

LIBERTY BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

BECOMING THE MESSAGE: USING JEREMIAH TO DEVELOP THE PERSONAL
ASPECT OF EXPOSITORY PREACHING

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BY

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BECOMING THE MESSAGE:
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ABSTRACT

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Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary, 2011

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The Word of God was given to the world to move human beings to faith and obedience. It is the role of the expositor to release that Word with all of its potency by faithfully communicating every aspect of every passage. Each passage of Scripture has a personal aspect designed to radically change both the heart and life of the expositor so that he becomes the message to his hearers. Among the Old Testament prophets, Jeremiah particularly models and informs this personal aspect of Scripture. The purpose of this paper is to show that using Jeremiah to develop the personal aspect of expository preaching produces measurable movement in both the expositor and in his hearers. This will bring the expositor into deep, personal involvement with the message in order to unlock the life changing potency of the passage in every sermon.

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CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

Preaching attempts the near impossible: to change lives through speaking. In order to do this, preaching must be based upon Scripture and accompanied by divine power. It is the contention of this paper that such divine power is most likely to accompany the message that is preached according to all six expository aspects of a passage.¹ “The type of preaching that best carries the force of divine authority is expository preaching.”² Much progress has been made in the way of expository preaching in the historical, theological, homiletical, and literary aspects of a passage, but less has been written on the personal aspect. That every passage of Scripture has a personal aspect designed to penetrate and transform first the speaker and then his hearers is what this paper intends to explore. The Holy Spirit does not simply want to use the speaker as a conduit to channel his message. Rather, He first desires to work His life-changing power into the speaker who is His first target audience. Then, He desires to work that life-changing power into the hearers who are His second target audience. The LORD wants to “put us on display in Christ.”³ Robinson points out that “ultimately God

¹ See Appendix A for an overview of how to exegete the literary, historical, redemptive, theological, and homiletical aspects of a passage of Scripture. Appendix B contains an outline for exegeting the personal aspect of a text.

² Haddon Robinson, *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1980), 19.

³ 2 Cor 2:14. All Scripture quotations are taken from the *Holman Christian Standard Bible* (Holman Bible Publishers: Nashville, 2004).

is more interested in developing messengers than messages...”⁴ As observed in the prophet Jeremiah, the divine message becomes dramatically more powerful when it is personal which is why the faithful expositor must not be content with his preaching until the passage has become so personal to him that he has become the message.

It is the role of the expositor to release the Word of God with all of its potency by faithfully communicating every facet of every passage of Scripture. Since the personal aspect is one of those facets, the expositor has not fully released the Word of God until he has become the message for his hearers. Among the Old Testament prophets, Jeremiah particularly models and informs the personal aspect of Scripture. This paper will show that using Jeremiah to develop the personal aspect of expository preaching produces measurable movement in both the expositor and in his hearers. The goal is to bring the expositor into deep, personal involvement with the message in order to unlock the life changing potency of the passage in every sermon.

Topic Choice

The topic at hand was selected for reasons based in both personal experience and academic enquiry. In January 2008 this senior pastor put the final touches on a formal revitalization plan for Faith Baptist Church. The goal of the plan was to move the church from traditionally inward to boldly outward. The plan was conceived through months of prayer, meditation, research, and counsel. The months of implementation that followed brought great heights of Spiritual joy and excitement as well as deep valleys of heartbreak and disappointment. Joy and heartbreak were so close together that the church could only describe it as a kind of spiritual intensity. Members began to perceive that

⁴ Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 25.

God was moving through His leaders to position Faith Baptist to become a Great Commission body streamlined to radically church the ten thousand unchurched people of Stephens City, Virginia. Some of the existing church programs were eliminated, others transformed, and new programs were added. New bylaws were adopted. Faith Baptist changed its name to The Camp of Faith Church. A message of risk and boldness embodied in the phrase “dangerous faith” began to surface. Messages from passages like Hebrews 10, 13, Luke 14, and Luke 9 persuaded the congregation to embrace a discipleship of dangerous faith.

During this revitalization something was happening that was not planned. New programs were put in place and those programs were stronger and more helpful, but something more significant began to occur. As he preached messages of dangerous faith and pushed the congregation to become a church of dangerous faith, this preacher realized that he must model it all, that he must become this message himself in order to lead his people to it. As he struggled with becoming each and every bold passage, his sermons became more intensely personal. The congregation became very responsive to the messages and longed for the same dangerous faith themselves. Having had such an experience, the pastor desired to more deeply explore this personal dynamic of preaching on an academic level.

A Doctor of Ministry seminar on the Old Testament prophets revealed that the prophets were men who were no mere messengers; they were deeply and personally hurt or healed themselves by every message they preached with the intention of hurting or healing their hearers. Moses, Jonah, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Hosea, and others had at least two things in common: they were used by God to communicate His message forcefully to His

people and their message became entangled with their personal lives. There is an apparent aspect to preaching that is designed to be intentionally personal. However, this aspect has been little explored. Greidanus, Robinson, Vines, Chappell, Sunukjian and their company of homiletics have informed readers and students well concerning the many and various aspects of sermon preparation, but few have invested more than a chapter on this personal aspect of sermon preparation. This student concluded that an exploration into the personal aspect of communication based upon the prophetic model would benefit both his own work as an expositor as well as make a helpful contribution to the field of homiletics.

Counsel with a homiletics professor and then an Old Testament professor suggested that the work focus on one of the Old Testament prophets. After consideration, Jeremiah was selected because he reveals significant personal moments in his ministry as a messenger and because the breadth of material in Jeremiah is great. Therefore, personal experience led to academic enquiry that led to this project whose goal is the production of a sermon preparation plan for the personal aspect of exposition that will have measurable results.

What the Project Will Do

This project will (1) develop the idea of a personal aspect of expository preaching; (2) explore how Jeremiah personally “became the message” revealing the insights gained from the prophet concerning the personal aspect of the divine message; (3) use those insights to develop a preaching plan that is personal; and (4) evaluate the resulting movement of such preaching using a variety of new measures. These four chapters represent the major components of this project. The goal is a deeper

appreciation for and practical use of the personal aspect of sermon preparation and preaching that ultimately leads to greater movement on the part of both the expositor and his hearers.

Expository preaching seeks to build sermons that expose and are in harmony with the literary, historical, redemptive, theological, homiletical, and personal aspects of a passage.⁵ Every passage of Scripture has a literary aspect communicating its message beautifully through genre, inclusio, catchwords, structure, grammar, context, and figurative speech. Each pericope has a historical aspect where the content of the message is being transmitted through a particular cultural frame of reference. There is a redemptive quality to each unit of biblical text which seeks to reveal the effort of God to redeem sinful men. All passages have a theological facet wherein lies authorial intent, canonical context, and transferal of relevance. Each pericope possesses a preaching or homiletical quality designed to persuade the hearer-reader to do something. Finally, every passage of Scripture has a personal quality which is meant to be embodied by the speaker and transmitted to the hearers. Expository preaching seeks to stay faithfully close to the text of Scripture by constructing sermons that are bound by the parameters of these six facets. The following pages will further define and expand on the personal aspect of a passage.

The first part of the project will show the contributions that Jeremiah makes to understanding the personal aspect of the divine message. There are many examples in both the Old and New Testaments of preachers who embodied the pathos of their messages, but perhaps none so much as the prophet Jeremiah. Therefore, in this paper

⁵ A passage is a unit of biblical text also known as a pericope.

Jeremiah will serve as an example of one for whom the message became so personal that he “became the message” personifying it in his very life. This paper will penetrate several examples of such personification in the personal calling, suffering, emotions, and life message of Jeremiah. It will be shown that the message is accompanied by special divine power when it materializes in the flesh of the herald such as it did in the weeping prophet of Anathoth.

The second part of the project will synthesize those contributions into a sermon preparation plan for the personal aspect of expository preaching. The pastor who desires to preach the Word of God faithfully and powerfully will build into his sermon preparation a plan to become personally involved with his passage. This project will develop a practical preaching plan which helps to employ the personal aspect of the text into the life of the preacher from his understanding of his calling to his weekly sermon preparation and from his daily lifestyle to his Sunday delivery. This paper will provide a plan to help the expositor bring his text for this Sunday into his lifestyle in such a way that he will live and embody it both during the week and on the weekend before his hearers.

Finally, it is important to evaluate this method of personalized preaching in order to appraise its ministry value for the preacher himself as well as for the congregation. The third part of the project will show how the use of the above plan produces measurable movement in both the expositor and in his hearers. This paper will offer methods that can be used to measure the effectiveness of personalized preaching. In the process of this assessment a variety of measures will be used including challenge cards, assigned activities, and invitation stations to indicate different types of responses. These

measures will reveal to the expositor the level of effectiveness brought by the incorporation of the personal aspect in his preaching.

Statement of Limitations

As important as they are, this paper will not deal with the other five aspects of expository preaching. Much work has already been done on the literary, historical, theological, and homiletical aspects of a text and will not be repeated or expanded upon here. This paper will only enlarge the discussion concerning the personal facet of Scripture.

There are so many helpful examples of servants in the Bible who have embodied their message in both joyful and painful ways that it is difficult to narrow them down to one, but this paper will only deal with the prophet Jeremiah. Moses fleshed out his message as did Nehemiah. Ezekiel was intimately involved with his visions and so much so that some scholars even today wrongfully diagnose him as psychotic. Even Jonah embodied the message of mercy as a negative example throwing the mercy of God into even sharper relief. In the Gospels, Jesus *is* the message of the Gospel and He wept over the ones to whom He preached. Paul declared, “to live is Christ”,⁶ and “For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from the Messiah for the benefit of my brothers, my countrymen by physical descent”.⁷ “Those are not the words of cool logic. They are the words from the furnace of the soul.”⁸ There are many examples of preachers who have

⁶ Phil 1:21

⁷ Rom 9:3

⁸ Jerry Vines and Jim Shaddix, *Power in the Pulpit: How to Prepare and Deliver Expository Sermons* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1999), 349.

embodied the message of God; nevertheless, this work will only draw on the contributions rendered by the example of Jeremiah.

Every passage of Scripture should be examined and delivered first for its literary beauty, second for its historical value, third for its redemptive passion, fourth for its theological quality, fifth for its homiletical power, and sixth for its personal penetration. However, only the personal part of the preaching plan will be built here. “The exegetical, theological, and homiletical work are mainly the preparation of the message. But preparing the physical, emotional, and volitional elements of the messenger are required as well before the sermon is truly ready.”⁹

Theoretical Basis

The theoretical basis of this paper will center largely in the field of homiletics. The relationship between inspiration and exposition as well as between inspiration and personalization will serve as the philosophical and theological framework behind much of the development of the thesis. The following paragraphs will argue that one’s view of inspiration implies both his preaching type (exposition) and his level of interaction with the text (personalization).

Inspiration and Exposition

Inspiration and exposition require the development of the personal aspect of Scripture. This paper holds out expository preaching as defined above as the best means for the most accurate and faithful communication of Scripture for the simple reason that it is a homiletical method determined by a high view of Scripture. The view one has of

⁹ Haddon Robinson and Craig Brian Larson, *The Art and Craft of Biblical Preaching: A Comprehensive Resource for Today's Communicators* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 551.

revelation determines one's homiletical method. A low view of Scripture reads the Bible as if it were a collection of good stories, helpful advice for living but fraught with cultural, theological, and historical difficulties. In this view, the Bible must be helped along in the pulpit by the aid of psychological, sociological, and scientific texts and current trends in spirituality. For this reason, one would not expect to find Scripture at the center of the preaching event for one with a low view of Scripture. The Word of God might be read, referenced, and even explained, but the most important points of the sermon including the topic of the sermon itself will be selected by the preacher. Such sermons are preacher-driven and preacher-determined because of a low view of the Bible. "The failure to preach expositionally and doctrinally is inexcusable. It can only be attributed to ignorance of, or indifference to, the implications of an inerrant, God-breathed Scripture."¹⁰

A high view of Scripture reads the Book as if it were the only source for "the words of eternal life".¹¹ A person who holds a high view of Scripture begins and continues in his preaching with the Word of God because it is the only objective source of revelation concerning the personal things of God and it is the beginning of life with the LORD. For men to know the personal things of God, they must be revealed to him. A philosopher might look out his window and reason that there must be a god and that such a god must be infinite, creative, and omnipotent, but he will never look out his window and reason that the Creator desires to have a love relationship with humans and has sent His own Son Jesus to make such a relationship possible. These are personal truths about

¹⁰ MacArthur, *Rediscovering Pastoral Ministry* (Dallas: Word Pub, 1995), 261.

¹¹ John 6:68

God that can only be known through clear and specific revelation. “The Bible is the source for contemporary preaching because it alone provides the normative proclamation of God’s acts of redemption and the response He requires.”¹² Those with a high view of the Bible recognize that it is the only source.

The person who holds a high view of Scripture begins with the Word because it is the beginning of his life with God. Those who repent, trust in Christ for their salvation, and embrace the Gospel for themselves do so by responding to the message of God. “But how can they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how can they believe without hearing about Him? And how can they hear without a preacher?”¹³ Scripture coming through the mouth of a preacher is how the salvation experience begins. Those who hold a high view of Scripture fully realize that their new life began with the message of the Bible, that everything personal that they know about God comes from the Bible, and that because of that they cannot pick and chose those things that they believe and those things that they doubt. They realize that they simply must believe it in its entirety because all of the most important things in their lives depend in some way upon Scripture.

Inspiration determines exposition. If the Bible is truly the Word of God, fully accurate, reliable, authoritative, and true, then the expositor must treat it as such and preach it in a way that stays as close as possible to the intention of the Spirit who inspired it. In the expository method “...preachers tie themselves to the Scriptures and, as heralds

¹² Sidney Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text: Interpreting and Preaching Biblical Literature* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 13.

¹³ Rom 10:14

of Christ, seek to proclaim only that which the Scriptures proclaim.”¹⁴ In 2 Timothy 3:16-4:2 the Apostle Paul makes a strong case that one’s view of inspiration determines his exposition. Paul argues that “all Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for teaching, for rebuking, for correcting, for training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.”¹⁵ Since this is the case, he continues, “I solemnly charge you: proclaim the message; persist in it whether convenient or not; rebuke, correct, and encourage with great patience and teaching.”¹⁶ “The only logical response to inerrant Scripture, then, is to preach it expositively.”¹⁷ Inspiration implies exposition so that a low view of inspiration will result in a low view of exposition while a high view of inspiration will result in a high view of exposition. “Stated simply, inerrancy demands exposition as the only method of preaching that preserves the purity of Scripture and accomplishes the purpose for which God gave us His Word.”¹⁸ If one views inspiration as the act of God to communicate to men His message in a way that is both inerrant and powerful, then the preacher must search to discover the message of that inerrant passage and preach it with power by conveying it in a way that honors the original divine intent. In order to honor the original divine intent, the homiletical plan must include the personal aspect.

¹⁴ Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher*, 13.

¹⁵ 2 Tim 3:16-17

¹⁶ 2 Tim 4:1b-2

¹⁷ John MacArthur, *Rediscovering Expository Preaching* (Dallas: Word Pub, 1992), 23.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 24.

Inspiration and Personalization

A homiletical view which values the deep way that the LORD intends to impact the preacher with His Word is crucial to the purpose of this paper. God desires a real interaction on the part of His messengers. Vines explains it this way, “though the preacher gets his sermon from the Bible, he must bring it to life in his heart.”¹⁹ In the Bible the LORD does not use preachers merely as non-participatory conduits to channel His message to men. His speakers are very intimately involved in the message because the LORD wants to bring His message to life inside the lives of the speakers as much as in their hearers. “Effective heralds demonstrate that the truth has gripped them and that it should grip the listeners. Effective heralds embody the text.”²⁰ There are multiple examples of this in Scripture including Jeremiah who will be discussed at length in the following chapters, but at this point these four will suffice to introduce the concept of the importance of the speaker in the divine communication process: 2 Corinthians 12:7-10, 1 Timothy 4:15-16, Jonah, and Hosea.

The divine emphasis upon the preacher is seen in 2 Corinthians 12:7-10 where the Apostle Paul is involved with the divine message in a way that is much more personal and painful than the experience of his hearers. Paul testifies that he was personally given some terrific revelations that had the potential of making him very proud. For this reason, he says that “a thorn in the flesh was given to me...so I would not exalt myself.”²¹ Pride would have ruined his ministry. He needed humility to continue his

¹⁹ Vines and Shaddix, *Power*, 347.

²⁰ Robinson and Larson, *Art & Craft*, 593.

²¹ 2 Cor 12:7

mission. Nevertheless, Paul's "thorn" was so distracting or painful that he "pleaded with the Lord three times to take it away."²² The only answer he received was "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness."²³ God wanted Paul to be weak in the flesh so that he could become powerful in the Spirit. Paul quickly realized "when I am weak, then I am strong."²⁴ The Lord personalized His inspired message for the Apostle Paul when He reduced Paul's flesh to make the potency of his mission and message much more powerful. In this way, the message of divine grace and power personally invaded the life of the speaker in a way that was likely both uncomfortable and painful. God placed a great emphasis upon His messenger.

The divine concern for the speaker is also seen in 1 Timothy 4:15-16 where Paul instructs Timothy to "practice these things; be committed to them, so that your progress may be evident to all. Be conscientious about yourself and your teaching; persevere in these things, for by doing this you will save both yourself and your hearers."²⁵ First, it is clear from this passage that the spirituality of the speaker has an effect upon his hearers. Timothy is urged to effectual ministry by the gravity of knowing that what he practices will "save both yourself and your hearers."²⁶ Second, it is clear from this passage that the speaker is crucial to the sanctifying work of the preached message. That Paul exhorts

²² 2 Cor 12:8

²³ 2 Cor 12:9

²⁴ 2 Cor 12:10

²⁵ 1 Tim 4:15-16

²⁶ 1 Tim 4:16

him to practice, be committed, be conscientious, and persevere, reveals that Timothy has a very active role in the message that he is delivering. The messengers of God are very active, not passive, in the communication and service of the inspired text.

Next, in the eighth century B.C. the LORD was more interested in reaching Jonah than in reaching Nineveh. It is clear that He was more interested in reaching Jonah because Jonah is the recipient of divine intervention and attention and because the prayers of Jonah occupy a dramatic place in the book. First, God shows His interest in Jonah as He intervenes in dramatic ways in the life of the prophet through various *appointments*.²⁷ God gave a shocking call to Jonah that he must go to Nineveh.²⁸ When Jonah ran away and was tossed into the sea, he was not drown, instead “the LORD *appointed* a great fish to swallow Jonah.”²⁹ The prophet did not die there. After three days and three nights inside that fish, “the LORD commanded the fish, and it vomited Jonah onto dry land.”³⁰ When Jonah was terribly disappointed that God did not destroy the Ninevites, “the LORD God *appointed* a plant,”³¹ a worm,³² and a “scorching east wind”³³ in order to teach Jonah a lesson about mercy. While Jonah receives divine intervention at many stages of this story and especially near the end, the Ninevites

²⁷ Manah is used in the same lexical form in Jonah 1:17; 4:6,7, and 8.

²⁸ Jonah 1:1-2

²⁹ Jonah 1:17

³⁰ Jonah 2:10

³¹ Jonah 4:6

³² Jonah 4:7

³³ Jonah 4:8

receive only a one sentence sermon. God does want to save the Ninevites but He is more interested in teaching Jonah how to understand and how to live out His mercy. The LORD wants His speaker to become His message.

Finally, God's divine desire to personalize His message in the speaker is clearly seen in the life and ministry of the Old Testament prophet Hosea. Hosea was to live out the message of God. "Go and marry a promiscuous wife and have children of promiscuity, for the whole land has been promiscuous by abandoning the LORD."³⁴ The message given *to* Hosea would be the message given *through* Hosea. God used the adulterous acts of Gomer and the merciful acts of Hosea as a message to Israel of their own spiritual adultery toward the LORD. Hosea had children—Jezreel, Lo-Ruhamah, and Lo-Ammi—who were also a part of the prophetic message. When his wife abandoned him for her adulteries, Hosea is commanded to go and buy Gomer back to communicate the faithfulness of the LORD and the faithlessness of Israel. In this way, the message of God entered into the family life of the messenger dictating even his personal relationships.

The LORD did not simply want to use Hosea to convey His message of disapproval to Israel for their adulteries; He wanted a man who would act out the very sinful condition of Israel and the very faithful heart of God. This would make the message more powerful in two ways: (1) Israel could see the message and (2) Hosea could feel the message. First, Israel could see the message fleshed out in front of their very eyes. There could be no mistake as to the meaning, interpretation, or application of such a message. Second, that Hosea could now speak first-hand of the experience and

³⁴ Hosea 1:2b

emotion of the heartbreak of an unfaithful lover put him in a position to appreciate the divine emotions of God over His people. Because he had experienced the message in his family life, Hosea could now preach the message the way God would preach the message—with emotional intensity and heartbreak. Like Hosea, God wants His messengers to be personally involved with the text to such a degree that they become the message.

