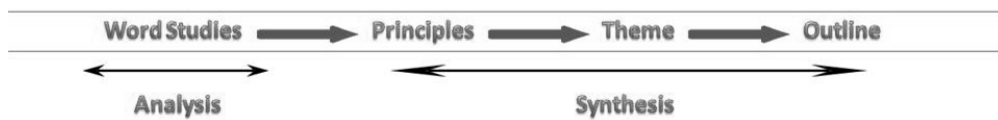


Figure 3

To return to Ps 23, one of the principal words in the psalm is 'shepherd'. So important is this word to the psalm that Ps 23 has often been called the 'Shepherd Psalm'. The word 'shepherd' appears in other important passages like Ezek 34 and John 10. When these passages are compared, certain commonalities are discovered and these ideas then provide a foundation for building a sermon. Therefore, a breakdown like that below becomes possible.

- Word: 'shepherd'
- Uses: Ps 23; Eze 34; John 10; etc
- Common meanings: God is a shepherd and he is a good shepherd – shepherd provides, protects, and guides his sheep – God's servants are shepherds
- Main Idea: God is our shepherd

Whiting Method Sermon Sample

Sermon Title: Yahweh, our Shepherd

Sermon Text: Psalm 23:1-6

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Yahweh, our Shepherd

One of the most evocative terms in the Bible is the word 'shepherd'. The presence of this word in Ps 23 has led believers throughout the ages to consider this as one of the most touching psalms ever written. The psalm is brief, only six verses, but it has received a huge amount of homiletical attention. I still remember the number of sermons based on this psalm that I heard growing up. It is also one of the earliest Bible passages that I memorised. I know many church people who have also memorised this psalm.

Why has this psalm caught the imagination of the faithful so much? What does it really teach us? Arguably, the most important word in the psalm is the word 'shepherd'. The psalm opens with this line, 'The Lord is my shepherd'. From this simple assertion flow a number of promises that have proven the main diet of believers in every age, especially in difficult times.

In every country we see people who take care of domestic animals. Shepherds and their sheep; goatherds and their goats; cowboys and their cattle; camel drivers and their camels. Only one of these imageries is adopted as a major metaphor of God's relationship to his people in the Bible. But let's begin by coming to terms with what shepherds did in biblical times. Most shepherds had relatively small flocks. A hundred sheep would be considered a large number. Since the flock was generally small, it was possible for the shepherd to know every sheep and even to name each sheep. There was an intimate relationship between sheep and shepherd. The shepherd stayed with his sheep at all times. He led them to the most suitable pastureland. He made sure they had sufficient water to hydrate themselves. He led them to the safest places for their grazing. Most shepherds had a musical instrument like a flute to call their sheep and provide night-time lullaby. At night the shepherd kept his flock in a pen surrounded with a high wall and only a narrow gate for entrance. This was his way of protecting his sheep from predators. The shepherd slept at the gate so that any predator attempting to get to the sheep would have to literally go through the shepherd. The Greek word for 'shepherd' and 'shepherding' eventually became the English words 'pastor', 'pastoral' and 'pastorate'.

All these tasks of the shepherd are drawn into the psalm to describe what God does for his people. He feeds them. He provides water for their thirst. He leads them in the right paths. He even lets them lie down in quiet places. This is why the psalm asserts that with God as our shepherd, there is nothing that we will ever lack and that even when we walk through the darkest valleys of life, we do not have to be afraid.

The imagery of shepherd however is not limited to God alone. All those who are called to be his servants also become shepherds. This appellation was applied to kings, priests, and prophets in the Old Testament. Ezek 34 describes the anger of God towards the leaders of Judah because they proved to be untrue shepherds. They cared more about their personal gains than the needs of the people. God utters some frightening warnings about the fate of these false shepherds.

In John 10, Jesus warns his disciples about false or hired shepherds. He tells them that such shepherds do not care about the sheep and will run at the first sign of danger. He also warns about wolves who will come disguised as sheep to ravage the flock. By contrast, he then paints himself as the Good Shepherd who knows every sheep by name, provides for their every need, and even lays down his life for his sheep. Jesus must have had Ps 23 at the back of his mind. The Yahweh who is depicted as the shepherd in the psalm is Jesus, the Good Shepherd of John 10.