Therefore, following from the above examples, the personal aspect is that facet of the Word of God designed to make an obvious impression upon the message-giver. Such an impression should make it obvious to his listeners that the message has changed the speaker's life and has touched his heart. Hearers must see in the preacher that he believes the message that he delivers to be true. Just as the LORD desires the hearts of the people so He also desires the hearts of His messengers.³⁵ Such genuineness is required to be an obedient spokesman and such genuineness is most likely to stir hearers to faith and obedience. “When preachers genuinely feel the mood(s) of the text, the audience will more likely respond.”³⁶ Inspiration requires full exposition and deep personalization.

Methodology

This project will accomplish its goal of developing an application of the personal aspect of Scripture for the expository sermon in three parts. First, it will discover how the prophet Jeremiah shows the way to become the message. Second, it will develop a sermon preparation plan that employs the personal aspects discovered in Jeremiah. Third, it will explore several methods for measuring the movement of the preacher and his hearers.

³⁵ See Isa 29:13.

³⁶ Robinson and Larson, *Art & Craft*, 593.

Chapter Two: Jeremiah Shows the Way

Chapter two will investigate four areas in which Jeremiah serves as an example of one who applied the personal aspect of the message. From this investigation it will be discovered that Jeremiah makes contributions to the personal aspect in several ways. First, the calling of Jeremiah was a personal one. His was a calling that lead him into danger, disrepute, and heartbreak. His calling entered his family and personal life.

Second, Jeremiah suffered the message he received by being personally overcome with it. His message consumed his emotions and motivated his ministry. His message caused him great pain and frustration. Jeremiah was no unmoved bystander to his preaching. He, himself, was hurt by his own message long before it would hurt others.

Third, the prophet embodied his message. He was caught up in the divine emotions of the message and he displayed those emotions. He preached it the way God, Himself, would have preached it which is the highest goal of all preaching. “If anyone speaks, his speech should be like the oracles of God...”³⁷ The prophets sincerely and passionately desired their people to change before it was too late. Therefore, they embodied the message in emotion, in persuasion, and even in practice. Jeremiah practiced the message and allowed the message to change his own lifestyle.

Fourth, God’s work with Jeremiah went a step further by creating a life message for the prophet. He became a theological symbol. Jeremiah, the weeping prophet, would come to be known for his message. His entire life could be summarized by his sermons and all of his sermons flowed out of that life message.

³⁷ 1 Pet 4:11

Chapter Three: Planning the Personal

Chapter three will pull together the ideas and principles gleaned from chapter two and synthesize those into a preaching plan that will fully develop and employ the personal aspect of the Scripture under study. First, the preacher will inspect his own calling and learn to appreciate its personal nature. Second, the preacher will call upon his own experiences, challenges, and pain to suffer the message himself. Third, the expositor will develop a plan for embodying the message before his own congregation by connecting with the divine emotions of the text, practicing the message prior to Sunday, letting the message change his lifestyle, and building a passion for the sermon that sees heaven and hell in the balance for his hearers. Finally, the preacher will consider what his life message is and will discern how his sermon passage fits into his life message.

Chapter Four: Measuring the Movement

The type of personalized preaching developed in this paper will cause a movement to occur in both the expositor and his hearers. First, chapter four will discuss the movement of a message and how it is intended to affect its hearers in a way that elicits a response. Second, since God desires to break through to the speaker first, the movement of the expositor must be measured. Third, some hearers will be receptive so it is important to measure their response. Fourth, other hearers will be non-receptive and it is valuable to discover the reaction of these non-receptive hearers since Jeremiah had many detractors during his ministry whose negative reactions were the result of the true message breaking upon their hard hearts. Sometimes a prophet can measure his success by those he had offended. “To some we are a scent of death leading to death, but to

others, a scent of life leading to life.”³⁸ Finally, chapter four will end with a variety of experimental new measures designed to provoke repentance or give opportunity for the fruits of repentance.

Review of Literature

The literature reviewed in the research of this project includes works in the fields of homiletics, the Old Testament prophets, and local church missions. First, the field of homiletics is of primary importance in this paper and the personal characteristic of homiletics in particular. Second, since Jeremiah is informing that personal characteristic to such a degree, Old Testament prophecy must be researched. Finally, measuring the result of personal preaching and creating new measures will require an investigation into the mission of the local church and the role of the pastor in that mission.

Professor of homiletics and Old Testament Elizabeth Rice Achtemeier makes a helpful contribution to this paper in regards to two subjects: Jeremiah and preaching. In *Preaching from the Old Testament*, Achtemeier discusses the value of the Old Testament and why it is necessary for the church today including an entire chapter on preaching from the prophets. *Creative Preaching* argues for the immense importance of words as well as the person in the preaching process.

There are numerous contemporary authors who have added a great deal to the discussion of expository preaching. Bryan Chapell emphasizes the redemptive aspect of Scripture and develops a sermon preparation plan designed to help students enhance their skills of exposition. In *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text*, Sidney Greidanus provides a comprehensive homiletical text which discusses the nature and components of

³⁸ 2 Cor 2:16

expository preaching and then gives guidelines for preaching Hebrew narratives, prophetic literature, the Gospels, and the epistles. Robinson's *Biblical Preaching* has become something of a standard and his work with Craig Brian Larson on *The Art and Craft of Biblical Preaching* contains many helpful essays on preaching. John MacArthur emphasizes inerrancy and a passion for biblical preaching. In *Power in the Pulpit*, Vines and Shaddix use an entire chapter to discuss the personal connection of the pastor to his sermon passage in the visualization, vitalization, and communication of the sermon. Warren Wiersbe adds the personal component of creativity (definitely involved in the prophetic ministry of Jeremiah) in his *Preaching & Teaching with Imagination*.

Leland Ryken, Tremper Longman, and D. Brent Sandy are very informative concerning the prophets and prophecy. Ryken and Longman with the help of Richard Patterson, William Gentrup, James Sims, and Branson Woodard discuss the methodology of interpreting the prophets. Sandy's *Plowshares & Pruning Hooks* is a very insightful work on the language of prophecy, how it works, and how it is best understood. Sandy also helps the reader understand the heart and pathos of the prophets.

Aubrey Malphurs skillfully explores the development of a dynamic local church from its very foundation including mission, vision, and effectiveness. In *The Power of Multi-Sensory Preaching and Teaching*, Rick Blackwood provides an extraordinary resource in the most effective use of tactile images for preaching. David Hesselgrave's *Communicating Christ Cross-Culturally* is also an insightful contribution to the missiological aspect of the pulpit ministry.

Conclusion

The Word of God has great power. It is “living and effective and sharper than any two-edged sword, penetrating as far as to divide soul, spirit, joints, and marrow; it is a judge of the ideas and thoughts of the heart.”³⁹ This great life-changing power must be exposed through pastors who preach the Scripture the way that the Holy Spirit inspired Scripture. This means preaching that is in keeping with all of the aspects of the text including its personal aspect. Every passage has a personal aspect intended to first affect the preacher and then his congregation. This is the power of making it personal.

³⁹ Heb 4:12

CHAPTER 2

JEREMIAH SHOWS THE WAY

Introduction

In his calling, suffering, embodiment, and in his bearing a life message, Jeremiah personally became the announcement of the LORD to be delivered to Judah. He simultaneously carried the oracles of God in his mouth and in his limbs; it was both an announcement to be vocalized and a fire to be incarnated. How does one enter so deeply into the divine message? How does a pastor bring a passage of Scripture into his chest and become it letting it explode out of him through his lifestyle and into his family with all emotional intensity? The following pages will confirm that when it comes to becoming the message, Jeremiah shows the way.

The Way of the Personal Calling

His Calling Was Unpopular

Jeremiah was born into dark days. During Jeremiah's younger years, King Manasseh's evil reign finally came to an end and young Josiah took the throne. Samaria to the north had already fallen seventy-two years earlier and in about sixty-four years Jerusalem would be raised to the ground by Nebuchadnezzar. The prophet grew up around priests just four miles away from Jerusalem in the town of Anathoth. The political scene of his time was hot and news of the movements of Assyria, Egypt, and Babylon spread quickly to Anathoth from the nearby capital.⁴⁰ It was in the midst of this tension that the LORD called Jeremiah to be a prophet, a spokesman for God to His people. "The word of the LORD came to me: I chose you before I formed you in the

⁴⁰ See Raymond Calkins, *Jeremiah the Prophet: A Study in Personal Religion* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1930), 17.

womb; I set you apart before you were born. I appointed you a prophet to the nations.”⁴¹

“Henceforth, he no longer belonged to himself. He belonged to God...His life really dates from the hour of his call. Thenceforth he steps out on the stage of history, a God-possessed soul.”⁴²

In Jeremiah 1:4-10, his call narrative, it is clear from the outset that the LORD is enlisting the prophet to be a human warning siren. When God “sets” Jeremiah over the nations in verse ten, it is to bring about punishment in the way of uprooting one nation, Judah, and planting another, Babylon, by his participation in the Word of the LORD.⁴³ The word translated “set” in verse ten has a range of meaning that includes to oversee, to reckon, to punish, to visit, and to avenge. It is translated “punish” often in the Book of Jeremiah.⁴⁴ God’s calling to Jeremiah, like that of Jonah, Joel, and others, is to warn his kinsman to repent before it is too late, to sound the alarm to a group of people who were very much enjoying their current lifestyle.

Jeremiah preached against social sins, pagan altars, and even against kings. He foretold a coming punishment at the hands of foreign invaders from the north. He earned in the process of all these sermons the displeasure of many and the hatred of some. “Do not be afraid of anyone, for I will be with you to deliver you. This is the LORD’s

⁴¹ Jer 1:4-5

⁴² Calkins, *Jeremiah the Prophet*, 19.

⁴³ See Isa 55:11. Also, the vision of the almond tree (saqed) that Jeremiah sees in 1:11-12 is a sign that God is watching (soqed) to assure that His Word comes true. God’s Word to raise Babylon over Judah is certain to come to pass, and Jeremiah brings about that rise and fall in the sense that he is partnering with the Word through his role as spokesman.

⁴⁴ See Jer 9:25, 11:22, 13:21, 23:34.

declaration. See, today I have set you over nations and kingdoms to uproot and tear down, to destroy and demolish, to build and plant.”⁴⁵ “For Jeremiah’s ministry the emphasis is undoubtedly on its destructive element; four verbs are used to express this, whereas two verbs indicate its constructive and restorative element.”⁴⁶ His ministry and life were to be consumed with the negative aspect of his calling, that of judgment, which would make him a very unpopular man in Judah.

No doubt, after observing the histories of Moses, Samuel, Elijah, Isaiah and others it must be concluded that “to be a prophet is both a distinction and an affliction.”⁴⁷ The LORD called Jeremiah to preach and rail against his own people, to become unbelievably unpopular. Every preacher wants to be liked and appreciated by those to whom they minister, but Jeremiah was promised no such thing. His was not a nice calling. “Even your brothers—your own father’s household—even they were treacherous to you; even they have cried out loudly after you.”⁴⁸ The prophet moaned, “Know that I suffer disgrace for Your honor.”⁴⁹ He also confesses, “I am a laughingstock all the time; everyone ridicules me. For whenever I speak, I cry out—I proclaim: Violence and destruction! Because the word of the LORD has become for me constant disgrace and derision.”⁵⁰ Jeremiah was embarrassed and upset because not only did he have to preach

⁴⁵ Jer 1:8,10

⁴⁶ Frank Gaebelin, ed. *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 6:384.

⁴⁷ Abraham Heschel, *The Prophets* (1969), 17-18.

⁴⁸ Jer 12:6

⁴⁹ Jer 15:15b

⁵⁰ Jer 20:7b-8

such a destructive and poorly received message, that destruction did not appear to be coming. This caused him to be a “laughingstock.” His preaching the Word of God actually made him unpopular and deeply affected his social life. That Jeremiah would be isolated from funerals (16:5), parties (16:8), and so many of his kinsmen because of his message “was almost a sentence of social excommunication.”⁵¹

He was rejected and his preaching attracted personal attack, ridicule, and even blame. This may at first seem like a romantic calling where one only has the LORD on his side and goes it alone, holy man versus the world, but Jeremiah knew it to be an unpopular, painful, and distressing life.⁵² It was his own name, reputation, and personal character that were on the line being bombarded every time he preached. His hearers were not simply angry about the message that he preached; they were angry at him! Jeremiah had great personal stakes in his ministry calling.

His Calling Was Dangerous

Jeremiah felt from the start that his would be a dangerous mission. In fact, “as far as we can see, no true prophet gets by without great difficulties.”⁵³ He would come into the spotlight and become the spearhead of God’s admonishments toward Judah. Gone were the carefree and comfortable days of childhood and the awkward years of young

⁵¹ Gaebelein, *Expositors*, 6:479.

⁵² In fact, as Brueggeman points out in Walter Brueggemann, *A Commentary on Jeremiah: Exile & Homecoming* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 148, “The isolation from his human companions (15:17) could be overcome by communion with God, but his isolation extends beyond earth to heaven. God does not stand by. God is not with him as was promised (1:8,19). His calling left him completely and utterly alone!”

⁵³ James Luther Mays and Paul J. Achtemeier, eds. *Interpreting the Prophets* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 25.

adulthood. In fact, one of his first visions in Jeremiah 1:13-14, that of a boiling pot tipping away from the north, indicates that disaster is on its way. Days of contention and violence had arrived so courage and boldness were required. He was being called into danger and risk.

His calling was dangerous because it set Jeremiah's own kinsmen and neighbors against him. Even those of his own hometown, those of Anathoth wanted him killed. With murderous intent, they plot, "Let's destroy the tree with its fruit; let's cut him off from the land of the living so that his name will no longer be remembered."⁵⁴ However, even through the danger of his calling, the LORD is helping Jeremiah personally identify with His own plight for the same men who conspire against Jeremiah in 11:19-20 had also conspired against their God in 11:9-10.⁵⁵ It is clear through the danger that Jeremiah and the LORD are in league because the LORD reveals the murderous plot to Jeremiah in 11:18 and promises to take care of it Himself. "They warn, 'You must not prophesy in the name of the LORD, or you will certainly die at our hand. Therefore, this is what the LORD of Hosts says: 'I am about to punish them.'"⁵⁶ God will deal with the plots of the men of Judah against Himself and take care of Jeremiah's case at the same time by sweeping His people away in righteous judgment.

Throughout the course of his ministry there would be those who seek his life because of the message that he bore. In chapter twenty-six, the prophet records the

⁵⁴ Jer 11:19b

⁵⁵ Jesus elaborates further on this personal bond between Master and messenger in Matthew 10:16-25 where He says that His messengers will be put in harm's way "because of Me" in 10:18. The apostles demonstrate that they believe this teaching in Acts 5:41.

⁵⁶ Jer 11:21b-22a

moment when he walked into the Temple courtyard during the days of King Jehoiakim and announced that if the people of Judah would not listen to the law or to the prophets, then God would “make this temple like Shiloh”⁵⁷ and this city “an object of cursing for all the nations of the earth.”⁵⁸ At this, the crowd of worshipers turned into an angry mob and rushed against the prophet. “Then the priests and prophets said to the official and all the people, ‘This man deserves the death sentence because he has prophesied against this city, as you have heard with your own ears.’”⁵⁹ In his own defense, Jeremiah tried to show the crowd in 26:12-15 that though he was the human agent who had delivered the message it was really the LORD with whom they were angry and with whom they must contend. He repeats at the opening and closing of his statement that “the LORD sent me.”⁶⁰ Though the message is from God, it is the messenger who receives the persecution. Hearers instinctively hold the messenger personally responsible for their message.⁶¹

This was no mere vocational calling to take up some ordinary profession. This was a calling that required Jeremiah to risk his life often. It was personal. It put him physically in jeopardy of murder and violence. In this way, it was deeply personal and there was no way that the prophet could divorce himself from his work, no way to remain personally unattached to his ministry because those he ministered to desired to do him

⁵⁷ Jer 26:6

⁵⁸ Jer 26:6

⁵⁹ Jer 26:11

⁶⁰ Jer 26:12,15

⁶¹ It is only after some time and wise counsel that the officials, elders, and the people convince the priests and prophets not to kill Jeremiah (see Jer 26:24).

personal physical harm. Jeremiah took up the mantle of this personal calling and gave his entire life to it.

His Calling Was Heartbreaking

Contemporary pastors have noted that when one carries the burden of the Word of the LORD, “God will cause your heart to break for those people to whom you preach.”⁶² Jeremiah experienced this heartbreak himself and at one point is so broken by his own message that he contemplates leaving the ministry altogether (20:9). Being the message-bearer has brought on many persecutors, makes him lonely, breaks his heart, and more.⁶³ “I never sat with the band of revelers, and I did not celebrate with them. Because Your hand was on me I sat alone, for You filled me with indignation.”⁶⁴ His heart was in conflict because receiving the message of the LORD was a delight to him in Jeremiah 15:16, but it also caused him to burn with indignation in 15:17. “It greatly pained him to be out of step with his contemporaries. The hand of God was on him; the constraint of God’s truth weighed on his spirit.”⁶⁵

On one occasion Jeremiah even cried out, “Cursed be the day on which I was born. The day my mother bore me—let it never be blessed. Why did I come out of the womb to see only struggle and sorrow, to end my life in shame?”⁶⁶ His heartbreak

⁶² Vines and Shaddix, *Power*, 350.

⁶³ It seems to be his conflict with so many persecutors that drives Jeremiah into this low point of frustration and despair (see Jer 15:15) so the LORD tells Jeremiah to return to Him and He will deliver the prophet from the power of evil people (15:21).

⁶⁴ Jer 15:17

⁶⁵ Gaebelin, *Expositors*, 6:477.

⁶⁶ Jer 20:14,18

resulted from the response of his hearers. In chapter nineteen the prophet preached a sermon in the Temple courtyard about the disaster that was about to come upon the inhabitants of Judah. They had disobeyed the LORD long enough and God was about to shatter them. Jeremiah shatters a clay jug and instead of responding with repentance his hearers ridicule him, plot against him, and place him in the stocks. He was preaching the imminent destruction of Judah, but that destruction was not coming quickly enough for Jeremiah (at least not on that day). This apparent delay caused his recipients to mock him in Jeremiah 20:7-8 and plot vengeance upon him in 20:10. Therefore, in his heart there is a tension between the part of his heart that is frustrated at God for His lack of timing and the other part of his heart that is confident, that even sings knowing that the LORD of Hosts will do what is best.

Jeremiah's task is a self-destructive one poisoning him seemingly to death, to the point of this curse speech which, "may be an undifferentiated act of both deep exhaustion and a sense of futility about his vocation."⁶⁷ It is so heavy and exhausting that he is not able to maintain the sense of worshipful awe that overcame him just one verse earlier in 20:13. In his calling the LORD was inviting Jeremiah to personal risk and pain, to conflict and stress. God calls, "Come, take My message to these stiff-necked people and I promise you that they will get mad at you, try to kill you, and put an emotional knife through your beating heart." His calling is personal and dangerously close to his heart.

His Calling Was Invasive

Prophecy and preaching are not ministries for those who wish to protect their family lives from their preaching lives. God's call to Jeremiah was so invasive that it

⁶⁷ Brueggemann, *A Commentary*, 185.

even invaded his private, home life. In Jeremiah 16:2, the LORD instructs the prophet not to take a wife. “The price paid for being a prophet is nowhere else expressed more painfully than by God’s command to Jeremiah not to marry. This command would have caused Jeremiah inner turmoil.”⁶⁸ His calling had now gone far beyond mere vocation or profession; it had now penetrated sorely into his family life.

In Scripture marriage is preferable under most all circumstances (Heb 13:4), it was the norm (Gen 2:24), and the channel of many divine blessings (Ps 127:3; Prov 17:6; 20:7). By this time most of his friends, colleagues, and neighbors would have been married and raising children but Jeremiah was called to refrain from marriage. In fact, “the syntax in v.2 expresses permanent prohibition (‘Do not ever’).”⁶⁹ “The word of the LORD came to me: ‘You must not marry or have sons or daughters in this place.’”⁷⁰ “The prohibition anticipates the mood of those who so fear nuclear holocaust in our time that they do not want to have any children who might be subject to the terror.”⁷¹ In other words, this period of judgment and punishment was no time for a wife and children, no time for the happiness of family life. There was a personal purpose in this command that would help the prophet to become the message: Jeremiah’s life and family must reflect his message. “His being denied a wife and children would be a warning that the family

⁶⁸ F.B. Huey, *Jeremiah, Lamentations* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1993), 166.

⁶⁹ Huey, *Jeremiah, Lamentations*, 166.

⁷⁰ Jer 16:1-2

⁷¹ Brueggemann, *A Commentary*, 150-151.

life of the nation was to be disrupted.”⁷² Therefore, because of his ministry, the prophet could never take a wife nor start a family of his own.

Jeremiah was personally and completely—his reputation, his emotional stability, his future family plans, his very life—in the hands of God. This was his calling. Had he fully appreciated at the moment of His calling all of the heartbreak, dislike, and danger that the LORD’s mission would push him through, Jeremiah might have wanted to run screaming from the place at the thought of such things. God was inviting Jeremiah on a mission that would require one hundred percent of his being, charging the prophet with a task that would enter into his soul and proceed out through his body. Jeremiah’s calling was unpopular, dangerous, heartbreaking, and invasive which also made it profoundly personal.

The Way of the Suffered Message

Jeremiah shows the way of the personal calling, but he also shows the way of the suffered message. The prophet became entangled with his message wrestling with it and working it out in his own life. It is important that every messenger feel the friction that exists between himself and the message that he is preaching. Jeremiah shows the way of the suffered message by the way he sees the divine perspective and in the way he learns to “wear” his message.

Seeing God’s Perspective Causes Suffering

Prophets not only saw the pathos caused by their message, they also saw the pathos that moved the message. At once Jeremiah could feel disappointment over the sins of his people, the danger and challenge of his message of judgment, and the holy

⁷² Gaebelin, *Expositors*, 6:479.

pain of God over the loss of His children. “My joy has flown away; grief has settled on me. My heart is sick. Listen—the cry of my dear people from a far away land...I am broken by the brokenness of my dear people. I mourn; horror has taken hold of me.”⁷³

“The pathos of God (or of the poet) in vv.18-19a, 21 is a heartsickness of a betrayed lover or a yearning parent. One sees the trouble of the lover or child, wants to head it off, but must stand helplessly while the disease works to its dread conclusion of death.”⁷⁴ His perspective on God’s suffering caused Jeremiah to suffer as well. He preached a message of repentance in the face of judgment but it did not delight him; his message hurt him. “Jeremiah, looking upon the garishness of Jerusalem, felt hurt by the people’s guilt and by the knowledge that they had a dreadful debt to pay.”⁷⁵

The LORD intended Jeremiah to speak to the crisis of Judah from the same pain that He Himself experienced. In Jeremiah 9:1, God could not contain His grief. “If my head were water, my eyes a fountain of tears, I would weep day and night over the slain of my dear people.”⁷⁶ Jeremiah is called to communicate the message in a way that corresponds to the divine suffering because that suffering is an important part of the message. Just as it would not be possible to clearly communicate a message of joy with gloom in one’s voice nor a message of love with hate in one’s voice; it is not possible to clearly communicate the message of Jeremiah without suffering and trembling in one’s

⁷³ Jer 8:18-21

⁷⁴ Brueggemann, *A Commentary*, 92-93.

⁷⁵ Heschel, *Prophets*, 105.

⁷⁶ Jer 9:1

voice. As a prophet, Jeremiah is caught up in the anguish of God so that his and the LORD's sufferings overlap as much as possible.

"Jeremiah's was a soul in pain, stern with gloom...He called, he urged his people to repent—and he failed. He screamed, wept, moaned—and was left with a terror in his soul."⁷⁷ He was never distant from the message that he preached. It was always close causing him suffering. He could see God's pain and it tormented him. "My inheritance has acted toward Me like a lion in the forest. She has roared against Me. Therefore, I hate her."⁷⁸

Jeremiah knew that the LORD loved His people because He called them, "the love of My life"⁷⁹ so when the prophet heard the words spoken above, he knew that they were coming from a deep, divine pain which he felt as well. He suffered the message by seeing it from the divine angle. He knew the divine emotions (see below) and bore up his preaching by that frame of reference.

Wearing God's Message Causes Suffering

That the LORD wants Jeremiah to personally suffer his messages is also evidenced by the interesting oracle concerning the linen garment. In this oracle, as in other sign acts, Jeremiah is commanded to play the part of God in a metaphorical demonstration of the LORD's relationship with Judah.⁸⁰ Portraying the divine in this way

⁷⁷ Heschel, *Prophets*, 105.

⁷⁸ Jer 12:8

⁷⁹ Jer 12:7

⁸⁰ In Jeremiah 19, the prophet plays the part of God by smashing a clay jug in a sign act that portrays through metaphor the coming judgment upon Jerusalem.

is a means by which the prophet physically participates in the anguish of God. “If the purpose of the story of the waistcloth were only to let the prophet see in a symbolic way the punishment of the people, he would not have been told to put it on his loins. But it is precisely this part of the story that seems to hold the central meaning of the act. The prophet must learn to feel for himself God’s intimate attachment to Israel; he must not only know about it, but experience it from within.”⁸¹ “Just as underwear clings to one’s waist, so I fastened the whole house of Israel and of Judah to Me”—this is the LORD’s declaration—“so that they might be My people for My fame, praise, and glory, but they would not obey.”⁸² God instructed Jeremiah to wear the linen garment himself so that he too could suffer the divine message. The garment was ruined and useless, soiled and offensive just like the people of God. Jeremiah must wear the garment, suffer the garment, because his is a ministry of proclamation that requires personal suffering.

The Way of the Embodied Message

The Old Testament prophets delivered powerful messages full of color, intensity, and drama.⁸³ They did this because they understood their holy calling to deliver the message of God to save the lives of their Israelite kin, and they were willing to do whatever it took, to say whatever needed to be said to get the message across, but there was another reason. For Jeremiah and the prophets, the message was not just a

⁸¹ Heschel, *Prophets*, 117.

⁸² Jer 13:11

⁸³ It must be noted that their messages were not always successful in deterring sinful behavior. Nevertheless, they were powerful. The expository message is the best tool for life transformation but that does not mean that it always succeeds in bringing about life change. Sin runs deep.

communiqué, they did not just serve as conduits of information; they *were* the information. As Heschel argues, “the prophet is a person, not a microphone.”⁸⁴ Therefore, “we must seek to understand not only the views he expounded but also the attitudes he embodied: his own position, feeling, response—not only what he said but also what he lived; the private, the intimate dimension of the word, the subjective side of the message.”⁸⁵

Divine Emotions Embody the Message

God anguishes over the sins and forthcoming destruction of His people (Jer 12:7-13; 31:15-17) and Jeremiah embodied that anguish. Brueggemann observes, “Jeremiah makes himself desperately vulnerable to the God who has called and sent him (15:17-18; 17:17-18), but Jeremiah’s vulnerability is not met by much solace. It is met by toughness and ruthlessness on the part of God (12:5-6; 15:19-21). It is surely the case, as Heschel has seen, that Jeremiah experiences and enters into the pathos of God.”⁸⁶ God wants to push His messenger through His own divine emotions for at least two reasons: (1) He desires to work with and reach the messenger; and (2) He desires that those who hear the message should hear it preached the way God Himself would preach it, with all personal involvement and passion.

That God desires to work with and reach his messengers can be clearly seen in the prophet Jonah. In the days of Jonah, the sinful king Jeroboam II was strengthening Israel during a time when its greatest enemy, the Assyrian empire, was suffering wars from

⁸⁴ Heschel, *Prophets*, x.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Mays and Achtemeier, *Interpreting the Prophets*, 117.

without and wars from within compounded by a recent famine. It looked like the Assyrians would soon come to an end which pleased Jonah greatly, but then the LORD commanded Jonah to go warn Nineveh, a very prominent Assyrian city, of its impending doom. The prophet did not want to go because he knew that the message of judgment was, in effect, one last chance of salvation before the hammer of God's wrath fell. Jonah knew that if Nineveh was destroyed, that may very well be the final nail in the coffin of Assyria. For Jonah's benefit, the LORD hurled a violent storm (Jonah 1:4) and appointed a fish (1:17), a plant (4:6), and a worm (4:7). The Book of Jonah begins with Jonah and ends with Jonah. The final verse of the book is directed toward the prophet. God did not only desire to reach the Ninevites; He wanted to reach Jonah. Yes, He hoped to break the wicked hearts of the Assyrians but even more He aimed to melt the hard heart of Jonah. Jonah hated the Assyrians and God intended to change that because He wants to work with and reach His messengers.

The LORD desires the recipients of His message to hear it preached the way He Himself would preach it. This is the only way to make sense of the story of Hosea. God called Hosea to marry a woman that he knew would be unfaithful to him. Why? "For the whole land has been promiscuous by abandoning the LORD."⁸⁷ After Hosea married the daughter of Diblaim and started a family, she looked with wandering eyes at other men, and cheated on him as was her lifestyle (Hosea 1:2). Even after she had wounded and hurt her husband, God told Hosea to show Gomer love by taking her back. Why? "Go again; show love to a woman who is loved by another man and is an adulteress, just as

⁸⁷ Hosea 1:2b

the LORD loves the Israelites though they turn to other gods and love raisin cakes.”⁸⁸ It is important for the message that it be preached in keeping with the divine emotions of the Message-Giver. God expects His message to be delivered with emotions that parallel His own, to be caught up in His own grief.

“Pathos deserves a central place in homiletical theorizing and practice—a higher place than it currently receives.”⁸⁹ Jonah and Hosea are examples of the same thing that the LORD did with Jeremiah. Jeremiah wept because God wept. Jeremiah lamented because God lamented. And when the LORD planned punishment, He wanted His prophet to feel the way He felt. “‘Do not enter a house where a mourning feast is taking place. Don’t go to lament or sympathize with them, for I have removed My peace from these people’—this is the LORD’s declaration—‘as well as My faithful love and compassion.’”⁹⁰ “The grief of the end is massive; it is escalated even more by this prohibition against active expression of the grief.”⁹¹ The Father desires to keep the heart of His messengers close to His own heart so that the pathos of the messenger parallels the pathos of God.

Practice Embodies the Message

The prophet from Anathoth did not only preach judgment and destruction; in the latter part of his book Jeremiah takes up a message of comfort. He announced that those exiled to Babylon would one day return to the land and life would resume as usual once

⁸⁸ Hosea 3:1

⁸⁹ Robinson and Larson, *Art & Craft*, 591.

⁹⁰ Jer 16:5

⁹¹ Brueggemann, *A Commentary*, 151.

again. In chapter 32 the LORD instructed Jeremiah to practice this message by purchasing a field in his home town from his cousin Hanamel, but why would anyone buy real estate when their country is being attacked by foreign invaders and about to be overturned? Why would Jeremiah be interested in property on the eve of a takeover? “Jeremiah’s purchase of the field appeared to make little sense in light of his prophecy that the people would soon be exiled to Babylon. But the action had symbolic value, for it anticipated a time when the people would return to the land and again buy and sell property.”⁹² Jeremiah was preaching a message of restoration and comfort, but not just preaching it, living it. “For this is what the LORD of Hosts, the God of Israel, says: Houses, fields, and vineyards will again be bought in this land.”⁹³ “Moreover, the public act (and its narrated report) put Jeremiah on public record as claiming that there is indeed ‘life after Babylon.’ The prophet has put his money where his mouth is.”⁹⁴

He also practiced the message by writing and rewriting God’s warning to King Jehoiakim in chapter 36. The northern kingdom of Israel had been destroyed by Assyria and the 10 tribes of the north had been scattered to the wind. The southern kingdom of Judah remained in the land longer because they had more godly kings. The last of Judah’s godly kings was Josiah who, when he heard the Law of the LORD read to him, tore his clothes and repented in 2 Kings 22:11. However, Josiah died leaving his wicked son Jehoiakim to rule in his place. Judah was in decline, doom imminent, and Babylon

⁹² Robert B. Chisholm, Jr., *Handbook on the Prophets* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2002), 197.

⁹³ Jer 32:15

⁹⁴ Brueggemann, *A Commentary*, 302.

on the rise. Jehoiakim and all of Judah were racing towards their own demise but God warned them by having Jeremiah write his message on a scroll. Why? “Perhaps, when the house of Judah hears about all the disaster I am planning to bring on them, each one of them will turn from his evil way. Then I will forgive their wrongdoing and sin.”⁹⁵ God wanted them to turn from their doom.

Jeremiah called for his close friend and confidant Baruch. Baruch came with paper and ink while Jeremiah began pacing. Jeremiah recounted all the doom and judgment that he had preached over the last decade or so and Baruch wrote it all down. Jeremiah instructed Baruch to take the scroll and read it to all of Judah so that maybe they would repent. The royal officials who heard Baruch reading Jeremiah’s sermons of doom became afraid. They also knew that this was not a popular message so they told Baruch to go get Jeremiah and to hide while they went to tell the king. They wanted to alert the king to the warnings so that he would make changes like his father Josiah did. However, when the scroll was read to the king, Jehoiakim cut it up and burnt it. So the patient LORD tells Jeremiah to make another. “God will generate as many scrolls as necessary to override the king’s zeal for autonomy.”⁹⁶ “Then Jeremiah took another scroll and gave it to Baruch son of Neriah, the scribe, and he wrote on it at Jeremiah’s dictation all the words of the scroll that Jehoiakim, Judah’s king, had burned in the fire. And many other words like them were added.”⁹⁷

⁹⁵ Jer 36:3

⁹⁶ Brueggemann, *A Commentary*, 353.

⁹⁷ Jer 36:32

The presence of the prophet and warning after warning sent to the kings of Judah concerning the coming judgment was the work of a patient and merciful God who wanted to give ample notice to His people in the hopes that they would repent and return before it was too late (35:3). When Jeremiah wrote and rewrote his sermons, he was practicing this message of longsuffering, warning, patience, and mercy. He was an instrument in soul and body of the lengths to which God would go to spare His people their punishment and doom.

Lifestyle Change Embodies the Message

The message that Jeremiah carried changed his lifestyle. As discussed above, his message required that he refrain from marriage, that he purchase property, that he suffer insults, threats, and loneliness, that he go into hiding, that he wear certain garments, and that he carry a yoke around his neck as he preached (27:1). These requirements caused the prophet to change his very lifestyle; he became a different person. Instead of becoming a priest like his father, Hilkiah, Jeremiah was called to the prophetic ministry. Rather than take up a normal life of home, wife, children, and steady service to the LORD at the Temple, this preacher took upon himself the unsteady lifestyle of a prophet which included burden and lament, hope and despair. His daily life was anything but normal.

Jeremiah's sign-acts, which included wearing ruined undergarments (13:1-6), smashing jars (19:10), buying fields (32:7), writing and rewriting his sermons (36:2,28), embedding paving stones (43:9), sinking scrolls in the Euphrates River (51:63), and other unusual behavior was recognized as characteristically prophetic by his peers. "The sign-acts were part of the socially recognized behavior of a prophet, by performing those non-verbal actions the role expectations were being fulfilled, thus legitimating for the

audience that the performer was a prophet.”⁹⁸ Not every person who performed sign-acts was an authentic messenger of the LORD,⁹⁹ but it was expected that such behavior was largely unique to the prophetic ministry in general. Therefore, Jeremiah’s role as a prophet required a certain lifestyle of curious behavior.

Most could enjoy a lifestyle of work and family with occasional holidays and feasting but not Jeremiah. “You must not enter the house where feasting is taking place to sit with them to eat and drink.”¹⁰⁰ His lifestyle was to reflect the message of judgment and doom that he bore (Jer 16:9). Here the message of God entered the life of the prophet in such a personal way as to affect his lifestyle and the people with whom he could or could not spend time. His message changed the way he lived affecting him spiritually, emotionally, and physically. Jeremiah and his message became one. Jeremiah was actively and physically involved with his messages. He felt them, embodied them, and practiced them in his lifestyle.

The Way of the Life Message

The Definition of a Life Message

“The most powerful intensifier of our communication is not our content and it’s not our delivery. It’s our life.”¹⁰¹ A life message is a theme or belief that characterizes

⁹⁸ Kelvin Friebel, *Jeremiah’s and Ezekiel’s Sign-Acts: Rhetorical Nonverbal Communication* (New York: Continuum International Publishing, 1990), 382.

⁹⁹ Hananiah prophesied falsely when, as a sign-act, he broke the yoke that Jeremiah had been wearing around his neck in Jeremiah 28:10-11. (Jeremiah replied back that now the LORD would put an unbreakable *iron* yoke on the neck of the nations that must serve Nebuchadnezzar in Jeremiah 28:14.)

¹⁰⁰ Jer 16:8

¹⁰¹ Robinson and Larson, *Art & Craft*, 599.

the entirety of one's life. It is one primary, all-consuming focus for which the individual has lived, a legacy that he leaves, one idea that he hopes the world will glean from his life. It is like the short sentence etched on his tombstone. Jeremiah's content was potent and his delivery characteristically prophetic, vivid and impassioned, but it was his life which made the greatest impact. He bore a life message and will forever be remembered as "the weeping prophet." The oracles of God came to life in his very persona. Jeremiah is himself a message, a message of brokenness over impending divine judgment.

Jeremiah is known as "the weeping prophet" while Peter is known for being the bold foundational leader of the church, Thomas for being the doubter who died fully convinced of Christ, Paul for being the great missionary, and John the disciple of love. Later, Martin Luther will bear up the message of reformation, William Carey will be called "the father of the modern missions movement," and Lottie Moon will give her life for the Chinese. Contemporary pastor Chuck Swindoll is known for his joy, John Piper for the supremacy of God, John MacArthur Jr. for the authority of Scripture, John Maxwell for leadership, and David Jeremiah for teaching. These men and women have spent their lives ministering the announcements of God to others but above and through all of their messages they each have born a prominent theme which comes through their lives. This message is unique to the individual but it is a message carried along by their lifestyle, the legacy they leave, and something that they have found worth living and dying for. Bearing a life message is perhaps the greatest way of becoming the message.

Passion Determines a Life Message

Not everyone has a life message because it does not come easy. A life message is determined by passion, purpose, movement, and perseverance. Only men and women of

passion leave a life message. Passion is what one has when he fully grasps the reason for his unique existence and becomes thrilled about it. “Passion provides an unrelenting sense of one’s identity and why he or she is alive.”¹⁰² More will be discussed later on how to discover personal passion but it is important now to understand why passion matters for the life message.

Many individuals live their lives passively reacting to their circumstances, trying simply to survive from day-to-day. They have nothing large to live for, make little if any impression on others, risk little, and make few bold moves. These have no singular passion to animate them. However, there are other individuals who understand that life is rare so they actively take bold risks to make their time count for something larger, something epic. Passionate people make a decision and make a difference; they live victoriously while the dispassionate only survive. The passionate die early and die well for something big, while the dispassionate linger on. Jeremiah was a man of great passion and his life message was generated by that passion.

Two truths reveal the importance of passion in Scripture: (1) Jesus offers His Kingdom to the passionate, those who see its worth and will sell everything they have to get it; and (2) the Holy Spirit who indwells the saints is passionate. First, Jesus explains to His disciples that the Kingdom of heaven makes a distinction between wheat and weeds and between good fish and worthless fish in Matthew 13:36-43. The wheat and the good fish are those who receive the benefits of the Kingdom while the weeds and the worthless fish are those who receive no part of the Kingdom. What must one do in order

¹⁰² David Earley, *The Small Group Leader’s Toolkit: Ten Power Tools for Personal Leadership Development* (Houston: Touch Publications, 2008), 43.

to become the wheat and the good fish? The Master's answer lies in the verses that are sandwiched between the parable of the wheat in 13:36-43 and the parable of the net in 13:47-50. The sandwiched verses, Matthew 13:44-46, contain two parables which are parallel in their point. The parable of the treasure hidden in the field and the parable of the priceless pearl make it clear that the Kingdom is for those who will see its worth and do whatever they must to get it. The Kingdom is for the passionate.

Before moving on, it must be seriously noted that while many Christians are timid, shy, and dispassionate, the Holy Spirit is not. "For God has not given us a Spirit of fearfulness, but one of power, love, and sound judgment."¹⁰³ The New Testament history of the Holy Spirit is recorded in the Book of Acts where the Spirit is regularly filling men and women to do great and bold things. He is the Holy Spirit who gave an anointing of leadership and wisdom to kings. He is the Holy Spirit who gave strength to the heroes of old. The Holy Spirit who inhabits God's people is not shy but bold and passionate.

Jeremiah was a passionate man. He did not always want to do what he was called to do, sometimes he even deplored it, but he did it anyway because he was moved by a burning deep within, a fire in his bones (Jer 20:9). On more than one occasion, his fervency turned him inside out emotionally. His zeal opened his eyes into fountains and sent him against kings and angry crowds. Jeremiah, like all men who have a life message, had a deep passion for God because he was called into it, the prophetic Spirit inside of him provoked it, and his ministry necessitated it. It did not really matter whether or not he wanted to be a passionate man; he had to be one.