It is God who provides for his people. It is God who protects his people. It is God who promises them an eternal, peace-filled future. His presence in the lives of the believers allows them to confront the challenges of life, even the scary ones, with strength and dignity. It is his presence that gives them courage in the face of danger, tragedy, and persecution. Such was the conviction of the thousands who were martyred for their faith in the early centuries of the Church's life. Such is the strength that still sustains God's people today.

God is our shepherd. Jesus is the Good Shepherd. He will not fail; he will not falter; he is an ever-present help. Because of Jesus we can utter the closing assurance of Ps 23 with confidence. 'I will dwell in the house of the Lord for as long as I live.' May this be your prayer and mine.

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The real genius of expository sermons is their adaptability. The absence of any specified structure to follow means that the preacher can exercise his or her creativity to outline the sermon. As illustrated above, the outline could follow the basic structure of the text itself; it could follow a deductive or inductive pattern; it even lends itself to biographical, descriptive, and narrative forms. Further, this type of sermon can utilise a hybrid format where more than one of the previously discussed styles are combined to form the sermon. Whatever the chosen outline, the crucial thing to keep in mind is that expository sermons are an attempt by the preacher to uncover the text/passage in as complete a manner as he or she can. When all is said and done, the sermon outline is less important than the exegesis that underpins the sermon. Expository sermons work only when the preacher has studied the text thoroughly.

Integrating Thoughts

Recently I invited some friends over for dinner and decided to make it a 'noodle' dinner. Every dish was based on some noodle form. There was Chinese noodle, Italian pastas, Burmese noodles, and so on. However, a meal made up entirely of noodles would not be very nutritious as the main nutrient would be carbohydrate. With this in mind I integrated every dish with something else. One noodle dish had lots of vegetable in it. Another had protein in it, while another had a variety of ingredients. A good meal integrates all the necessary food groups. The next sermonic model is an integrative model that blends together different components.

Kenton Anderson (2003, pp. 109-129 contains a complete discussion of the integrative model) proposes a sermonic style that he terms 'integrative preaching'. This sermonic style is extremely effective but also somewhat difficult to master. I have attempted to simplify the suggestions of Anderson in this section. In integrative preaching, the sermon is viewed as comprising four quadrants in a circle. The two principal axes in the circle represent different things. The horizontal axis ranges from text to contemporary situation. In the figure below (adapted from Anderson), this is represented by 'Text' and 'Today'. These are the two parts of the horizontal axis. The vertical axis accounts for 'Head' and 'Heart'. Integrative sermon takes care of the text and its contemporary relevance in the horizontal axis and cognitive and affective learning in the vertical axis. Furthermore, the horizontal axis represents authority, while the vertical axis represents apprehension (our reticence in dealing with the text). The authority of the sermon comes from the word of God in as much as it relates to our contemporary setting. At the same time, we all approach the text with a degree of apprehension because we sense that God's word has authority over our lives and yet there may be areas of our lives that we are unprepared to be governed by the text. Therefore, we may struggle with the text and its message.

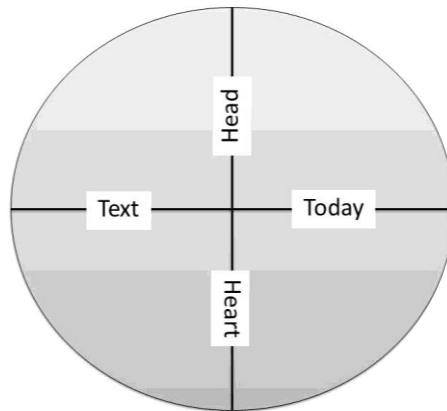


Figure 3: The Axes of Integrative Sermon

Anderson also suggests that the sermon proceeds from the bottom left quadrant in a clockwise manner and terminates in the bottom right quadrant. According to this method, each quadrant is best comprehended by asking a specific question (see figure below). In the first quadrant (bottom left), the question to ask is, 'What is the story?' This is the quadrant dealing with discovery of the text. Here we uncover the data that is embedded in the story or song or letter.