¹⁰³ 2 Tim 1:7

Purpose Determines a Life Message

Passion is a deep burning desire to risk boldly for something worthwhile but passion is of little use without a guiding purpose to direct its energy and focus. Earley argues that “your purpose states where you want to go and your passion explains why you want to go there.”¹⁰⁴ The passion of Jeremiah was his profound conviction that he had to proclaim the Word of the LORD, but his purpose was to use his preaching to “uproot and tear down, to destroy and demolish, to build and to plant.”¹⁰⁵ And in his preaching ministry he witnessed the destruction of Jerusalem against which he had preached for years warning and admonishing his people that judgment was forthcoming. His passion was to proclaim while his purpose was to preach messages to Israel in order to move them either toward salvation or toward judgment. This purpose led to an entire book full of sermons incorporated into the Canon of Scripture and to a life message of broken-hearted preaching.¹⁰⁶

Movement Determines a Life Message

People leave a life message when their passion is so strong that it births in them a grand purpose which then moves them to do courageous and bold things and moves others to respond in some way. From the fire in his bones Jeremiah set his purpose to preach messages of judgment and salvation to Israel and then did it. He was not simply stirred to preach nor did he simply understand how he must preach; he preached!

¹⁰⁴ Earley, *Toolkit*, 76.

¹⁰⁵ Jer 1:10

¹⁰⁶ One of the reasons that his was “broken-hearted” preaching was Jeremiah sometimes resisted his purpose. This resistance at times made him a man in conflict, a man whose heart was torn in different directions.

Jeremiah preached against all odds, foes, and obstacles. He kept on preaching even when he was forbidden to do so, even when it was dangerous to do so. He spoke, he bought fields, he broke pots, he wore garments, and he wrote sermons. He was beaten but continued to preach. He was put in stocks but continued to preach (20:1-6). There were times when he tried not to be moved, tried not to preach, but it was no use. “I become tired of holding it in, and I cannot prevail.”¹⁰⁷

His passion was refined into purpose which gave birth to movement. Jeremiah was moved and so were his hearers. Life messages are not built by those who only sit and contemplate their passion and purpose but by those who take action. The prophet from Anathoth was moved to preach.

Then Jeremiah said to all the officials and the people, “The LORD sent me to prophesy all the words that you have heard against this temple and city. So now correct your ways and deeds and obey the voice of the LORD your God so that He might relent concerning the disaster that He warned about. As for me, here I am in your hands; do to me what you think is good and right. But know for certain that if you put me to death, you will bring innocent blood on yourselves, on this city, and on its residents, for it is certain the LORD has sent me to speak all these things directly to you.”¹⁰⁸

Perseverance Determines a Life Message

Finally, a life message is determined by perseverance. Anyone can be passionately and purposefully moved to do something for a time but enduring in that movement is much rarer. Jeremiah preached through the reigns of seven kings, through the degradation and eventual fall of Jerusalem. For some forty years he faithfully proclaimed the message of God.

¹⁰⁷ Jer 20:9b

¹⁰⁸ Jer 26:12-15

Perseverance is the test of all things including whether a passion will truly turn into a life message or will only be a briefly enjoyed infatuation. Gamaliel advised the Sanhedrin that perseverance would be the test of this new faith in Christ.¹⁰⁹ Paul argues that perseverance is how one's faith continues until the end, how one holds on to hope right up to the coming of Christ.¹¹⁰ Perseverance was even further evidence of the authenticity of an apostle.¹¹¹ Jeremiah persevered in his passion, purpose, and movement and so left a life message that will be remembered even into eternity.

By personally bearing a life message Jeremiah was “the weeping prophet” who put on display the heartbroken tenderness of the LORD. Jeremiah became the message of God's compassion even in judgment. The prophet's life was a picture of both the mercy and righteousness of God. In His mercy the LORD is torn to tears by the pain of His people, but His holiness requires that they be judged for their sins. The result is a heartsick God who communicates His messages to His people through a heartsick prophet.

Conclusion

Jeremiah shows the way to become the message. His calling was deeply personal; he experienced first-hand the suffering of his sermons, he also physically embodied the divine oracles in his own emotions and lifestyle, and he bore up a personal, life message over the length of his years that would become his legacy. Jeremiah is a helpful and robust example of what it means to bring a passage of Scripture into one's own chest and

¹⁰⁹ Acts 5:33-39

¹¹⁰ Rom 5:3-4; 8:23-25

¹¹¹ 2 Cor 12:12

then to bear that message out through life, limb, and total persona. The following chapter will take these observations concerning the calling, suffering, embodiment, and life message of Jeremiah and produce a plan to aid the expositor in his own process of becoming the message for his hearers.

CHAPTER 3

PLANNING THE PERSONAL

Introduction

Planning

It is the aim of this chapter to apply the concepts of personal involvement gleaned from the study of Jeremiah to the experience of the New Testament expositor. “The interpreter will want to be a knowing participant in the awakening of faith in his hearers, careful to function in harmony with the work of the Spirit.”¹¹² In what ways can the New Testament preacher relate to the Old Testament prophet and in what ways can he become the message as Jeremiah became the message in order to release the full power of the text of Scripture? The following pages will examine the correlation between the calling of the prophet and the calling of the expositor and will discuss a plan for personally suffering the message, embodying the message, and for carrying a life message. First, however, it must be settled that there is a sufficient parallel between Jeremiah and the expositor that justifies such a comparison and application.

Prophet and Preacher

Is it fair to draw an analogy between the Old Testament prophet and the New Testament preacher and/or pastor? The two callings are clearly dissimilar in some respects and yet akin in others. They are dissimilar in at least three regards. First, the LORD gives a promise of protection to Jeremiah in 1:8 that does not find an equal for the modern preacher. Though he goes through many trials at the hands of his enemies, the prophet is never executed by them but ultimately is vindicated for all his messages. The

¹¹²Wayne McDill, “Interpreting the New Testament for a Faith Response,” *Faith & Mission*, no.1 (Fall 1994), 94.

modern preacher on the other hand is made no such promise and his life may very well be required of him.¹¹³ Second, in Jeremiah 1:9 the LORD placed His words in the mouth of the prophet in a way that is distinct from the modern preacher. His words were the words, declarations, and oracles of the LORD. Whereas the modern preacher is given his words by God and should preach them as such, it is on a different level of inspiration and revelation.¹¹⁴ Finally, the way in which Jeremiah was to participate in the rise and fall of nations through his part in the Word of God is distinctly unique to his prophetic office. No modern expositor can claim to be “set over nations and kingdoms” in this way.¹¹⁵

The New Testament preaching ministry is akin to the Old Testament prophetic ministry in at least these three ways: first, the New Testament preacher is called by God to a difficult task; second, his message is the Word of God; and third, his whole person is involved in the ministry. Timothy, the young associate of the Apostle Paul, is a good example of this correlation between the prophet and the pastor/preacher. First, like Jeremiah, Timothy was called, set apart, and gifted for the difficult task of ministry. “Until I come, give your attention to public reading, exhortation, and teaching. Do not neglect the gift that is in you; it was given to you through prophecy, with the laying on of hands by the council of elders.”¹¹⁶ He also knew that such a task would not be easy (1 Tim 4:1-2), that it would require much patience and longsuffering (2 Tim 4:2), and that it would mean persecution (2 Tim 3:10-12). MacArthur states well that, “the minister of

¹¹³ See Mt 10:27-28.

¹¹⁴ See Mt 10:19-20 and 1 Peter 4:11.

¹¹⁵ See Jer 1:10.

¹¹⁶ 1 Tim 4:13-14

today, like the prophets of the Old Testament, are under constant attack and pressure as they speak of the things of God.”¹¹⁷ Once called to ministry, the preacher can expect “an exciting and rewarding but also an incredibly demanding life waiting for him. To cope with the incredible demands, he has the assurance of God’s help and empowerment.”¹¹⁸

Second, Timothy was charged with handling none other than the Word of God. The Scriptures were his message and he was compelled to preach them whether his hearers were receptive or not (2 Tim 4:1-5).

All Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for teaching, for rebuking, for correcting, for training in righteousness...Before God and Christ Jesus, who is going to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom, I solemnly charge you: proclaim the message; persist in it whether convenient or not; rebuke, correct, and encourage with great patience and teaching.¹¹⁹

With the Scriptures as his message and calling, Timothy was charged to preach in any and all circumstances in full view of the fact that such preaching and godliness would likely bring scorn, derision, persecution, and possibly even death. In this way, Timothy’s calling was similar to that of the Old Testament prophetic ministry.

Finally, like Jeremiah, Timothy was called to involve his whole person in his preaching ministry. The message was to become personally interwoven into the very fabric of his conscience and lifestyle. “Be conscientious about yourself and your teaching; persevere in these things, for by doing this you will save both yourself and your

¹¹⁷ MacArthur, *Pastoral Ministry*, 105.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 115.

¹¹⁹ 2 Tim 3:16; 4:1-2

hearers.”¹²⁰ Therefore, in order to complete the charge given him in 1 Timothy 3:16-4:2, Timothy had to allow the message to penetrate and invade his personal life.

Paul’s young associate could see from the experiences of his mentor that God would require much of him in the way of personal involvement. In fact, 2 Corinthians 12:7-10 is Paul’s testimony to the fact that God would have His servants personally weak in order to show forth His strength. There Paul explains, “But He said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.’ Therefore, I will most gladly boast all the more about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may reside in me...For when I am weak, then I am strong.”¹²¹ “This grace of Christ (13:14) was adequate for Paul, weak as he was, precisely because (gar, ‘for’) divine power finds its full scope and strength only in human weakness—the greater the Christian’s acknowledged weakness, the more evident Christ’s enabling strength (cf. Eph 3:16; Phil 4:13).”¹²² Through suffering, physical and spiritual struggles, pain, and other human weaknesses, God’s servants become strong showing off the mighty power of God. Therefore, His preachers can expect and indeed ought to pray for the power of God to be put on display through their weakness which comes about by way of personal suffering and struggle.

Therefore, in the following pages a parallel between Jeremiah and the New Testament expositor will be drawn on the basis of the above commonalities in order to develop a plan for the personal aspect of expository preaching. Both Jeremiah and the modern expositor face a difficult task, are compelled to preach the message of the Word

¹²⁰ 1 Tim 4:16

¹²¹ 2 Cor 12:9-10

¹²² Harold W. Mare and Murray J. Harris, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: 1 & 2 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 225.

of God, and inevitably experience the intertwining of their lives with their message. The ministry of the message in both the Old and New Testaments demands that the proclaimer himself become personally involved so that he might become the message. The following plan, then, is designed to bring the contemporary expositor into close, personal contact with each passage after the manner of Jeremiah in calling, suffering, embodiment, and life message.

Personal Is Part of the Calling

As previously discussed, personal is part of the calling for the New Testament expositor just as it was for the Old Testament prophet. The call to preach in the New Covenant era is not popular, can be dangerous, is most often heartbreaking, and always invasive. That it is unpopular, dangerous, heartbreaking, and invasive means that it is personal, that the preacher will experience things as a result of his calling that will affect him internally and externally, and will shape him both intellectually and emotionally. If he is called to preach the message of God and intends to fulfill that calling with integrity, then he will not be able to hide away any part of his life from the influence of such a personal calling. The purpose of this plan, however, is not only to accept this fact but to embrace it. Since personal is part of the calling, the expositor is required to meditate on each passage to discover how it fits into his personal calling.

The Calling to Preach Is Unpopular

No doubt, every Christian has a calling to preach in the sense that he must be a witness to the world of the things that he has seen and known about Christ, but what is in view in the following pages is the Lord's calling upon a man to preach vocationally, full-time, and as a life-long endeavor. All of the men of Israel were called to proclaim the

greatness of God (Ps 145:4-7) and to preach to their own families (Dt 6:6-9), but there were only some who received a recognizable and distinct calling to preach as a specific ministry to the nation (Ex 3:7-10; 1 Sam 3:10-18; Isa 6:1-13; Eze 2:1-5). All New Covenant Christians are called to proclaim the Gospel of Christ and to be ready with the truths of Scripture (Eph 6:15; 1 Pet 3:15), but there are only some who are called to preach as a specific ministry to the Body of Christ (Acts 9:4-6; 16:10; Rom 15:16; 1 Cor 9:14; Eph 4:11-13; 2 Tim 1:6-8). Those who receive this burden know that their greatest ministry and area of service to the church is through preaching the message of God.

Jesus made it plain that the calling to preach the message of Christ would not be a popular one. In fact, He warns His disciples that they should expect opposition, that they should plan on it. “You will be hated by everyone because of My name.”¹²³ “It is enough for a disciple to become like his teacher and a slave like his master. If they called the head of the house ‘Beelzebub,’ how much more the members of his household.”¹²⁴ Jesus wants His preachers to be prepared for the dislike and rejection associated with their calling and their message (Mt 10:14). He admonishes His disciples that as they bear His name and preach His message, they should expect to be treated as He was treated.

The reason for the unpopularity of the calling to preach is that Christ is the central point of all Old and New Testament expository preaching. Christ is the center of the Old Testament too? Yes, “since the heart of the New Testament is Jesus Christ, this means

¹²³ Mt 10:22

¹²⁴ Mt 10:25

that every message from the Old Testament must be seen in the light of Jesus Christ.”¹²⁵ To preach expositionally from a text of Scripture, then, is to preach Christ.¹²⁶ To preach Christ is to invite others to either build their lives upon Jesus or to stumble over Him. Unfortunately, most choose to stumble rather than to build.¹²⁷ “For the Jews ask for signs and the Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to the Jews and foolishness to the Gentiles.”¹²⁸

Oddly enough, Christ’s followers can read passages like the ones above and still enter their pulpits hoping and even expecting that their hearers will like them for preaching the messages of God. Every man wants to be liked and hopes that his friends and neighbors will enjoy having him around and be glad when he opens his mouth. The calling to preach, however, is very personal because it means that the expositor must expect to be often disliked and unpopular. In his sermon preparation time, the proclaimer must plan to personally let go of his deep desire to be liked and focus upon his text. His measure for success must not be his popularity but his responsible dispatch of the duty to faithfully proclaim God’s announcements.

¹²⁵ Sidney Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament: A Contemporary Hermeneutical Method* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 51.

¹²⁶ For a discussion on connecting an Old Testament text to Christ see Greidanus, *Preaching Christ*, 62, 279-292.

¹²⁷ Christ is offensive (Gal 5:11). He was destined to be the point of decision for every man even from birth (Lu 2:34). In other words, Jesus is God’s line drawn in the sand, His fork in the road so that all men will have to decide what to do with Him. Upon hearing the message people will be forced to make a decision. Such ultimatums are not very popular.

¹²⁸ 1 Cor 1:22-23

The Calling to Preach Is Dangerous

Like the calling of Jeremiah, the modern day expositor must recognize that his calling to preach can be dangerous. Holding and proclaiming His name, Jesus promises, will become a dangerous business. It will bring treachery even in one's most intimate circle of relationships. "Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child. Children will even rise up against their parents and have them put to death."¹²⁹

It was so linked to his view of his calling, that the Apostle Paul developed a ministry posture that expected danger. Peril was part of his Damascus Road experience and he was reminded of as much by the Holy Spirit throughout his preaching tours. "...in town after town the Holy Spirit testifies to me that chains and afflictions are waiting for me. But I count my life of no value to myself, so that I may finish my course and the ministry I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of God's grace."¹³⁰ In fact, hazards were marks of authenticity for the Apostle Paul. He considered himself a genuine preacher of Christ because he suffered as Christ did and was marked for it. He bore in his flesh the validation of his own faithfulness to his calling to be God's "chosen instrument to carry My name before Gentiles, kings, and the sons of Israel."¹³¹ "Are they servants of Christ?...I'm a better one: with far more labors, many more imprisonments, far worse beatings, near death many times."¹³²

¹²⁹ Mt 10:21

¹³⁰ Acts 20:23-24

¹³¹ Acts 9:15

¹³² 2 Cor 11:23

Peter and John quickly realized how dangerous their calling to preach and teach Jesus would be. They had only just begun their ministries of proclamation when they were persecuted. Luke explains that early on the apostles were ordered by the religious leaders “not to preach or teach at all in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John answered them, ‘Whether it’s right in the sight of God for us to listen to you rather than to God, you decide; for we are unable to stop speaking about what we have seen and heard.’”¹³³ However, they knew that God had called them to preach and their obedience to Him superseded any obedience they might have felt to the leaders of Israel.

The calling to preach is a personal calling because it requires men to put themselves and sometimes their own families into harm’s way. Jeremiah bore a message of impending doom to the people of Judah and so was seen as a traitor by officials and by kings. His messages were breaking the morale of the people which brought upon him the ire of their leaders and the danger of being killed. Nevertheless, it was his calling, his commission, and he could not yield. Therefore, in his sermon preparation time, the expositor must plan to personally let go of his instinctive desire for self-preservation and focus upon his text. He must develop the mental posture of Jeremiah, of Paul, of Peter, of John, and of Jesus who, knowing that they were called to a highly dangerous task, expected the danger and set their faces like flint toward their tasks (see Isa 50:7). The expositor cannot shudder at or shrink back from the message of his passage because it may put him into a hazardous situation. Instead, during his exegesis he must prepare

¹³³ Acts 4:18-20

himself to expect the dangerous situations that his text may lead him into and pray that God would “certainly show him how much he must suffer for My name!”¹³⁴

The Calling to Preach Is Heartbreaking

The modern preacher must become convinced that the calling upon him will not only make him unpopular and put him in danger but will also lead to personal heartache. He will feel the desire of God to see people saved and strengthened by a passage and when those people balk at the message it will frustrate and break the heart of the proclaimer. He will come to know the inner weight of the ministry that leaves its own emotional marks and scars upon his soul. “Not to mention other things, there is the daily pressure on me: my care for all the churches.”¹³⁵ The expositor is under pressure and stress to see his hearers experience life change and when he does not see that change it will bring him to new depths of distress. Paul expresses this when he writes, “I am fearful for you, that perhaps my labor for you has been wasted.”¹³⁶ On the other hand, when he witnesses a positive movement from his hearers it will send him to the heights of elation (see Phil 1:7).

Few vocations will affect the human heart the way the calling to preach will. Following such a calling brings one into deep, personal involvement with God, His message, and the audience. For this reason, one can expect great joy and great heartbreak. In his sermon preparation time, therefore, the expositor must plan to relinquish the guard he has placed upon his heart and allow it to bleed, burst, rise, and fall

¹³⁴ Here in Acts 9:16, the Lord used the fact of Saul’s future persecution to reassure Ananias that Saul was legitimate. Trouble is something of a badge of authenticity for the preacher (see 2 Tim 3:12).

¹³⁵ 2 Cor 11:28

¹³⁶ Gal 4:11

with his text. No matter the emotional intensity, the proclaimer will find that his obligation to preach will outweigh the heartbreak he experiences so that if he does preach, he may experience heartbreak but if he does not preach, then he will definitely experience even more. “For if I preach the gospel, I have no reason to boast, because an obligation is placed on me. And woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!”¹³⁷ So the expositor prepares for this by visualizing his hearers along with their hurts, needs, and pains and by meditating on the Lord who is hurting for His people but is hopeful that they will be positively moved by His message. The preacher identifies with both God and His people, looks them all in the eyes as he speaks, and allows himself to be moved by both compassion and indignation at the same time.

The Calling to Preach Is Invasive

From the outset of his sermon preparation time the expositor must recognize that the text with which he is dealing will want to invade not only his Sunday morning pulpit but also his personal, private, and family life. His calling to preach has predetermined the involvement of his wife and children. Jeremiah’s calling to become the message so invaded his private life that he had to refrain from the joys and blessings of marital life in order to communicate a message of dread and doom upon his people. The modern preacher may expect the same type of invasion.

Paul understood this necessary familial involvement when he admonished Timothy concerning the type of men who should serve in the pastoral-preaching positions of the church. The pastoral-preachers should be “one who manages his own household

¹³⁷ 1 Cor 9:16

competently, having his children under control with all dignity. (If anyone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of God's church?)”¹³⁸

The overseers of a church have the great responsibility of leading and feeding the church flock, and their family life will determine whether or not they are qualified for such ministry. In this way the calling to preach impacts the whole household in a personal way.

Simon Peter's wife and children understood how invasive the calling to preach was when they lost their husband and father to Roman persecution. Peter would simply not stop preaching the Gospel. Paul limited his own right to take a wife and family for the sake of the Gospel. “Don't we have the right to be accompanied by a Christian wife, like the other apostles, the Lord's brothers, and Cephas?...instead we endure everything so that we will not hinder the gospel of Christ.”¹³⁹ Peter and “the other apostles” personally suffered persecution with their families because of their calling to preach the Gospel to all nations while Paul limited himself in this very personal way so that he could focus on “the things of the Lord—how he may please the Lord.”¹⁴⁰ To take a family while in the service of Gospel preaching, therefore, has the potential of causing pain and, at the same time, it is painful to decide to have no family.¹⁴¹ In any case, the calling to preach invades the personal family life of the expositor and he must be prepared on a weekly basis for this invasion to impact himself, his wife, and his children.