In the second quadrant (top left), we ask the question, 'What's the point?' This is the didactic quadrant in the method. At this stage, the preacher seeks to enlighten his audience with the theology and teaching of the passage. This is where we draw the lessons and inform our listeners with the word of God in its entirety, in so far as it concerns that particular passage.

Next we move to the third quadrant (top right). This is the difficult segment of the sermon. This is where we confront the challenges of the text. This is where we ask questions to highlight our

discomfort with the text. The principal question in this quadrant is, 'What is the problem?' The Bible is the living, active word of God. It also contains instructions that conflict with contemporary lifestyle or mindset. God's word challenges our learning and compliance. Some people give the appearance that they obey everything God's word tells them. The reality is that most of us find that hard to do. When we confront some biblical truth which discomforts us, the tendency is to explain it away or simply ignore it. Selective use of Scripture is a common practice among people of faith. This is not intentional behaviour but almost a natural reflex in dealing with demanding material. Every sermon text presents such challenges to the audience and a perceptive preacher has to take this into account when he or she preaches. The most demanding part about this quadrant is learning how to formulate the right question so that the sermon is not fragmented into smaller sermons.

The final segment (bottom right) offers relief from the tension created by quadrant three. It provides resolutions to the discomfort we may encounter with the text. In this manner, quadrant four teaches us the gospel, the good news uncovered in the text. Every word of God should bring good news to its listener. The Bible is not a textbook on science or philosophy or religion. It is the good news of a God intensely interested in his people and how he seeks to connect with them in every circumstance.

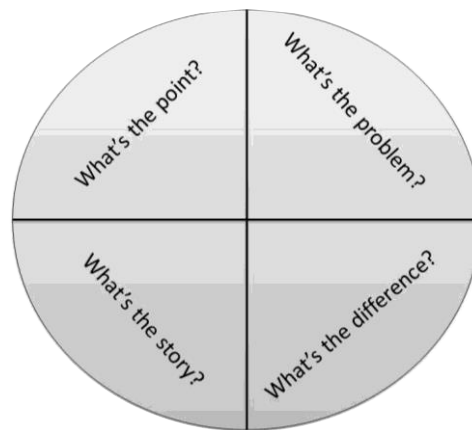


Figure 4: Integrative Sermon Questions

The following samples may help illustrate how an integrative sermon works.

Integrative Sermon Sample 1

Sermon Title: The Enemy Quotient

Sermon Text: 1 Samuel 24

What's the story?

- We all have enemies
- David had enemies

What's the point?

- Vs 6 no retaliation
- Vss 9-11 verbal self-defence
- Vss 12-15 invoking God's arbitration

What's the problem?

- We want to retaliate
- If opportunity presents itself, why shouldn't we get even?

What's the difference?

- Enemies will remain
- We have a great protector
- We can have peace – John 16:33

Integrative Sermon Sample 2

Sermon Title: A Time of Reckoning

Sermon Text: Isaiah 6

What's the Story? (quadrant 1)

- My story – 1996 events
- Isaiah's story – events in 740 BCE – events leading to his call

What's the Point? (quadrant 2)

- Time of reckoning is an unforgettable moment – vs 1-4
- Time of reckoning is a time of astonishing transformation – vs 5-7
- Time of reckoning is a time of commissioning – vs 8-13

What's the Problem? (quadrant 3)

- Why couple pain with the call?
- Why insist on mission?

What's the Difference? (quadrant 4)

- Your unforgettable moment can become someone else's encounter with God
- Your transformation can change others
- Your commission can inspire others
- Your time of reckoning can lead others to their reckoning!

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A Time of Reckoning

In March 1996, my friend and colleague and I took about a hundred students for a Bible camp to Tioman island off the east coast of the Malaysian peninsula. At dinner on the first evening at the camp, we discovered that my colleague had not returned to camp. A few of us went out to the beach and found his towel and slippers on the beach but no sign of him. We inquired of the student who had been with him earlier that afternoon and learnt that he had gone swimming to a nearby islet. He was an excellent swimmer but never returned to camp. Our frantic search throughout that night did not yield any sign of his whereabouts. His body was eventually recovered in the sea about four days later. The grief in the camp was palpable. Some of the female students became hysterical. I felt the loss of my friend very keenly but had to remain calm as I was the only faculty member left behind. However, this tragedy became a time of reckoning for six young people who gave their lives to Jesus that night and were baptised in the Tioman sea.

Isaiah was at the temple in Jerusalem. The great king Uzziah had just died (vs 1). During his reign, the kingdom of Judah had reached its political, territorial, and economic zenith. A great era had come to a close. Fifty two years of prosperity were up for grabs and Isaiah felt this uncomfortable transition more than most. Rabbinic sources claim that Uzziah and Isaiah's father were cousins. This loss was more than a political one to the prophet. The future of Judah was certainly at stake. At this particular junction in time, Isaiah received his call from God. In his own

words, 'In the year that king Uzziah died, I saw the lord.' This event precipitated a massive reckoning for Isaiah whose results would be a ministry of nearly 60 years.

Isaiah's story tells us that the time of reckoning is an unforgettable moment in time (vss 1-4). How could anyone possibly forget an encounter with God? Think back on other encounters like this one. Moses at the burning bush; the shepherds on a Bethlehem hill side; John on Patmos; and a host of other stories. If this happened to you and me, could we ever forget it? I still recall with clarity the events on Tioman island. How much more an encounter with the Lord!

The time of reckoning is also a time of astonishing transformation. Things were never the same for me after 1996. The event on that little island affected me spiritually and professionally. Isaiah also experienced an amazing transformation that day. His initial reaction to the encounter was a deep sense of unworthiness peppered with the idea that God's presence meant the end of life itself. 'I am lost!' cried out Isaiah. But he was not. God reached out to him, touched him, and cleansed him (vss 5-7). Isaiah was radically changed that day.

The time of reckoning is also a time of commissioning. After Tioman island, I returned to Singapore (where I was working) with more duties to bear. My friend's job became mine; and I already had my own. His classes became mine. His family became part of my responsibility. His students became my students. His burdens became my burdens. Likewise, Isaiah knew that once we have met God, once we have come to know the truth, we are responsible for it (vss 8-13). God's questions were swift and succinct. 'Whom shall I send? Who will go for us?' Isaiah knew that there was only one possible outcome to all this. So he responded, 'Here I am send me.' That day, Isaiah received his prophetic commission and a message for his people. His life was never the same. Again, according to rabbinic tradition, Isaiah would finally die a horrible death, sawn in half by the wicked king Manasseh. His ministry would bring him into confrontation with godless kings. He also met and ministered to God-fearing kings. This is what a time of reckoning does.

Looking at both stories, mine and Isaiah's, I am compelled to ponder two questions. These are not easy questions and I have struggled with them from time to time. One question is, why couple pain with the call? As I review the many call stories in the Bible, I am struck by one fact: in almost every instance, God's call was accompanied by pain. This was true of Isaiah, Jeremiah, David, and even Paul. God's chosen servants had to face hostile audiences, vindictive rulers, rebellious crowds, and a great deal of rejection. Jesus himself was not exempted from these things. It seems to me that whenever God calls someone, there will be pain. Is this a natural consequence of the call or designed by God?

Another uncomfortable question for me is this. Why insist on mission? Why can we not encounter God without the resulting commission? In every recorded instance of divine-human encounter in the Bible, the person is given a job to do. In fact, so prevalent is this concept, it appears as though God never shows himself to someone unless it was for the purpose of mission. This was true at the burning bush. It was true on Mt Sinai. It was true in the Abraham narratives. It was true on the road to Damascus. It was true for Isaiah at the temple.