¹³⁸ 1 Tim 3:5-6

¹³⁹ 1 Cor 9:5,12b

¹⁴⁰ 1 Cor 7:32

¹⁴¹ See 1 Cor 7:28, 33-34

Since this unpopular, dangerous, heartbreaking, and invasive calling is so intensely personal, the modern expositor must brace himself like Jeremiah and develop a posture that situates itself toward personal involvement. He must expect that each week his message may cause him loneliness, threats, frustration, and upheavals in his work and family life. In the weekly sermon preparation process, the expositor must first read his passage recognizing that he dwells directly in the midst of a calling that demands his entire person and the honor of full engagement. He must wrestle with his preaching passage, feel the friction of the Scripture, face it, and deal with it.

The modern preacher learns from Jeremiah to plan the personal by viewing each Scripture passage in the context of his own personal calling to preach. He reads his passage and reaffirms these four truths: (1) I am called to let this text make me unpopular; (2) I am called to let this text put me in danger; (3) I am called to let this text break my heart; and (4) I am called to let this text change myself and my family.¹⁴² Then, he answers the following corresponding questions: (1) How might this text make me unpopular? (2) How might this text put me in danger? (3) How might this text break my heart? and (4) How might this text change myself and my family? In this way, he develops a posture which faces and embraces the personal aspect of each passage of Scripture from the foundation of his personal calling to preach.

¹⁴² Appendix B contains an overview of the plan for exegeting the personal aspect of a passage. When this plan is added to the plan in Appendix A for exegeting the literary, historical, theological, redemptive, and homiletical aspects of a passage, then the expository sermon preparation plan is finally complete.

Planning to Personally Suffer the Message

Personal Experience

For the text to have its greatest impact upon the hearers, the expositor himself must first suffer its message. “The preacher must first let the developing message sift through his own thinking and life before he can preach it.”¹⁴³ He will need a plan in place so as to be certain that he has fully suffered the content of his passage. When he, like Jeremiah, becomes entangled with his own sermon, wrestling with it and working it out in his own life, then its life-changing power will be more greatly revealed and released upon his congregation. He can personally suffer or “wear” the message by relating his experiences to it, by observing how it challenges him, how it causes him pain, and by walking through each point of the message in unhurried prayer.

At this point, the expositor must be intentional about bringing his own personal experiences to bear upon his sermon preparation.¹⁴⁴ He must find a link between his own life and the life-changing power of the Spirit’s passage. He must build into his sermon preparation a plan to reflect upon how he has himself experienced the meaning of the message. If the message is about joy, then he must relate his own joy experiences. If the message is about doubt, then he must connect his own struggles with doubt. Vines and Shaddix encourage, “If you have known significant heartbreak in your own life, allow that experience to keep your heart pliable.”¹⁴⁵ The preacher must meditate on how he has

¹⁴³ MacArthur, *Preaching*, 15.

¹⁴⁴ Note that it is only during the exegesis of the personal aspect of the text, the final stage of the sermon preparation plan, that such experiences are intentionally brought into the process. This reduces the risk of subjectivity.

¹⁴⁵ Vines and Shaddix, *Power*, 352.

experienced all or part of the message of his passage at some point in his life. Such experiences are valuable and as Sanders argues, “scars are the authenticating marks of faithful discipleship and true spiritual leadership.”¹⁴⁶

In a sermon on Ezra 3:8-13 where the homiletical idea was “Drown the way it was in new wine,” this pastor connected the passage’s emphasis upon letting praise for the new works of God drown out the memory and sentiment of the former works of God. In preparation for this sermon the preacher explored some of the heartbreak that he had experienced over the loss of much of his childhood experience. In his childhood he grew up on a farm with his parents, grandparents, great-grandmother, aunt, uncle, and cousin. He played freely on two hundred acres of fields, woods, and creeks. In those younger years he could walk quietly and freely on acres and acres of lonely wood stopping to pray under oaks and hemlocks. God grew him in many ways during that former work, but God is also doing a new work. The LORD brought him to Stephens City, Virginia and made those neighborhoods, streets, and parks his new “wood.” God does new works and Christians are to praise Him more for those new works than they are to weep for the old works. Connecting this heartache and memory from his past helped the pastor to preach the text in a more personal way.

In a sermon on the purpose and value of the church as God’s Great Commission disciple-making machine from Matthew 28:18-20 and Ephesians 4:11-16, this pastor found in his own experience his disappointment with the local church but how these two passages of Scripture place the church in high regard. His own experience created a tension with the text at this point because pastors know very well the shortcomings and

¹⁴⁶ J. Oswald Sanders, *Spiritual Leadership*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994), 116.

failings of a congregation. Nevertheless, the Spirit declares plainly that the church is both the product of the Great Commission and the means by which the Great Commission is fulfilled. Matthew 28:18-20 makes clear that the Master's final command was to go and make disciples. Then, the Book of Acts and the rest of the New Testament is about churches. The disciples were commissioned to make more disciples, to make more people like Christ, so they went out and started churches, cared for churches, wrote letters to church, and ministered to churches. They did this because they believed that the church is God's disciple-making machine. Ephesians 4:11-16 shows that the church with its Spiritual Gifts, experiences, and accountability is the mechanism that Jesus put in place to make disciples. This means that though church life can be disappointing and even painful, it is the one divine program uniquely designed to fulfill the Great Commission and God believes in it very much. Therefore, the pastor had to identify his own negative and disappointing experiences and compare those to the truths of his message.

In his sermon preparation plan, the expositor must analyze his text according to how it relates to his experiences. Here he must ask and answer the question, "How have I personally experienced the life and message of this text or how am I experiencing it right now?" He simply finds an area in his life from the past or from the present that identifies with the passage under study. He answers this question in as little as one sentence typed into his sermon preparation outline. If his passage concerns faith in the promises of God, then the expositor takes note of great events or current events in his life that require faith in the promises of God. If his passage concerns marital crisis, then he records any moments of marital crisis that he has experienced in his life. If his passage speaks to lust,

then the expositor writes down moments of overcoming or being overcome by lust. This forces the preacher to evaluate his life situations and appreciate them as moments for which his passage was made.

Personal Challenge

Every text of Scripture will challenge the messenger himself in a personal way. Vines and Shaddix suggest preaching “your sermons to yourself first, in the presence of the Lord. Then, when you stand to preach, your message will not come merely from your notes or from your mind but from the depths of your heart and from God’s Spirit.”¹⁴⁷ As he reads and turns his passage over in his mind, the preacher will feel the challenging pull of his verses. They will defy him in some way that will force him to personal repentance and on to greater Spiritual growth.

On one occasion, the sermon text for the week was 1 Samuel 2:1-10, the desperate prayer of Hannah for a child, and just as he began his sermon preparation work the LORD made the preacher desperate. There are always ministry challenges but this week it seemed to the pastor that all of the weight and burden of the church’s financial situation and its mild attendance numbers came to bear upon his shoulders. All at once, he felt a great despair and desperation for God and knew that only He could help the bleak situation. He poured his heart out in prayer and heard no word from the LORD so the pastor went back to his computer to continue his work on 1 Samuel 2:1-10. As he worked through the passage he discovered that God had brought those pastoral challenges into his life to help him identify with the personal despair and agony of Hannah whose

¹⁴⁷ Vines and Shaddix, *Power*, 350.

song and whose pain he was exegeting. God wants His people desperate for Him especially in the midst of challenges.

At this point, the expositor must pause and ask himself, “In what ways does this message challenge me?” Does it challenge his faith, his ethics, or maybe his behavior? Does it challenge his prayer life? Perhaps a particular text presents a challenge to the Spiritual friendships of the preacher. In any case, as he exegetes a passage he is careful to note the extent to which his own personal experience compares to that admonished in his study. The greater the disparity found here, the greater the challenge.

Personal Pain

Every sermon passage confronts sin, admonishes faith, corrects behavior, or envisions the person of God in comparison to the character of man, and therefore holds the possibility of causing much personal pain. Human beings can be expected to become emotionally involved with the divine message because it always speaks to the deep issues of the heart, and the modern expositor must be the first to allow this kind of personal and painful penetration of the text. He must plan to become what Vines and Shaddix refer to as a “heart preacher,” and “heart preaching issues forth from a broken heart.”¹⁴⁸ He must plan to bear every message out of his heart or experience rather than just out of his intellect or theory. “The preacher must not communicate merely the contents of a message; he must also communicate his own heartbeat.”¹⁴⁹ Jeremiah felt a profound pain over his message. “My heart is broken within me, and all my bones tremble. I have

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 347.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 348.

become like a drunkard, like a man overcome by wine, because of the LORD, because of His holy words.”¹⁵⁰

In his sermon preparation plan, the expositor must ask himself, “In what ways does this message hurt me?” Perhaps the passage aims to convict its hearers of lust, and if the preacher has fallen to that temptation, then he should allow himself to be hurt by that Scripture. James actually prescribes such a response in his epistle when he writes, “Be miserable and mourn and weep. Your laughter must change to mourning and your joy to sorrow. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and He will exalt you.”¹⁵¹

Whenever the Bible speaks to the brevity of human life it almost always causes the preacher pain for he knows that he has spent hours doing things that will not matter in eternity. However the passage speaks, the proclaimer will need to bow down before it and meditate on how it intends to cause him personal pain for his own good. In this way, he attempts to get the personal pain of his text into the deep places of his heart.

In a sermon on Judges 5:12-23 where the homiletical idea was that Christians must “Get in on the win” the pastor communicated a point of Deborah’s song concerning the shame that is upon those who do not join in on the battle. In order to personally feel the writer’s disgust over those who do not join the battle he watched several scenes from the movie “Saving Private Ryan.” In this film Corporal Hopem has the opportunity to save the lives of his friends but becomes frozen in fear and, although he is fully armed, does nothing. Watching the film helped the preacher to experience some of the personal pain within the passage as well as refresh his memory since the movie scene would also

¹⁵⁰ Jer 23:9

¹⁵¹ Ja 4:9

serve as an illustration in the sermon. The expositor will need to use creativity and imagination in a fervent effort to experience the full force of his text on his inner experiences, especially if that means a painful experience.

Personal Prayer

“Though God uses man as His agent, He never intends him to operate independently.”¹⁵² For this reason, the expositor must take time to seek divine assistance in suffering the message. Another essential element in the personal aspect of sermon preparation is prayer. The expositor must take time to suffer the message of his text during a time of intense prayer. “While the Word of God is innately living and powerful, it is only vitalized in the preacher’s heart through unhurried prayer.”¹⁵³ Such vitalization occurs through two phases of prayer. First, the pastor talks through the challenges, pain, and personal experience of his passage to the LORD. Second, he prays through the outline, homiletical idea, and application of his sermon on behalf of his hearers. In the first phase of this prayer plan, the preacher meets with the Holy Counselor to ask for His help in becoming His message. He is concerned primarily with himself. Then, in the second phase of this prayer plan, the prayers of the preacher are intercessory concerned primarily with his hearers. He wants the Holy Spirit to use the message of His Word to redeem, restore, and heal. He wants some to come to salvation, others to come to repentance, and still others to find refreshment and strength. McDill argues that in this

¹⁵² McDill, “Faith Response,” 94.

¹⁵³ Jim Shaddix, *The Passion Driven Sermon: Changing the Way Pastors Preach and Congregations Listen* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2003), 151.

prayer time the expositor "...prays for his own faith to be awakened, and for the Spirit to use that message to awaken the faith of others."¹⁵⁴

As difficult as it is for the modern pastor, these two phases should be accomplished in an unhurried way. It takes time in prayer to finally break through the cares and worries of ministry. It takes unhurried time in prayer to finally reach the place where the mind of the preacher is quiet and his heart is still. Only then will he know the deep workings of the Spirit in making his passage personal. In this time the expositor may have the company of the Master as he wrestles with the challenges, suffers the pain, or reflects on the personal experiences brought to life by his passage. Though it takes time, personal prayer must be a fixture in the plan to become the message because even after all of his preparation, prayer is still the only real hope that he has that his sermon will change a life. "Do not allow the sacred truths you handle weekly to become unfelt truths. Let your sermons take possession of your heart on your knees before the Lord. Let their substance become real in your own experience."¹⁵⁵

The text becomes more personal to the expositor as he learns to personally suffer its message. He lowers himself before those holy pages acknowledging that this text will touch his personal experiences, will challenge him, will hurt him, and will drive him into prayer. For that reason he readies himself with three preparatory questions and one practice. First, how have I personally experienced the life and message of this text or how am I experiencing it right now? Second, in what ways does this message challenge me? Third, in what ways does this message hurt me? Fourth, take time for unhurried

¹⁵⁴ McDill, "Faith Response," 94.

¹⁵⁵ Vines and Shaddix, *Power*, 350.

prayer through the points of this message. When he follows this plan to “wear” the message himself relating his experiences to it, being challenged by it, being hurt by it, and praying through it, then he is another step closer to becoming the message, to releasing the text upon his hearers in full, life-changing power. If his passage causes him to suffer, even if only a little, then the preacher has begun to follow the way of the weeping prophet. The preacher has followed a sermon preparation plan that has considered the deeply personal nature of his calling as well as the required suffering of the message, but now he must plan to embody that message.

Planning to Personally Embody the Message

By embodying his messages Jeremiah reflected the heart of God in his own person. In the same way, the expositor must plan to personally embody his Scripture text. When he becomes the message, “the preacher not only delivers his sermon; he also delivers himself.”¹⁵⁶ As with Jeremiah, the LORD does not intend merely to use the pastor as an uninvolved conduit of His message, but as one through whom God can personally communicate. The preacher will not just plan to disseminate biblical information but also to exemplify the Scriptural message by the clearest and most obvious means possible. He will explore ways to support his text visually through gestures and objects. He will plan to embody and authenticate his message through change of lifestyle and weekly practice. Finally, the preacher will plan to support the forceful delivery of his passage through the divine emotions and passion of the message.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 352.

Embodying the Gestures of the Message

The example of Jeremiah suggests the use of motions and objects in the delivery of the message. The ability to use hand motions, facial expressions, and to communicate with various postures is no new invention of drama. “[The prophets] undoubtedly used a wide range of bodily movements including arm and hand gestures, facial expressions and eye movements to emphasize and dramatize points of their messages.”¹⁵⁷ The ancient prophetic communicators made good use of everything at hand including their own bodies in order to convey the distress, joy, comfort, anger, and overall heart of the message. Therefore, it is difficult to overestimate the value of appropriate gestures in sermonizing.

In a sermon on 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1, the congregation saw the preacher gesture to the right and to the left in referring to the incompatibles that Paul mentions in 6:14-16: believers and unbelievers, righteousness and lawlessness, darkness and light, Christ and Belial, sanctuary and idols. His gestures supported the truth that each of these sets was in different places, was distinct from one another, was separated. Later, hearers watched as the preacher opened his arms wide when talking about how the LORD *welcomes* those who “come out from among them.”¹⁵⁸

At this point, the expositor must ask himself, “What kinds of hand or bodily gestures do I need to use more often in the delivery of this message?” In his sermon preparation plan, the expositor must think about gestures as he is reading his passage. He might imagine seeing Paul pacing as he dictates a sermon to his amanuensis. What

¹⁵⁷ Friebe, *Sign-Acts*, 11.

¹⁵⁸ 2 Cor 6:17

gestures might he be using? What is the look on his face? How has he shaped his posture? Visualizing the text in this way helps to discover gestures in the passage that help make it come alive. Many passages come inspired with such gestures. For example, in Luke 18:9-14 a preacher can easily make a gesture for those who “looked down on everyone else.”¹⁵⁹ Then, he stands with hands and head raised toward Heaven as he exposes 18:11-12 but falls to his knees and even on his face as he explains 18:13. In such passages gestures are very important for with them the speaker can communicate in a visual and memorable way the difference between pride and humility, the emphatic contrast bound to the key message of the passage, simply by his posture. In doing so, he communicates more than just a lesson. “By means of his voice, his gestures, his intellect, and his heart, the preacher lays before the throne of God and the hearts of the people his very life.”¹⁶⁰ Gestures are another means of becoming the message through the personalization of the text.

Embodying the Objects of the Message

“The majority of Jeremiah and Ezekiel’s sign-acts involved either gestures or movements of the body as part of the communicated messages or bodily motions in conjunction with the use of an artifact.”¹⁶¹ Prophetic preachers in both the Old and New Testaments employed the use of objects in their message-giving.¹⁶² These objects were designed to support the message and enhance its ability to persuade. This includes sign

¹⁵⁹ Lu 18:9

¹⁶⁰ Vines and Shaddix, *Power*, 352.

¹⁶¹ Friebe, *Sign-Acts*, 394.

¹⁶² See the example of Agabus in Acts 21:10-11.

acts, the category of prophetic communication discussed earlier in this paper. Where passages are inspired with objects and sign acts already within their verses, the expositor must plan to use those sign acts making appropriate contextual adaptations for the sake of cultural relevance. Still, many passages do not carry their own sign acts or objects. Therefore the preacher must look for ideas, metaphors, and items around him that will both serve as a communication tool appropriate for the message and relate clearly to the audience. “Simple objects can grab attention, clarify truth, and make your teaching unforgettable at little cost to you in terms of time and energy.”¹⁶³

This pastor articulated the homiletical idea of 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1 using the metaphor of fire since the LORD often uses that symbol to represent Himself. He stated it this way: “The fire of separation brings us closer to God’s warmth.” The message of that text is designed to admonish and exhort hearers to separate themselves from worldliness and sin. The large campfire that the pastor built in the center of the stage (see Figure 1) symbolized the fiery presence of God, and moving closer toward that fire symbolized separation. Therefore, as men separate themselves from the cold dark of sin to draw closer to the fire of God’s presence they feel the warmth of His great love and care for them (2 Cor 6:17-7:1). In this case fire serves as a concrete object representing the presence of God, the idea of warmth as a metaphor for divine love and care, and movement toward or away from that fiery object as a metaphor for the Spiritual condition. Nevertheless, it was the fire that most enhanced the message becoming

¹⁶³ Rick Blackwood, *The Power of Multi-Sensory Preaching and Teaching: Increase Attention, Comprehension, and Retention* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 137.

ensconced in the minds of the congregation as a visual representation of 2 Corinthians 6:17-7:1.



Figure 1. The campfire

In his sermon preparation the expositor, therefore, must plan to personalize his message through objects by asking himself, “Are there any objects or sign acts involved in this text or are there sign acts that I might do to illustrate this message?” Jeremiah did not shy away from writing scrolls, purchasing land, breaking pottery, or wearing a yoke. “God was using Jeremiah as a walking three-dimensional visual object lesson to teach Israel a truth.”¹⁶⁴ No doubt with a little creativity the twenty-first century proclaimer will discover modern equivalents of such objects and many more. Carrying these types of objects into the pulpit with him will help him to embody the message making it easier for his hearers to understand and remember the meaning of the passage. The use of such objects should be taken seriously as Jeremiah reveals that visual illustrations and the whole visual/dramatic feature of message-giving are not just sermon helps to keep the message interesting; they can be a crucial part of what it means to rightly and fully expose the Word of God.

¹⁶⁴ Blackwood, *Multi-Sensory*, 77.

Embodying the Message in Practice during the Week

“The end game of God’s Word is not just to make us smart or theologically astute but rather to effect change.”¹⁶⁵ This is true for both the congregation and the pastor. In order for him to embody the kind of messages that will have the greatest potential of moving his hearers to a positive response, the expositor must plan to practice the meaning of his message himself before he hopes to convince his audience of its application. Indeed “the most powerful sermons are forged out of the heart of a preacher who has sought to live out the principle of the text in the week or weeks prior to its presentation.”¹⁶⁶ The message demands that its messengers “accept its overwhelming challenge personally and, by His grace, live as examples before His sheep and a scrutinizing world ready to level the accusation of hypocrisy.”¹⁶⁷

Here the expositor must pause to ask himself, “What does this passage want me to do this week in order to practice its message myself?” A message on Matthew 28:18-20 must be preceded by personal witnessing. A message on Hebrews 10:19-39 must be preceded by exhortations to the brotherhood. A message on Exodus 29:38-46 about the divine desire to “camp out” with men might be preceded by a personal time of communion with the LORD at some special, quiet place. The Holy Spirit will lead in the type of practice that the expositor should employ for that text, but it is important for the sermon preparation plan that the sermon be completed early enough in the week to allow

¹⁶⁵ Keith Willhite, Scott M. Gibson, and Haddon W. Robinson, *The Big Idea of Biblical Preaching: Connecting the Bible to People* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998), 126.

¹⁶⁶ Willhite, Gibson, and Robinson, *The Big Idea*, 144.

¹⁶⁷ MacArthur, *Pastoral Ministry*, 280.

for this kind of practice. Robinson and Larson agree, “Before preaching, I need to provide enough time and opportunity for God to affect every element of my personal makeup: my mind, emotions, body, and will.”¹⁶⁸

Embodying the Message for a Change of Lifestyle

While the expositor must put his message into practice during the week prior to his Sunday delivery, he must also find ways to apply his text permanently to his lifestyle. In this way, the passage makes a long-lasting personal impression upon the preacher. He is able to say after years of preaching in this way that the text has truly changed him and changed the way he lives. “A minister of the Word, when faithful to his calling, in every way becomes just that—one in whom the Word has absolute sway, even to the point of great personality change in him.”¹⁶⁹ Each week, each passage of Scripture adds to, takes away from, or changes some part of the proclaimer’s lifestyle so that week-by-week and year-by-year he becomes his message more and more. He may work on one passage that requires only a small change to his current living but that is still an important change. On the other hand, the change may be great and difficult altering him in a significant way. Both he, his family, and his congregation will be able to see that this is a man who practices what he preaches, who becomes his message.

In *Laugh Again*, Chuck Swindoll describes very personally and joyfully his experience of buying a Harley Davidson in the later part of his life. He and his wife were both a bit giddy and even apprehensive about the idea of becoming “the motorcycle type,” but they bought it anyway and came alive. He describes the freedom of the air and

¹⁶⁸ Robinson and Larson, *Art & Craft*, 551.

¹⁶⁹ Jay Edward Adams, *Preaching with Purpose: the Urgent Task of Homiletics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, Ministry Resources Library, 1982), 155.

the open road and the happiness that he, his wife, and their son have as they take a cruise. His message in *Laugh Again* is a message of learning to “lighten up,” to be free, and to laugh again. He was able to preach this message more powerfully because he lived it; it came from his heart. Swindoll has a laughing and light heart. Such is his lifestyle. The LORD gave him a motorcycle life situation so that he could better preach and apply the message of laughter and joy. Such a message comes across naturally and unforced by the man who smiles sitting astride his two-wheeled fun machine.

Therefore, in his sermon preparation plan the expositor will ask himself, “How does this passage want to change my lifestyle?” He will reflect on his current lifestyle and take note of things that may be contrary to the point of his message for that week and so need to be permanently removed or things that may parallel his message but need to be accentuated in his lifestyle to a greater extent. For example, he cannot preach a message on the value of unhurried prayer when his lifestyle is one of constant hurry and impatience. A preacher cannot proclaim the truth of Deuteronomy 6:1-11:32 that family is how the blessing of God remains on a people while his family is falling apart and he spends little time with them. Neither can he preach the message of Luke 20:20-26 about how Jesus did not come to overthrow but to infuse if he is not personally involved in preaching the Gospel and expanding the Kingdom through his own spheres of influence. In order for him to become the message and to preach it with all integrity, the expositor must plan to make, on a weekly basis, permanent changes to his lifestyle.

Embodying the Divine Emotions of the Message

“[God] motivates us through awe of His immensity, fear of His holiness, confidence of His goodness, and joy of His grace. Pathos is crucial, not incidental, to

God's communication."¹⁷⁰ Every passage of Scripture is alive with divine emotions. One can feel the hope of Jeremiah's message to stay in the land in Jeremiah 42 and God's anger toward His people for their sins committed in Egypt in Jeremiah 44. The reader can feel the desperation in Hannah's prayer for a child in 1 Samuel 1:1-18 and her elation when she has her prayer answered in 2:1-10. The Holy Spirit goes to lengths to communicate such emotions through the Scripture He has inspired because "feelings are the common denominator of us all."¹⁷¹

If, in fact, divine emotions and feelings are part of the Scripture, they must be exposed along with the rest of the content of a passage. The faithful preacher must himself seek to embody those divine emotions as he becomes the message for his hearers. "We simply need to add a few more questions to our checklist when doing exegesis: 'What is God trying to do with this text,' and 'How does pathos help achieve that goal?' We should ask not only 'What does it mean,' but also 'How does it make me feel?' Identification of the mood is the first step toward communication of that mood, and the next step is to embody the mood in delivery."¹⁷²

"Delivery will take care of itself to a great extent when you allow yourself to feel, or experience, the emotional impact of what the content is teaching."¹⁷³ In order to embody such inspired emotions the expositor must reflect on the question, "What emotions do I need to communicate in the delivery of this message that reflect the divine

¹⁷⁰ Robinson and Larson, *Art & Craft*, 592.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 561.

¹⁷² Ibid., 593.

¹⁷³ Adams, *Purpose*, 154.

emotions within the text?” If there is anger within the passage, then the sermon ought to be preached with anger. If there is comfort within the passage, then the sermon ought to be preached with comfort. Jeremiah was “the weeping prophet” because his messages were predominantly negative predicting the doom and judgment to come. In Revelation 5:1-14 the divine emotions of the text move from despair to relief and from relief to joy. The expositor must note that movement and seek to reflect it in his emotions during the delivery of the sermon. This practice will keep the preacher personally close to his passage and help to expose more of its persuasive power.

Embodying the Passion of the Message

“The final word about exposition, regardless of whether or not you augment your message creatively or preach without notes, must be given to the need for passion—heart—in the preaching event.”¹⁷⁴ The Holy Spirit has infused holy passion and divine unction into each and every passage of Scripture. “Unction seems to live in God-given messages, as fire dwells in lava. The fire is in the message and the warning to the preacher is not to let it cool.”¹⁷⁵ The expositor must have a plan in place to identify that passion and communicate it to his hearers.

In order to identify the passion with which the Holy Spirit has inspired a passage, one must see that passage within its larger redemptive context. This is vital work because the passion of a text is almost always drawn from its connection to the LORD’s redemptive pursuits. God wants every hearer in every age to read Scripture, interpret Scripture, preach Scripture, and obey Scripture only through the filter of His obsession

¹⁷⁴ Vines and Shaddix, *Power*, 347.

¹⁷⁵ Robinson and Larson, *Art & Craft*, 82.

with the healing and restoration of the human race. The divine passion is a redemptive passion, a passion to help human beings come back to a right relationship with the Father.

During his exegetical plan¹⁷⁶ the preacher will analyze the redemptive aspect of his text which will help him locate his passage in the broader sweep of biblical redemptive history. He must take what he finds from the redemptive aspect analysis and bring it into the personal aspect by purposing to make the passion of the text his passion. As he listens to the Scripture under analysis he will hear in it the passion of God to use that Scripture to bring about a redeeming work in a specific way. For example, in Exodus 17:1-7 God purposefully leads His people to a thirsty place in order to teach them to trust Him and to thirst for Him especially when their surroundings challenge their faith in the goodness of God. The Israelites will need to learn this lesson and to learn it well in order to stay close to the LORD through the many obstacles they will face as they journey to the Promised Land. The God of Israel was passionate about closeness with His people. He was zealous for their dependence because it was for His own glory and for their own good. Every week the preacher must see the passion of his passage, let that passion enter his own heart, and then communicate it in his delivery.

The best way to communicate the passion of a passage is to develop week-by-week a clear vision of what is at stake in the text. Here the expositor must stop and answer the question, “What is at stake in this message and why should that make my delivery more passionate?” For example, from a message on Exodus 17:1-7 hearers will either learn to depend upon God in the thirsty places of their lives or they may look elsewhere for help during times of trial and so become shipwrecked in their faith. The

¹⁷⁶ See Appendix A below.

stakes of such a message are high requiring a higher level of urgency and fervor in preaching.

Another means for communicating the passion of a passage is to envision the needs of the hearers. Planning to preach with passion might also lead the pastor to walk into his worship center where he can picture the faces of those who will be seated there on Sunday. He might envision the husband who has just gone through a terrible divorce who is seated on the third row with his frightened children. He may picture a woman who is emotionally wounded by an abortion that she regrets having years ago. He can see the young and old who are living in high-handed rebellion against God and others whose love for Jesus has grown cold. Walking down the aisles and around the seats he might visualize those who are lost but looking for hope seated beside those who are lost but do not even know it or care to know it. They all desperately need to hear from God. They need the LORD to change them, and God intends preaching to meet such a need. “For since, in God’s wisdom, the world did not know God through wisdom, God was pleased to save those who believe through the foolishness of the message preached.”¹⁷⁷ “Remember that expositors have a mandate from God to preach the truth and that eternal consequences hang in the balance.”¹⁷⁸ The preacher proclaims the message and hearers are saved or condemned based upon their response to that message.

One final means of embodying the passion of the text is to practice personal evangelism. Every passage is infused with the LORD’s zeal to save the human race through His message of truth. “You cannot expect to mount the pulpit on Sunday with

¹⁷⁷ 1 Cor 1:21

¹⁷⁸ MacArthur, *Preaching*, 323.

passion if you have not been about His first business personally during the week.”¹⁷⁹

Making His first business one’s own first business will link the passion of the text with the passion of the preacher.

When the expositor has a deep grasp of what is at stake in his sermon—someone may be saved by hearing it, another may repent and return to their spouse, or someone may receive the encouragement they need to walk in faith another day—the passion will come out in his preaching. When he stands in the pulpit looking into those hurting faces feeling the zeal of God to heal those individuals,¹⁸⁰ he will preach with unction. When he knows that preaching mingled with the inner working of the Holy Spirit is their only hope of connecting with God’s healing, he will preach with power. When he practices the primary aim of every text—redemption—through personal witnessing, then he will preach with passion. Therefore, he must make it a part of his exegetical plan to identify and communicate the redemptive passion of his message evaluating and feeling just what is at stake, envisioning his needy and desperate audience, and practicing the redemptive passion himself. The preacher will personally embody the passion of the passage when he sees heaven and hell in the balance in every sermon.

Planning to personally embody the message of a passage is challenging and exciting. It requires thought, prayer, and creativity. Becoming the message for his hearers will require the expositor to embody his text, to demonstrate or exemplify the Scriptural message by the clearest and most obvious means possible. He asks six

¹⁷⁹ Vines and Shaddix, *Power*, 350.

¹⁸⁰ Healing is not always or even often a pleasant experience. The LORD may heal them by breaking them (see Ja 4:8-10).

questions of himself: First, what kinds of hand or bodily gestures do I need to use more often in the delivery of this message? Second, are there any objects or sign acts involved in this text or are there sign acts that I might do to illustrate this message? Third, what emotions do I need to communicate in the delivery of this message that reflect the divine emotions within the text? Fourth, what does this passage want me to do this week in order to practice its message myself? Fifth, how does this passage want to change my lifestyle? Sixth, what is at stake in this message and why should that make my delivery more passionate? As the proclaimer follows this plan to embody the message of his sermon text through gestures, objects, personal practice, lifestyle change, divine emotions, and passion, he draws closer to the text allowing it to become more personal and releasing more of its life changing potency.

Planning to Personally Bear a Life Message

“There is no doubt that our lives are the most important sermon that we preach.”¹⁸¹ It is important to be mindful that through the preaching of every sermon the LORD may be building a life message in the expositor. Just as Jeremiah and other preachers mentioned above left a life-long legacy, so also God may be developing a specific prophetic emphasis in the modern expositor. In order to take full advantage of this last and ultimate aspect of becoming the message, the preacher must first discover, then develop, and finally use his life message. No doubt this type of personal discovery will require keen observation over several years of persistent and faithful preaching. However, the following plan will help guide the expositor in the process.

¹⁸¹ Willhite, Gibson, and Robinson, *The Big Idea*, 127.

Discovering a Life Message

During his sermon preparation plan and personal worship time, the expositor must ask, “What is my life message?” Passion, purpose, and perseverance will answer that question. First, “passion provides an unrelenting sense of one’s identity and why he or she is alive.”¹⁸² A passionate preacher is a pleasure to see and hear because he is genuine in his appeal, and his delivery is moving. “It is unthinkable that the preacher who believes and preaches these truths should be dull, boring, or apathetic.”¹⁸³ Every expositor must make time to explore the passion aspect of his divine design. Through life experiences God builds into His saints deep, moving desires. These desires of the heart are not superficial so they take time to investigate. First, the preacher should take note of all the things he is most excited about in life. Then, he considers any deeper desires actually motivating that excitement. Among these deeper desires he will find his passion. For example, a pastor may be excited about preaching his Sunday morning sermons, but after some more extensive probing he discovers that he is excited about his preaching because he aches to see hearers awaken to the glory of God. In this case, even more than preaching, his passion might be worship.

Dave Earley asks his students the question, “Who are you and why do you exist?”¹⁸⁴ Finding the answer to this question is a life changing experience. It guides and measures one’s life purpose (see below). Living a life that reflects Christ, working to see others worship Jesus, and living an adventure worth one’s very soul are all passion

¹⁸² Earley, *Toolkit*, 43.

¹⁸³ Vines and Shaddix, *Power*, 351.

¹⁸⁴ Earley, *Toolkit*, 47.

statements. In his sermon preparation time the expositor must remind himself of his passion. If he can write his primary passion down in one memorable sentence it, it will be beneficial to the rest of the sermon preparation process.

After he has discovered his passion, the speaker looks into his purpose. “Vision, or purpose, is a picture of a preferred future told in the present.”¹⁸⁵ Whereas passion is the burning desire that fuels one’s existence, purpose is the direction that one takes to fulfill that desire. After he has discovered his passion, the preacher should ask himself how that passion might be accomplished and then write a statement that clearly and accurately expresses that purpose. For example, one’s passion may be working to see others worship Jesus, but his purpose is to preach messages and lead Sunday services. The purpose gives direction to the deeper desire of worship. One’s passion may be living an adventure worth one’s very soul, but his purpose is to radically church everyone that he can reach in his ministry area. In this case, disciple-making is the worthy adventure.

It is important to bear in mind that one may not always readily embrace his purpose. The account of Jeremiah reveals a man who fulfilled his purpose in his lifetime. However, there were times when the prophet resisted. The lack of corroborating divine judgment embarrassed him to the extent that he attempted to hold back the message of God, to thwart his calling, but it was no use.¹⁸⁶ The expositor who has discovered and begun to use his purpose may expect moments of regret and feelings of dismay. If he has truly discovered his purpose, however, he will be compelled to persevere even through those times to fulfill his calling.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., 54.

¹⁸⁶ Jer 19:8-9

Once the expositor has discovered what most deeply moves him—passion—and the direction in which he must move—purpose—it is time for him to actually make the movement. Here he will set goals and priorities for himself to make his passion and purpose come alive in his daily routine. A pastor whose passion is to do something great and whose purpose is to make disciples of his ministry area will need to orient his schedule and agenda accordingly. He will place himself in the path of lost people and organize himself and his ministry around the task of disciple-making by planning door-to-door evangelism events, missions events, and implementing a discipleship process in his church. In this way, the preacher moves toward accomplishing his passion and purpose.

Genuine passion, the kind that is stored within the deep places of the soul, will lead to perseverance. Life messages are determined by perseverance so if he has correctly discovered his passion and purpose and if he has put those into motion in his daily life, then as he perseveres in this movement the expositor will recognize his life message. Should his passion and purpose wane, he will know that he has either fallen victim to laziness or that he has misread his passion.

Daily perseverance in the practice of passionate purpose will lead the individual to embody those godly things by which he is most moved. The continued practice of this lifestyle will manifest a life message which will remain basically consistent throughout the course of his life. That life message will grow and develop, even twist and turn but it will come to define the legacy of the expositor as it defined the legacy of Jeremiah. Jeremiah's was primarily a message of doom only later followed by comfort, so he became the message—"the weeping prophet."

Developing a Life Message

Having discovered his life message the expositor plans to grow in that message through every passage of Scripture that he exegetes. In the personal aspect of his sermon preparation he approaches each text understanding that it will contribute to his life message in some way. Here, he pauses to ask himself, “How does this message further develop my life message?” He must explore the various ways in which this passage fits into or builds upon the larger life message that the preacher is already becoming. One who bears a life message of joy will look into that aspect of each passage discerning how it would sound through one whose voice is filled with gladness. A life message of boldness will allow a passage like Jeremiah 22:24-30 to enhance that boldness.¹⁸⁷ One who bears a life message of encouragement will find in the same passage a reason to be built up for all of the Word of God, even pronouncements of judgment, is supportive in some manner.¹⁸⁸ With every exegesis, the preacher develops and grows more and more into his life message.

This is not to say that the life message is a bias obscuring the text any more than the human vessel obscures the divine revelation. God communicates with man through His holy and inspired revelation and most powerfully through preaching. Every preacher comes to the text with a filter, himself! This filter does not limit or hinder the text but rather gives hands and feet to it. Just as one person ministers in many different ways through one or two Spiritual Gifts, so one man preaches many different passages through

¹⁸⁷ This prophecy was a bold one declaring to King Coniah (Jehoiachin) that he would have no heirs to his throne.

¹⁸⁸ 2 Tim 3:16-17 shows that even the function of the Word to rebuke and correct are positive in nature because they complete and equip the man of God.

one life message. It takes a variety of different men to accurately communicate the multifaceted character of the living God.

Using a Life Message

1 Timothy 4:12-13 indicates that “fewer things damage transformational proclamation more quickly than a proclaimer whose life contradicts what he preaches.”¹⁸⁹

There must be a clear parallel between the preaching text and the preacher’s life that is genuine and without hypocrisy. The final characteristic of the life message, then, is that once discovered and developed it ought to be used in the delivery of the sermon message in order to build in both authenticity and personal power. Using one’s life message builds in authenticity because it comes from the deep and moving desires of the preacher. It builds in personal power because it is another aspect of becoming the message.

The expositor must take time to consider just how his own life message can support the message of his sermon text. He does this by asking himself the question, “How can I use my life message in the communication of this passage?” A preacher in whom the LORD is developing a life message of mountain-moving faith will see every passage as an opportunity to use faith himself and bolster greater faith in his hearers. A pastor who bears the life message of God’s Great Commission will come alongside every text and proclaim it like a missionary. One might use the life message of boldness to preach Hebrews 10:25 pointing out that Christians must boldly enter into one another’s lives in order to encourage them on to the end.

Discovering, developing, and using a life message in the personal aspect of the weekly sermon preparation plan, then, is the ultimate means for becoming the message

¹⁸⁹ Willhite, Gibson, and Robinson, *The Big Idea*, 127.

because in it the life of the passage and the life of the expositor are aligned. Asking these probing questions of each sermon text goes one step further in the deep personalization of Scripture. Allowing oneself to become so entangled with a passage that it creates its own prophetic emphasis within the expositor is truly a faithful surrendering to the text.

Conclusion

In chapter two of this paper the personal aspect of Jeremiah's message-giving was evaluated. Now, a sermon preparation plan for the personal aspect of modern expository preaching has been developed based on that evaluation. In order to follow the way of Jeremiah, the preacher must plan to make every exegesis personal by considering his sermon text in light of his calling, by allowing the Scripture to cause him suffering, by creatively embodying every possible aspect of the message, and by thoughtfully embracing a life message. These steps will lead the expositor closer to the Word that he preaches to bear it up with so much of his life that his very person in the pulpit will become a message. Each aspect of this plan requires thoughtful answers to intentionally personal questions. His answers to these questions need not be long, only thoughtful. The following chapter will attempt to analyze the effectiveness of this personal preaching plan.

CHAPTER 4 MEASURING THE MOVEMENT

Introduction

This paper argues that using Jeremiah to develop the personal aspect of expository preaching produces measurable movement in both the expositor and in his hearers, but how does one measure the effect of a preacher's message? Since personalized preaching is more likely to illicit a response and "only heart preaching will move the hearts of people,"¹⁹⁰ it must be in the degree to which the hearer has been moved. This motion can be in either of two directions: toward repentance and godliness or toward bitterness and godlessness. Yes, the measure of a message can be determined in both regards. If hearers repent and turn back toward God, then the message has had a positive effect, but if hearers bitterly scoff and turn toward godlessness and destruction, then the message has had a negative effect. Either way, however, the message has had an effect; it has moved its hearers. The message should always move hearers.

Remember that Jeremiah's was not a completely positive calling. He was tasked with the movement of people. "Look, I have filled your mouth with My words. See, today I have set you over nations and kingdoms to uproot and tear down, to destroy and demolish, to build and plant."¹⁹¹ Isaiah had a similar experience when he was called. Isaiah volunteered to be sent by God with His message to Israel and Judah to "dull the

¹⁹⁰ Vines and Shaddix, *Power*, 348.