I have pondered many times these questions and the implications of this encounter with God. At times it seems simpler if there is no such encounter. Yet, such events are inescapable. The questions they engender are never easy to answer. The answers are never forthcoming. However, I now believe that call, pain, and mission co-exist for a purpose. Our unforgettable moments can become someone else's encounter with God. Isaiah's temple experience led to the production of a book that has influenced God's people for millennia and continues to do so. The transformation we experience at such moments can change others. Isaiah became instrumental in ensuring that the light of God was never extinguished in Israel. Our commission can inspire others. The century in which Isaiah lived, the 8th cent BC, also has the most number of prophets at a particular period of biblical history. Finally, our time of reckoning can lead others to their reckoning. On Tioman island, several young people gave their lives to God.

A young man in that camp loved my friend very deeply and everything within him turned against God for taking his beloved teacher away. He also projected his anger at me and felt I had no

right to take his teacher's place. He vented his thought openly and suggested that I was not worthy to fill my friend's shoes. At the same time he had noticed the effort and calmness with which I handled the whole episode. Later he became aware that the other teacher and I were the closest of friends and realised that my personal loss outstripped his. In a letter, he not only expressed regret for saying some unkind words to me, but expressed his appreciation for what the whole episode taught him. Today this young man is a faithful servant in God's Church.

If God calls you, be assured that there will be challenges alongside the call. Also, be equally assured that God will stand beside you to strengthen you. He did it for Isaiah. He did it for me. He will do the same for you.

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Wrapping Things Up

In the last few years, I have become more and more interested in cuisine or gourmet vegetarian cooking. Because of this, my time in the kitchen has gradually increased. I am also learning some crucial lessons about cooking. I always wondered what differentiated cuisine cooking from the ordinary, day-to-day cooking that is the substance of most household kitchens. I have come to the conclusion that the two types of cooking differ primarily in the presentation.

In the normal style of cooking, most cooks adopt a very functional approach. This type of cooking is done for the sake of the meal. We need to eat and so we cook. It does not really matter what the food looks like or what it really smells like so long as it is palatable and fills our stomachs.

In cuisine cooking, appearance is as important as palatability. In other words, presentation is everything. Cuisine food is cuisine because it excites more of the senses. It has to smell good. It has to look good. It has to taste good. On the one hand, cuisine food looks and smells so good that you want immediately to dig in and consume the food. On the other hand, because it looks and smells so good, you feel disinclined to touch the food. You almost just want to look at it or photograph it or leave it undisturbed. Furthermore, cuisine food leaves you breathless with questions. You want to know as much as you can about the food. Perhaps you say things like, 'See, how beautiful it looks!' Or, 'My, doesn't this smell heavenly?' Cuisine food touches us deeply and some may begin to wish that they could 'cook like that.'

Gourmet preaching is like cuisine cooking. A preacher takes ordinary ingredients and blends them into masterpieces that leave the congregation breathless with anticipation. Our members listen to such sermons and desire for more. They hear such preaching and they are inspired. They encounter such presentations and are driven to return to the Bible to discover why their own ability with the word is so common. Gourmet preaching excites the mind, the heart, and the senses of the congregation.

As argued earlier in this book, the basic content of Christian preaching is determined by the Bible. Preachers do not create truth as they go along. God has revealed his mind and heart through the revelation embedded in the Scripture. However, preachers can take this essential content and, like a gourmet chef, blend and present the truth in a variety of ways so as to inculcate interest, learning, and inspiration. Every sermon should be a gourmet dish of spiritual food. The presentation counts far more than the credit given to it.

It is my firm conviction that every pulpit should be a gourmet pulpit. Our congregations come to church to be fed and it is our duty to provide them with a weekly feast. Not to do so is a failure to perform our homiletical duty. Nevertheless, to be able to do this requires effort and practice. A cook does not become a gourmet chef overnight. Similarly, preachers do not become master preachers without practice.

It is incumbent upon all preachers, as voices of God, to become the very best they can become in this most important task of growing the kingdom. We owe it to ourselves to convert our pulpits into gourmet pulpits and to become gourmet preachers. This is both my plea and my dream.

Appendix I

Sermon Analysis and Evaluation

Analyst: _____

Speaker: _____

Date: _____

Sermon Type: _____

Length: _____

	5	4	3	2	1
DELIVERY					
Use of Voice: Volume (loud, soft, weak)					
Inflection (monotone, preacher tone)					
Body Language: Eye Contact (looks at audience, looks elsewhere)					
Gestures (helpful, distracting)					
Posture					
Movement (static, too much, not enough)					
Language: Articulation (open mouth, stress vowels)					
Choice of words (appropriate, academic, colloquialism)					
Spirit (Pathos): Dynamic					
Persuasive					
Sincere					
Use of Presentations: Font size (too large, too small)					
Readability					
Clutter effect					
Impact factor					
CONTENT					
Introduction: Creates good will					
Catches attention					
Gives direction to sermon					
Structure: True to type					
User friendly					
Coherent					
Progress					
Illustrations: Vividness					
Appropriateness to sermon					
Accuracy of facts					
Conclusion: Summary					
Appeal for decision					
Length					
THEOLOGY					
Accurate (primary meaning of text preserved)					
Application to human need					
MESSAGE					
Relevant					

Informative					
Inspirational					

Grading Scale:

5=Superior; 4=Very Good; 3=Average; 2=Poor; 1=Unacceptable for Public Use

Appendix II

Additional Sermon

A Pilgrim's Memoirs (Hebrews 11:8-19)

For the last 25 years, my family and I have wandered from country to country. As perpetual wanderers, we have often searched for a home church in each country we have sojourned. Yet each time we knew that we would wander again. In a sense we are living testimony to a simple biblical truth: that we are all pilgrims!

A Pilgrim's Observation

As a pilgrim, I get to see many diverse things; some good and some not as good. Most importantly, I get to see the state of God's Church, a mixed review at best. I notice a sense of fragmentation tugging at the coattails of the Church's existence. This is brought about by two forces vying for control of the hearts and minds of God's people.

On one end of the spectrum is the renaissance of legalism – the rigid, uncompromising legalism of bygone days – the legalistic approach to salvation that gave children nightmares and caused them endless anxiety about judgement. Today, this legalism is marked by the presence of fringe groups with a penchant for extremism. These groups travel the world trumpeting a harsh gospel, causing havoc and divisions in the churches, and undermining the duly elected leadership of the Church.

On the other end of the spectrum is the rampant secularism that pervades certain segments of the Church. There is an intense desire among so many Christians to be and live like the world. This can be observed at both the personal and institutional levels of the Church. At the personal level, God's people seem more intent on securing their future here on earth, as though we already are in some sort of earthly paradise. At the institutional level, Christian schools are obsessed with accreditations; hospitals are enamoured with community wages; and publishing houses are intent with making money.

These fragmenting forces, whether pulling right or left, have the same ultimate consequence: they both turn the Church inward. The Church becomes self-absorbed and, in the process, loses its sense of mission.

However, I also observe another force at work among God's people. I notice a sense of *esprit de corps* in God's Church that is unmatched in this planet. This camaraderie, this oneness, this sense of *esprit de corps* creates a world body that is bound in faith and in the Spirit. Regardless of where I am, I always know when I am among God's people. This truly is the mystery and thrill of being a pilgrim. There is something amazingly enthralling and captivating about this sense of *esprit de corps*. Such a sense of belongingness is difficult to match this side of heaven.

Nevertheless, I cannot deny the evident fragmentation of the Church. I cannot help but ask: How can a Church driven by such a magnificent sense of *esprit de corps* also exhibit such fragmenting tendencies? I think that pilgrimage requires a stable anchor, something to hold a pilgrim's faith steady amidst the violent waves that seek to capsize faith's vessel.

A Pilgrim's Anchor

I would like to suggest that the only anchor that will hold a pilgrim firmly in place is an Abraham-like faith. Such a faith has four principal components.

First, Hebrews 11:8 says, 'By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as an inheritance, obeyed and went.' The first component of an Abraham-like faith is an obedient response to a call. Each one of us is called by God for some purpose, for some mission, for some unique task. God's call is never vague; it comes with a great deal of clarity and it serves as the underlying conviction that we are servants of the Lord. The only real struggle pertains to our response. Abraham's response to his divine call was unconditional and unquestioning. A pilgrim's faith anchor must likewise be an unreserved, obedient response to God's call. As Isaiah the prophet states, we too should be prepared to say, 'Here I am, send me!' Unless our faith, individually or corporately, is mission driven, it will not stand the test that lies ahead of us.