¹⁹¹ Jer 1:9b-10

minds of these people” and to “deafen their ears.”¹⁹² When he asked the LORD how long he would perform this ministry, God replied, “Until cities lie in ruins without inhabitants.”¹⁹³ What a successful ministry! The effectiveness of the speaker is not measured by the positive responses of his hearers,¹⁹⁴ but by the obedience of the proclaimer to faithfully give a moving message in voice and flesh to everyone to whom he is sent. “Do not say: I am only a youth, for you will go to everyone I send you to and speak whatever I tell you.”¹⁹⁵

The preacher is given the responsibility of moving his hearers. He is only likely to accomplish this by first allowing the text to move himself. Then, he can become the message and attempt to move his audience. They may be moved to receive or to reject, but they must be given the opportunity and the challenge to move. The following pages will discuss measuring the movement of the message, the expositor himself, the receptive, and the non-receptive. A sampling of new measures will be given as examples of further ways in which the expositor may measure the movement of his sermons. This last chapter will also show how using this plan based on the example of Jeremiah has impacted the life of the writer through a journal that records his own personal preaching journey.

¹⁹² Isaiah 6:10a

¹⁹³ Isaiah 6:11b

¹⁹⁴ The Son of Man did not mind speaking words that were “overly offensive.” He was not afraid of receiving a negative response because He knew that more “offensive” things were coming (Jn 6:60-62) and moreover that only those whom the Father called would respond positively (6:65).

¹⁹⁵ Jer 1:7b

Measuring the Movement of a Message

Purpose: Why Sermons Are Measured

Sermons are measured and are measurable because they have a purpose. “No biblical writer took up his pen to jot down ‘a few appropriate remarks’ on a religious subject. Each wrote to affect lives.”¹⁹⁶ Adams agrees when he argues that, “the purpose of preaching, then, is to effect changes among the members of God’s church that build them up individually and that build up the body as a whole.”¹⁹⁷ The Bible by its very nature is completely and wholly applicable to the human life. That is how it was written and that is how it reads today. “New Testament scholars have highlighted this trait of the Bible with the striking statement, ‘in the beginning was the sermon,’ that is, ‘the New Testament texts were the product of preaching, teaching, exhortation, and comforting, and...in turn they preach, teach, exhort, and comfort.’”¹⁹⁸ The Bible *is* sermon. The Bible *is* homiletic. It has always been and always will be purposefully relevant.

Since the entire Bible is relevant kerygmatic address, every Word-of-God event, especially the Sunday morning sermon, ought to be an opportunity for hearers to apply, grow, change, and be equipped. “The God-ordained means to save, sanctify, and strengthen His church is preaching.”¹⁹⁹ Swindoll puts it this way, “I’ll put my neck on the line. If you leave a church service following any meeting we have where I am a teacher and you weren’t equipped better to live the life, you got ripped off. I did not do

¹⁹⁶ Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 109.

¹⁹⁷ Adams, *Purpose*, 13.

¹⁹⁸ Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher*, 182.

¹⁹⁹ MacArthur, *Pastoral Ministry*, 250.

my job.”²⁰⁰ MacArthur agrees when he writes, “If I preach the Word of God powerfully and accurately, everything I say should ‘apply.’”²⁰¹ Preached correctly, the Word will be applicable because the Word is naturally relevant kerygmatic address; it just needs to be transferred from the historical to the contemporary context.

The purpose of the sermon is to encourage, correct, heal, and restore God’s people, and the expositor must know whether or not he is accomplishing that purpose. The LORD holds false preachers in contempt because they do not help to turn His people back from their evil deeds. “If they had really stood in My council, they would have enabled My people to hear My words and would have turned them back from their evil ways and their evil deeds.”²⁰² The Father punishes sin and disobedience but sends messengers ahead of His judgment to intervene and help them avoid disaster. Preachers are held accountable for the messages that they do or do not preach based on their involvement in God’s intervention for His people. Therefore, knowing whether or not he has seen the purpose of his text accomplished in the movement of his hearers should be important to everyone who proclaims the divine message.

Application: What Is Being Measured

Since every sermon has a purpose, it is the responsibility of the expositor to first find that purpose. Once he has found it, he preaches his sermon in line with the text’s

²⁰⁰ Charles R. Swindoll, “Body Life at Its Best,” *Insight for Living* web site, Windows Media File, <http://www.insight.org> (accessed February, 2010).

²⁰¹ MacArthur, *Preaching*, 343.

²⁰² Jer 23:22

own purpose giving application²⁰³ and inviting hearers to make that application in their own lives. “The expositor must first discern why a particular passage was included in the Bible, and, with this in mind, decide what God desires to accomplish through the sermon in His hearers today.”²⁰⁴ Sermon application is not a matter of turning the text into shallow how-to’s, moral principles, the imitation of Bible characters, or drawing spiritual analogies. Application in the expository sermon is the process that recognizes the kerygmatic nature of biblical address by transferring authorial intent from its original historical context to this Sunday’s pews without losing a drop of its original potency. True expository application will first go to the original address in full appreciation of that unique historical context and then cross the bridge of history, culture, language, and occasion to arrive in the contemporary context with the same Word of God power. “A sermon is a presentation designed to apply the word of God to the lives of people. Without application, a talk is not a sermon; it may be a lecture, a lesson, or the like, but it is not a sermon.”²⁰⁵

To make correct application of a passage, the preacher must first discover authorial intent. Authorial intent guides the purpose and application of the sermon more than anything else. “The message isn’t a Bible lecture with the emphasis on content; it’s

²⁰³ Wayne McDill writes succinctly that “application spells out the practical action necessary for that faith response” in Wayne McDill, “Interpreting the New Testament for a Faith Response,” *Faith & Mission*, no.1 (Fall 1994), 94.

²⁰⁴ Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 109.

²⁰⁵ Douglas Stuart, *Old Testament Exegesis* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 86.

a word from the Lord with the emphasis on intent.”²⁰⁶ One finds authorial intent by appreciating the original occasion of the writing, identifying any explicit statements of purpose, examining instances of catch phrase and repetition, and by understanding the apparent invitation of the passage. The original occasion serves as a strong indication of the intended purpose of the author. Some Scripture passages give an explicit statement of purpose so that the expositor need not wonder. Luke’s intent in writing to Theophilus was to have a record of the events to which Luke testifies “so that you may know the exact truth about the things you have been taught.”²⁰⁷ Also the repetition of words signals the emphasis and intent of the writer. Often the author’s intent is laid bare by an obvious invitational tone within his text. One reads the passage slowly and can feel the draw or invitation of the message even prior to a full exegetical analysis; the passage has an apparent “pull.”

After discovering the authorial intent, the expositor must transfer that original intent into the contemporary context by acknowledging which concepts were meant to continue and which were not, noting the presence of canonical themes which stretch from the Garden of Eden to the New Earth, grasping the redemptive purpose of the passage, and then drawing a universalized analogy accordingly. One method for checking the transference of the homiletical idea for the original audience is to distinguish whether that idea has discontinued for some historical, revelatory, or covenantal reason or whether it may still continue into the present context. Some ideas may not transfer easily if they are bound by their historical contexts. However, when the homiletical idea for the original

²⁰⁶ Warren W. Wiersbe, *Preaching & Teaching with Imagination: The Quest for Biblical Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994), 243.

²⁰⁷ Lu 1:4.

audience flows into one of the larger canonical themes, the reader may be certain that the idea remains relevant in some form today. Furthermore, from cover-to-cover God is in redemptive pursuit of human beings attempting to restore and recreate them. Every passage that reveals itself as a point on this line of pursuit contains a redemptive application; it is a passage designed to save sinners by adopting them into the care of God through blood atonement. Here is where Christ is applied in every text because every one of these redemptive passages falls somewhere on the continuum moving towards the cross, at the cross, or from the cross towards the New Creation. What's more, authorial intent can be transferred²⁰⁸ into the present through responsible universalized analogy. An analogy is universal when it can be applied to people of both covenants, of all ages, and of all nations.

“When the Word of God is authentically preached, it is also applied. I do not mean that the preacher searches for some way to make the text relevant. I mean rather that the text must be directly addressed to persons in the congregation: ‘This is what you must do. This is what you must think. This is who you must be.’”²⁰⁹ The expositor truly has a prophetic calling to deliver the message of God to the people of God in order to transform lives. God desires transformed lives more than education or indoctrination.

²⁰⁸ Mohler makes the helpful point that “the pastor’s conviction about theological preaching becomes the foundation for the transfer of these convictions into the hearts of God’s people” in R. Albert Mohler, *He Is Not Silent* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2008), 112. In other words, to pursue the difficult path of sound expositional application laid out here, the pastor must begin with a burning conviction in the truth of 2Timothy 3:16-17.

²⁰⁹ Mohler, *Silent*, 85.

“Our job is to explain what God wants people to know and do about his eternal commands, promises, and truths and then to offer them ways to do it.”²¹⁰

Movement: How It Is Being Measured

Measuring the extent to which hearers are moved to respond to the application is not a simple task since that movement may not always be observable. Nevertheless, since every sermon has a purpose, it aims at a response. “A sermon that doesn’t aim seldom hits a target.”²¹¹ There may be many occasions when hearers are moved by a message in an inconspicuous way performing acts of obedience in private. This is all well and good, but the expositor may only analyze the effectiveness of his message-giving by the more conspicuous results that he witnesses in his hearers. He is not able to evaluate whether or not he has hit his target unless he sees movement. Such patent results may include open repentance demonstrated by posture, tears, and/or verbal confession. They may also include acts of obedience as the fruit of repentance demonstrated by a virtual multiplicity of responses. Whether in his own application or in that of his hearers, the expositor will measure the effect of his preaching based upon what physical action has accompanied his message. Therefore, his aim for himself and for his hearers is that they would do something physical in response to his sermon.

The expositor must aim at movement by giving his hearers the opportunity and motivation to respond positively to the application of the passage. He must be a careful observer of the reactions of his hearers so that he can distinguish whether or not he is rendering the message responsibly in its full life-changing power or if he is falling short

²¹⁰ Robinson and Larson, *Art & Craft*, 288.

²¹¹ Gordon D. Fee, *New Testament Exegesis* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 153.

in some way. After all, the Word of God is much mightier than the nice speeches of people-pleasers. “The prophet who has only a dream should recount the dream, but the one who has My word should speak My word truthfully, for what is straw compared to grain?”—the LORD’s declaration. ‘Is not My word like fire’—the LORD’s declaration—‘and like a sledgehammer that pulverizes rock?’”²¹² Every sermon has a purpose, every purpose has an application, and every application has the potential for movement. Which way will the hearers move in response to the application? To what extent will they make the application to their own lives? It is of great value to the preacher to measure the movements of his passage, and the first movement to be measured is that of the expositor himself.

Measuring the Movement of the Expositor

“Samuel May said to Lloyd Garrison, ‘Oh, my friend, do try to be more cool; why, you are all on fire.’ Garrison replied, ‘I have need to be on fire, for I have mountains of ice about me to melt.’”²¹³ The preacher must be set on fire with the message of God that he handles. Jeremiah was given a message of wrath but “the prophet of wrath did not merely proclaim it; he lived it, and was conscious of it.”²¹⁴ As he follows his sermon preparation plan for exegeting the personal aspect of a passage, the expositor himself will be moved (1) to repentance, (2) to sympathize with all of the feelings of the passage, and (3) to decide how best to practice it during the week prior to delivery.

²¹² Jer 23:28-29

²¹³ Vines and Shaddix, *Power*, 347.

²¹⁴ Heschel, *Prophets*, 115.

First, the LORD desires to lead hearers to repentance and the first hearer of the weekly sermon is the preacher himself. As he brings his personal life into view during the process of exegesis he may find himself awakening to a sin problem or faith deficit in his own life. This may break his will leading to repentance. “Therefore, this is what the LORD says: If you return, I will restore you; you will stand in My presence.”²¹⁵ To melt before his own preaching text is the first and best movement of the expositor.

Second, the expositor will know whether or not he has been moved by his passage as he begins to respond to it emotionally. Does the text on rejoicing make him happy? Does the Scripture on the consequences of sin make him weep? Does the text on love move him to care more deeply for his congregation? When confronted with the text does he capitulate to its invitation or does he remain uninvolved? Does He see things from the divine perspective? Does he feel the hurt or need that is addressed in the passage? Does he sense its urgency? Does he hope with the Holy Spirit that these words will save the lives of his audience, will cause hearers to avert doom? The expositor is moved when he experiences the pathos of the message in his own heart. Praise God for the pastor who, when confronted in his study with the passage, is the first to repent, is the first to have a change of heart. “I, the LORD, examine the mind, I test the heart...”²¹⁶

Third, the expositor will know if he has been moved by his passage when he makes the decision to practice the message himself that week. Has he found a good way to truly live out the text? Has he clearly followed the invitation of the Scripture? Does Jeremiah 50:38 send the preacher to his own idols to toss them into the garbage? Does he

²¹⁵ Jer 15:19a

²¹⁶ Jer 17:10a

cast his vote as a citizen in light of Jeremiah 22:3? Does he carry out a concrete act of obedience or does he assume that such responses are primarily for his congregation rather than himself? Let the expositor be the first to be moved to a physical response because actions, as much as motivations, are important. The LORD declares that He gives “to each according to his way, according to what his actions deserve.”²¹⁷ It is very possible for a person, especially a servant of God, to perform the requirements of the LORD in an empty way and for all the wrong reasons,²¹⁸ but obedience (James might call it faithful obedience because real faith always acts, is always in motion)²¹⁹ is the point. Obedience is the goal. “Does the LORD take pleasure in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the LORD? Look: to obey is better than sacrifice; to pay attention is better than the fat of rams.”²²⁰ Therefore, the expositor measures the extent to which the message has moved him by how it leads him to repentance, touches his feelings, and works itself out in his own practical obedience.

Measuring the Movement of the Receptive

When a passage is preached in harmony with its literary, historical, redemptive, theological, homiletical, and personal aspects the expositor can expect movement in one of two directions. Hearers may receive the message and its application and respond positively, or they may hear the message but reject its application to their lives. God’s

²¹⁷ Jer 17:10b

²¹⁸ See Mt 23:27.

²¹⁹ See Ja 2:14-26.

²²⁰ 1Sam 15:22

desire is for all people to hear His message and to receive it. “But if you will not listen, my innermost being will weep in secret because of your pride.”²²¹

The expositor may measure the movement of the receptive by the way they physically respond to the application of the message. They will show signs of repentance or will produce the fruit of repentance (see below). The preacher will witness the receptive taking up the challenge of the application. Some may walk the aisle, others may desire to speak with the preacher after the conclusion of the worship service, while others may relate to the speaker the following week that they had applied the passage. It is not possible to track the responses of all of the hearers, but it is possible to observe and measure some movement, some life change each week. The pastor who witnesses the movement of several receptive hearers each week can be satisfied.

It is important in this process of preaching, applying, and measuring to build in some mechanism for observation that will aid the expositor in evaluating the impact of his messages. Perhaps he will use a preaching style that allows for audience participation. Blackwood advises that interactive teaching “draws the learner into the learning process.”²²² Maybe the order of service can be reformatted to allow for testimonials. These types of changes will be uncomfortable at first for both the preacher and the audience and will require both hard work and creativity. However, anything that can foster a rise in accountability and involvement as well as assist the expositor in measuring the movement of the hearers will be well worth the effort.

²²¹ Jer 13:17a

²²² Blackwood, *Multi-Sensory*, 141.

Measuring the Movement of the Non-Receptive

While some will hear the message and receive it making application to their lives, many others will not receive the preacher's message. "But the preacher cannot let lack of response in the pew hinder him...So many congregations have not heard heartfelt preaching in so long that they actually do not know how to respond to it."²²³ Such messages may cause confusion or anger to an extent that hearers will not receive it. Some will need to become accustomed to real expository preaching first while others may remain unmoved for years. Nevertheless, like the receptive, the non-receptive will also show measurable movement. They may show anger, may write a grumbling letter to the pastor, may complain to the preacher, or they may leave the church. Some may even threaten the expositor and attempt to have him fired. These are the non-receptive and since it is his calling to move hearers, the proclaimer must make it a point to evaluate their movement as well as that of the receptive.

The difficulty comes with those who show few signs of life at all. The expositor will notice that there are men and women who come to listen to his sermons week after week but never show signs of brokenness, illumination, awakening, or repentance. He may decide to take a more direct approach with these individuals. He might interview them to discover their Spiritual development. If that reveals nothing, then he may conclude that these individuals are not being moved at all. In response he may target them for specific prayer and extend himself further into the personal aspect of his passage allowing the flames of his passion for the text, God, and humanity to burn even brighter.

²²³ Vines and Shaddix, *Power*, 348.

He might also consider developing new means for measuring the movement of his congregation broadening the scope of his applications.

Developing New Measures

Preachers need to be constantly open to new measures in their sermon applications and invitations for the simple reason that Scripture calls for a variety of real responses to its message. One text may invite prayer while another invites evangelism. One passage may challenge hearers to full devotion while another challenges them to lay down destructive habits. 1 Corinthians 13 provokes hearers to make their Spiritual Gifts effective through the exercise of brotherly love while Revelation 1-3 admonishes hearers to overcome. Though the variety of applications is enormous, the expositor will find that his invitations fall under one of two broad categories: repentance and fruits of repentance. He will be able to measure the movement of his hearers by either their immediate tearful response of repentance or their acts of repentance or, in some cases, both.

Great revival and church leaders left a legacy of measures that were new in their original contexts but have become very traditional and even stale in a more contemporary context. The Acts church did not practice walking the aisle; they had no aisle. The early church did not have altar calls or commitment cards; these are relatively new innovations. Perhaps it is time to broaden the scope of the invitation to allow for new measures that more faithfully conform to the variety of invitations found in Scripture. If a passage is inviting reconciliation, why not provide an invitation at the end of the sermon that challenges hearers to go make amends with their Christian brothers or sisters? Why not give them the occasion to respond to the message immediately in a clear and concrete

way? Can walking the aisle to speak privately with the pastor in front of the entire congregation be the only proper response to Scripture?

Repentance

True broken-hearted repentance is the first and best response to any passage of Scripture. Preachers need to give a clear and open invitation for hearers to respond in immediate contrition with a mind to turn around. The expositor may sing the traditional invitational song or he may work creatively to develop new measures which promote a response of repentance. For example, he may finish his sermon with a call to group prayer while music is being played. Perhaps he will invite hearers to remain seated for a moment to think through their response to the message. Maybe he will even provide a time at the end of his sermon for the congregation to speak, to give a testimony, or to urge their fellow brothers and sisters to repent. Regardless of the method, new measures in the invitation to repent must be carefully considered making way for the Holy Spirit to bring hearers under conviction.

Those who truly receive the message and are moved by it to repentance will feel the need to do something about what they have heard. They will be under Spiritual conviction that they have fallen short of the text and must make a change to their way of living. This awakening will manifest itself physically in a variety of ways: weeping, trembling, confession, vocal testimony, lament, or renewed Spiritual resolve (also referred to as vows in the Psalms). The expositor may measure the impact of his message through this physical evidence.

Fruits of Repentance

Just as the holy Scriptures are inspired to move hearers to action, the expository sermon ought also to move hearers to action. Congregants must know what they are to do as a result of the message that they hear. Repentance is the first and best response to a passage of Scripture but repentance must be given direction so that the participant will not simply have a teary moment followed by a short-lived personal revival. The expositor needs to remain creative in the development of new measures which provide opportunities for hearers to show forth the fruits of repentance. Below are examples of invitations given at The Camp of Faith Church as opportunities to produce the fruits of repentance and respond to the message of God.

After a sermon on Deuteronomy 6, the expositor challenged hearers to put the message into practice by going home that evening to have a family worship time with their spouse and children. The pastor provided devotional material and encouraged each church member to use it. He then listened for and elicited responses the following week concerning their experience. Several families had commented that theirs was a special time together.

After preaching from Hebrews 10:19-39 on the value of Spiritual relationships, the expositor challenged his hearers to join one of the church's in-home Bible study groups. A display table was placed in the foyer with the names, locations, and times of the current small groups and a sign-up list was placed by each one. The leaders of these small groups were also on-hand to answer questions and recruit members into their groups. The pastor was able to measure the movement of this message by the number of individuals enlisting into small groups.

“The local community is now the ‘mission field,’ and missiological perspectives and skill are required.”²²⁴ This means that the church must become active missionary communities “whereby mission is not bolted on to church programs but is recovered as the purpose of the church.”²²⁵ The goal of the discipleship system at The Camp of Faith Church is to lead every member from being a worshiper to a missionary. Therefore, the invitation of a message centering around Acts 1:8 challenged hearers to take advantage of one of the many outreach opportunities that the church offers. A list of those opportunities was placed in the hands of each member along with the details and contact information for each event.

In October of 2010 the pastor of The Camp of Faith Church began a series of sermons following the great moments, songs, and hymns of praise from the Old and New Testaments. Passages like Deuteronomy 31:9-32:42, Judges 5:1-31, and Revelation 15:3-4 were exposed. During this series which lasted from October to December there was a large fabric mountain constructed near the back of the worship center. Beside the mountain there was a small table that held leaf-shaped cutouts and tacks. Church members were invited to write down a praise and tack their “praise leaf” to the mountain. By December the mountain was covered with leaves. This gave hearers the opportunity to personally practice the message of the passage.