Second, Hebrews 11:9-10 states, 'By faith Abraham made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents; for he was looking forward to the city with foundation, whose architect is God.' The second component of an Abraham-like faith is the ordering of life according to eternal priorities. Abraham recognised and accepted the transitory nature of his life – he lived in tents – he knew that he could never be more than a resident alien. Living in America alerted me to the fact that there are three types of people as far as the immigration authorities are concerned: citizens, resident aliens, and non-resident aliens. Like Abraham, all pilgrims must accept the fact that this world is not our home and we are simply passing through. We are at best resident aliens and at worst non-resident aliens. Consequently, Abraham trusted in a divinely inspired future; he looked for a city whose architect is God. Never mind the tents; never mind the alien status. He knew that a better world awaited him.

Third, Hebrews 11:11-12 reads: 'By faith Abraham, even though he was past age, was enabled to become a father . . . and so from this one man, and he as good as dead, came descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as countless as the sand on the seashore.' The third component of an Abraham-like faith is about living an empowered life. It is about transcending the impossible; it is about doing the impracticable; it is about going beyond the obvious. An empowered life creates life instead of death and success in place of failure. Abraham lived such an empowered life because he chose to meet every situation in his life at an altar. Genesis 12:7, 'The Lord appeared to Abraham . . . and Abraham built an altar to the Lord.' Genesis 12:8, 'From there Abraham went on towards the hills east of Bethel . . . there he built an altar to the Lord.' Genesis 13:18, 'So Abraham moved his tents and went to live near the great trees of Mamre . . . there he built an altar to the Lord.' Such was the pattern of Abraham's life and faith. His altars were his connection to his God and to the power of his God. Through this simple act of building an altar to the Lord, Abraham demonstrated that he lived his life entirely by the power of God. A pilgrim who would succeed in his/her journey must also recognise his/her need for building an altar to the Lord. Do we begin the day at the altar? When confronted with significant decisions, is our first instinct to take them to the altar? When faced with life-changing circumstances, is it our desire to take that to the altar? That's what altars are for – places that connect us to our God through which power flows!

Fourth, Hebrews 11:17 tells us that 'By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice.' The last component of an Abraham-like faith is absolute sacrifice. A pilgrim must live a life that holds unreserved love for God. As Jesus put in Luke 14:26-27, 'If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters, yes, even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. Anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.' Pilgrimage demands nothing less than our most cherished possessions, whatever they may be. The *Aqedah*, the binding of Isaac recorded in Genesis 22, teaches that Abraham had to be prepared to let go of the one thing that could compete with loyalty for God in order to be a pilgrim of faith. Nothing less than such absolute sacrifice will suffice.

An Abraham-like faith, a faith that will serve as the pilgrim's anchor, a faith that will sustain our heavenly journey is comprised of an obedient response to a call, an ordering of life according to eternal priorities, living an empowered life, and absolute sacrifice.

A Pilgrim's Commendation

Lest I appear one-sided, a pilgrim's life carries some very definite rewards. The most significant of such rewards comes in the form of the highest commendation heaven can bestow. Hebrews 11:13-16 states, 'All these pilgrims were still living by their faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised but only saw them from a distance. They admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth. They demonstrated that they were looking for a better country of their own. . . . They were looking for a better country – a heavenly one.' Notice the ultimate commendation such pilgrims receive: 'Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.'

The ultimate obsession of pilgrims is to find a country they can call home. Pilgrims are always homesick; homesick for a land they have never seen, a city they have never lived in, a country that is not their own. All pilgrims know that one day God will give them a new home, a new city, a new country.

Are you homesick for such a country or are you too comfortable in this one? Is your life absorbed by preparation for that country or with existing in this one? Are you driven by desire for heaven or simply by the treasures of this world? It is my prayer that every believer will learn the lesson of pilgrimage and develop an Abraham-like faith. Happy journey!

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