The “Dive In” sermon series used five “Dive Stations” to measure the movement of the message and to provide a practical challenge to the message. The stations were: (1) “Dive In to Service” where a person takes a handprint cutout with Hebrews 6:10 on

²²⁴ Stuart Murray, *Church Planting: Laying Foundations* (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 2001), 122.

²²⁵ Ibid., 123.

the back and places a handprint cutout in a cleaning bucket; (2) “Dive In to Membership” where a respondent signs up to take the Discovery church membership class; (3) “Dive In to Stewardship” where a congregant takes a tithing commitment card, fills it out, and places it in the offering plate; (4) “Dive In to a Small Group” where a person signs up to join one of the church’s existing small groups; and (5) “Dive In to Salvation/Baptism” which is a room where persons go to be counseled on their commitment to follow Christ, to be baptized, or both. At the end of the message all members and visitors were encouraged to move to the back of the room where the Dive Stations were located in order to make a commitment to “dive in” in to one of those five areas. As a result of these stations, twelve members placed handprint cutouts in the cleaning bucket to show their renewed devotion to service, one person who had been visiting the church signed up to take the Discovery class, four people indicated their commitment to stewardship, and two joined a small group.

After preaching a message from Judges 5:1-31 where the homiletical idea was, “Get in on the win,” the pastor invited members to join in the work and battle of the Kingdom. He announced a challenge for church families to invite unchurched families to their church so that those unchurched families would have a church home in time for Christmas. The challenge was accompanied by posters and e-mail reminders throughout the following months. In response, one man who was not very involved in church growth or outreach prior to this series began to invite others to his church and one of those families came in time for Christmas.

After preaching a message on 1 Samuel 2:1-10 about how God wants His people desperate for Him, the pastor made his invitation a special call to prayer. It would be a

desperate prayer hour that Tuesday night at eight o'clock. The time was chosen to make it sober and grave. Church members arrived and walked quietly into the sanctuary where candles were lit, the song "Breathe" was playing softly, and the words "desperate for God" were projected onto the screen. They took the first ten minutes of the experience and prayed softly by themselves confessing their sins, reading Psalm 42 aloud to themselves, and then writing down a praise. After this, the meeting called members to pray together in short sentence prayers, "God we need you because..." The pastor then read Exodus 33:12-16 and invited members to imagine what it would be like if God were to leave and to tell the church that it was on its own. God does not want to be taken for granted. Members gave testimonies to the greatness of the LORD in their lives. Then, members prayed out loud telling the Father how much they were dependent upon Him. Finally, the desperate prayer hour was finished with a concert of prayer where all those present prayed softly out loud at the same time for the entire church to become desperate for God. The church has an average worship attendance of one hundred people and forty of those came to this Tuesday night desperate prayer hour.

At the end of a message on Ezra 3:8-13 hearers were invited to let their praise for God's new work drown out their heartache over His former works. Earlier in the sermon, hearers were given the opportunity to reflect upon the great things that God had done in their lives thus far. By the end of the message, however, hearers were being asked to look forward and praise God for the new things that He was doing in their lives at that moment. Ten members publicly testified of the new work God was doing in their lives and praised Him for it.

“One of the most effective methods of ensuring continued interaction with the message is to give a take-home element.”²²⁶ The take-home element helps hearers personalize the message of the text in several ways. First, it serves as a reminder helping hearers to remember and to reflect on the message so as to further bring its meaning into their lives throughout the week. They are also tangible reminders of the movement that took place in the message at worship on Sunday morning. Second, as reminders take-homes provide a measure of accountability because as congregants take the message home with them, they become more aware of their responsibility to live out the message when Sunday is over. Finally, take-homes can be used as catalysts for family devotions. At The Camp church fathers are encouraged to place their take-homes on the dinner table or coffee table where they can use them to further instill the Sunday morning text into their children.

In a sermon on Isaiah 5:1-7 where the homiletical idea was “cultivate a fruitful lifestyle,” church members were exhorted to build lifestyles that produced Spiritual fruit of all kinds. As a reminder, the preacher gave everyone a bookmark with a mirror on it and the words “reflect: is mine a fruitful lifestyle? Isaiah 5:1-7.” In a sermon on Deuteronomy 6:1-11:32 where the emphasis is on the family as the necessary component of longevity in the land of promise, hearers were given small cardstock tents with strings attached to remind them of the importance of a godly home in passing the faith down to the next generation (see Figure 2. Family tent take-home). Another take-home was a business card that reminded hearers to pray that God would bring a lost person into their path that day. After a sermon on “The Power of Love” from 1 Corinthians 12:31-13:13,

²²⁶ Blackwood, *Multi-Sensory*, 142.

members received small valentines from the pastor with the sermon's Scripture referenced printed on them. Other take-homes have included nails, pieces of rope, gold-painted stones, small pieces of railroad tracks, and tent pegs.



Figure 2. Family tent take-home

The compass logo developed by the church is a means of depicting its entire discipleship system (see Figure 3). Members begin as worshipers around the fire of God's presence, proceed on to build godly and faithful families at the tent icon, then move ahead to develop deep Spiritual relationships at the trailhead marker, and finally take the trail of missions and evangelism themselves before starting the whole process all over again. Every January the pastor preaches a sermon series through the texts which make up these four disciple-ship stages (fire/worship: 2 Cor 6:14-7:1; pitch/family: Deut 6:1-11:32; trailhead/relation-ships: Heb 10:19-39; and trail/missions: Lu 20:20-26). In order to measure the progress of the hearers from fire to trail the pastor built a larger "Spiritual Compass" (see Figure 4) where members would indicate each week their progress through the discipleship system. Members were instructed to place a flag sticker on the compass at the point of their farthest progress for that week. For example, if they only completed the first three stages, then they placed a flag on the trailhead icon. Meanwhile the pastor preached week-by-week the four messages from above and exhorted his hearers to make their way completely through this discipleship process, completely around the compass.



Figure 3. Compass logo



Figure 4. Spiritual compass

On week one of this series there were fifty responses in all from a total worship attendance of ninety-three. On this first week, four people indicated that they only made it to worship. That same week, twenty marked that they went to worship, spent Spiritual time with their families, and worked to develop their Spiritual friendships in the church. Another twenty-six made it all the way around the compass to personal missions. On the second week of this series, two people indicated that they only made it to worship, one that they made it to worship and family, three that they progressed through relationships, and twelve that they had completed the entire discipleship process. On the third week of this series no one marked that they had stopped at worship or family, but that four stopped at relationships while eighteen made it all the way through to missions. On the last week only two stopped at relationships while fifteen completed the discipleship process.

	<u>Worship</u>	<u>Family</u>	<u>Relationships</u>	<u>Missions</u>
Week 1:	4	→	20	26
Week 2:	2	1	3	12
Week 3:	→	→	4	18
Week 4:	→	→	2	15

Table 1. Discipleships system results

On week two of this series after the speaker had preached the family message from Deuteronomy 6:1-11:32, he invited hearers to raise their hands to indicate whether they had repented of their family failures or were doing so at that moment. Then he challenged fathers to draw their families together during the invitation time praying for them to have a future of faithful obedience and blessing. At this worship service where there were eighty-eight people present, twenty-one fathers raised their hands acknowledging that they had either at that moment or in the recent past repented of failing their families. Twenty-five families participated in the family prayer time. On the third week of this sermon series hearers learned about the importance of brotherhood and were challenged to join a small group. On the final week the preacher communicated a message of missions where hearers were challenged to become engaged in a local missions event through the church.

After a message based upon Philippians 3:1-4:1 the expositor encouraged his hearers to toss their trash. The homiletical idea was, “Toss Your Trash to Catch Up with Jesus” and centered on the idea that the text urged believers to make forward progress in their faith by leaving behind any confidence they may have in the flesh. Trash cans were placed near the front of the worship center while scrap paper was placed under every seat. Thirty members wrote down one or more ways in which they placed confidence in their flesh, came forward during the final song, crumpled the paper up, and tossed it into the garbage.

A sermon series on Acts 1:1-8:4 presented an opportunity for church members to become unstoppable in the Gospel mission. The broader homiletical idea of the series was that when the church was united in Holy Spirit power to reach its Jerusalem, then it

would be unstoppable. This series had several measurable facets. First, hearers measured their progress through the discipleship system using train tickets that were punched as each stage of the discipleship system was completed (see Figure 5). Participants placed their names on the back of these tickets and then turned them in to the pastor. At the end of the eight-week series three of the tickets were selected to win train whistles with the series title imprinted on them. Twenty-three church members who participated indicated that they had moved through the discipleship system eight times over the course of the sermon series.



Figure 5. Train ticket

The expositor whose aim is to fully expose the personal aspect of the Word of God will develop a variety of measurable invitations appropriate to each message that hearers can use to personalize the passage. Themes and take-homes are a part of this effort to further the personal impact of Scripture. Train tickets, paper tents, trash cans, and compasses, as mentioned above, give the preaching pastor a means by which to measure the personal effect his sermons are having upon his hearers.

A Personal Preaching Journey

The writer began to employ this preaching plan for the personal aspect of Scripture in early 2010. Since then, he has made the personal aspect a part of his weekly sermon preparation. Every week the expositor takes his Sunday text through the four parts of the above personal preparation plan in order to analyze how God wants him to

become the message in the areas of calling, suffering, embodiment, and life message.

The following personal preaching journey is an account of the impact that this work has made on the expositor and his hearers.

Becoming the Message of Exodus (May-August, 2010)

In May of 2010 the church that the writer pastors was undergoing some significant philosophical and organizational changes. In order to help the church make it through those changes victoriously, the pastor decided on a sermon series through the Book of Exodus.²²⁷ The series was comprised of four main units: “Into the Wild with God” (Exodus 1:1-15:21), “Staying Alive in the Wild” (Exodus 15:22-18:27), “The Rules of the Wild” (Exodus 19:1-24:11), and “The Holy Campout” (Exodus 24:12-40:38). In Exodus the LORD calls His people out of their bondage in Egypt to follow Him into the Promised Land. Though it was a harsh life of oppression, life in Egypt was familiar and predictable. God was inviting Israel to join Him in the wild where they would have to depend upon Him in faith every moment. The pastor hoped that this message would inspire and embolden both his congregation and himself for the changes that they needed to make. As he followed his plan for the personal aspect of each message in these series, the expositor became more and more like his message and made it through the difficult year of change by following God into the unknown depending upon Him in faith every moment.

In the first series, “Into the Wild with God” (Exodus 1:1-15:21), the expositor had to become personally connected with the theme of leaving the confines of the familiar for

²²⁷ Sermon series have been especially helpful in the personalization process because they provide an extended period of time to impress their message upon the expositor. They give him more time to become the message.

a wild journey into the unfamiliar. In this journey he would need to live strong on faith for the future (1:1-2:10), he would discover that he was wired for a wild task (2:11-22), he would need to become involved with the lives of others so as to become the answer to someone's prayers (2:23-4:31), he would need to really believe in the LORD (5:1-10:29), he would need to make his salvation more than a memory (11:1-13:16), and he would have to behold the power of God and be bold (13:17-15:21). In personalizing these messages, the expositor used objects (ex., family photo albums and warning signs), body language, and practiced them in his family devotions and personal life each week.

At the beginning of this series, the writer, like Israel was timid. Israel had lived under the domination of Egypt for generations becoming apprehensive and retiring, but they would learn in the course of their experiences in the exodus and the wilderness that their God was never timid. Like Israel, the expositor would see God's powerful actions and be emboldened by them. The preacher saw his prayers answered on a weekly basis, received encouraging messages and cards just when it was needed, and witnessed Spiritual victories in his core members. These powerful acts strengthened his sense of calling and challenged him to step out in faith and lead his people wherever the LORD should command.

One of the most important and heated business meetings of the church occurred on May 10 during this sermon series. Preparing for this meeting was like preparing to go into the wild. The pastor did not have enough experience or knowledge but knew that the LORD was calling him to lead his people into radical changes in order to better obey the Great Commission. He called upon every message in this series from Exodus chapter one to chapter ten in order to find strength and faith for the meeting. He put the messages

into action in his prayer life, in his demeanor, and in his leadership. He had personally entangled himself with the life of Moses and Israel which, he is convinced, made a great impact upon his preaching, upon his congregation, and upon his situation. Leading up to the business meeting his preaching was powerful and convincing because he was living it, suffering it. At the business meeting, he stood ready to lead and invited the church to follow even into the unknown. It did.

These messages were filled with suffering and anguish as the expositor wrestled to personalize them. He struggled with doubt, fear, and worry that challenged his application of every single passage. It was the worst time of Spiritual struggle that he can remember as well as the greatest time of Spiritual victory. Almost all of his hearers were moved. Some were afraid of the unknown, of change, and the severe calling that the messages presented upon their lives and so were moved to reject the messages. Some of these left the church quietly while others left not so quietly. Most, however, were moved to receive the messages and so became strong supporters of the Spiritual leadership in place. Many of these described in writing a level of closeness to God that neither they nor their family had before experienced. The pastor had become the message but so had his hearers.

In the second series, “Staying Alive in the Wild” (Exodus 15:22-18:27), the people of God learned that following their leader into the wild is one thing and staying alive in the wild is still another. The LORD wanted to heal the bitter lives of the Israelites (15:22-27), to show them that He provides but on His own terms (16:1-36), to warn them not to let their thirsts turn them against God (17:1-7), to remind them that they win or lose by the power of God (17:8-16), and that the One who saved them also built a system

to sustain them (18:1-27). In these sermons the expositor exhorted his congregation (and himself) that when the LORD brings you out into the unknown, you can trust Him to have every intention and every resource to sustain you in that wild place. Some of the objects employed in the preaching plan for the personal aspect of these messages included glasses of cloudy and clear water, “manna” cakes, and a video of Kirk Cameron witnessing to some dangerous-looking gang members in Los Angeles. These sermons helped to fill the Sunday morning worship time with a kind of Spiritual intensity because hearers knew that they, like their preacher, were living like the Israelites in the wild, and to “stay alive in the wild” they would need to continue on in faith that God would continually provide and protect.

In the course of this second series, the pastor-preacher was encountering many significant residual effects of the decision made at the May business meeting. One member used the church’s electronic mail distribution list to spew bitter accusations against the leaders of the church. There were still more business and legal issues to be resolved. The expositor continued to wrestle with doubt, worry, and fear. Therefore, he was forced to personalize each of the continuing messages in order to “stay alive in the wild.” On August 17, 2010 the church held one more final business meeting where the decision to adopt all of the changes presented by the leadership were approved unanimously. To the pastor-preacher it was clear that the LORD had been miraculously faithful and had won the victory for Himself and His people.

Personalizing the third sermon series, “The Rules of the Wild” (Exodus 19:1-24:11), brought the expositor closer to the LORD in his personal and ethical life. In Exodus 19:1-20:21, God reveals that His physical and relational presence has boundaries

and that those who desire to walk with God must live in bounds. His personal experience with this text caused the expositor to feel the absence of God when living outside the bounds of the Spirit-led life and the loving presence of God when living within those bounds. During that week of sermon preparation the writer emphasized obedience in his own prayer life and family life. He embodied this message of boundaries during worship by using a large picture of fiery Mount Sinai on the overhead screen above the stage and then roping off the stage itself with caution tape and volunteers who posed as armed guards.

In Exodus 24:1-11 the LORD reveals that we freely pledge our devotion to Him and that pledge is sealed by blood so that whenever we see temptation, we should see blood. In order to help hearers personalize this message, the pastor placed three bowls upon the stage. Two glass bowls were filled with tomato juice and were on hand as visual objects of the blood required to seal the relationship between God and His people. The congregation was led to believe that the third ceramic bowl also contained blood, but it actually was filled with water. Near the end of the message, the preacher picked up the ceramic bowl and sprinkled the water on the audience. After this, the ushers passed out business cards which had red paint splotches on them and the words, “Whenever you see temptation, see blood.” These cards were designed to aid the memory, and the pastor saw members carrying these cards around for weeks after the sermon. In this way, the message was personalized for hearers by touch (sprinkled water and business cards) and sight (red paint splotches and bowls of red “blood”), not just through sound.

The fourth Exodus series, “The Holy Campout” (Exodus 24:12-40:38), focused on the presence of God. In Exodus 29:38-46 God shows His people that He wants to

“camp with” (be present with) them but the camp must be clean and it must be special. Exodus 33:1-23 warns that God can camp wherever He wants and will not camp with stiff-necked people. These two sermons about the presence of God forced the expositor to personalize the messages by spending extra time in prayer with the LORD in lonely places. This time of prayer gave the preacher a renewed excitement over personal worship and a greater passion for leading others to spend personal time with God. He knew that if his congregation took these messages to heart then families might be healed, addictions broken, and relationships mended. So to help hearers make the personal connection, the pastor pitched a dome tent right in the middle of the sanctuary and arranged the chairs around it. He placed a light inside the tent and used it as an object to remind hearers that God wants to “camp out” right in the middle of their lives.

These sermons in Exodus impacted the expositor and his hearers because they were personalized. They helped to bring the church through a challenging time. They helped the pastor lead the church through a challenging time. Some of the messages made the preacher unpopular which, like Jeremiah, is part of his personal calling. The expositor suffered the messages of these texts himself as they painfully challenged his fears, his laziness, his faith, and even brought secret sins to light. He enjoyed embodying these messages through objects, passionate hand gestures, and Scriptural emotion.²²⁸ As themes, into the wild, staying alive in the wild, the rules of the wild, and the holy campout also helped to develop his life message of adventurous faith. The year 2010 would have been completely different without the deep personalization of Exodus.

²²⁸ “Scriptural emotion” refers to the emotion found within the text itself.

Becoming the Message of Praise (October-December, 2010)

After the many challenges and changes faced by both the pastor and his congregation, he felt it appropriate to spend several months exposing praise texts. These worship passages were selected throughout the canon and were intended to lift the hearts and minds of the hearers in praise to God. In Deuteronomy 31:19-32:43, the expositor embodied the message by singing the homiletical idea to the congregation, to his family, and to the LORD in his prayer time. He stated each point of the message in a rhyming scheme which built to a chorus. “When you’re surrounded by a thousand good things (32:4-27), when you wonder why your life is not working (32:28-33), when He’s reduced you to absolutely nothing, begin to sing (32:34-43): There is only one rock for you.” Near the end of the message, the preacher led the congregation in singing the whole song together. In this way, the message came to life and was embodied through song.

In 1 Samuel 2:1-11 the pastor exposed the song of Hannah which bore the idea that when we are desperate for God, He will lift our lives. In order to personalize this message he knew that he must become desperate for God. That very week during the beginning of his sermon preparation the pastor learned of a crisis in his church that broke his heart, put him on his knees, and caused him to despair. That crisis played an important role in how he became the message for his hearers. He had practiced the very thing that he would preach that coming Sunday morning. Without this view of the personal aspect of Scripture he might have seen this as only a distraction to his sermon preparation, but understanding God’s desire that His messengers suffer every text, the pastor knew that this crisis was simply a part of his sermon preparation plan for the week.

In Colossians 1:15-23 after a Christological doxology, Paul warns his recipients to “remain grounded and steadfast in the faith”²²⁹ so the pastor preached the homiletical point that all Christians need to stake down their belief in the supremacy of Christ. That Christ is supreme over all things needs to become an unmovable truth and practice for every believer. As he struggled to become this message, he realized in his own person that Christ was not supreme over his own sense of dignity. He spent some time listening to Michael Card’s, “God’s Own Fool” during his prayer times and determined to obey Christ even in situations that might be considered embarrassing. This fit perfectly with a new evangelism strategy that was being taught at the church during that time, *The Way of the Master*. Colossians 1:15-23 and *The Way of the Master* placed the pastor in many situations where he would have to sacrifice his own perceived dignity to obey the Gospel and practice evangelism. This helped him to become the message and his congregation to apply that aspect of the passage in their personal lives. Each person received a tent peg to remind them to stake down their belief in the supremacy of Christ.

Lastly, in Revelation 15:1-8 John exhorts hearers to praise the God who brings finding God to an end. The passage inspires Christians to remember that they must seek God now, but there will be a day when His people do not have to search for Him for He will surround them, His presence will be everywhere. In order to become this message in practice during the week, the pastor spoke with his children about what Christians do to seek God, to be close to God. He taught them that as Christians, reading and meditating on Scripture, unhurried prayer, singing, spending time with the believing community in church, walking in the Holy Spirit, and practicing simple acts of obedience help draw us

²²⁹ Col 1:23

closer to God. He then taught them to imagine a time when God's people do not have to search for God, seek God, or find God because there will be no sin at all to separate them from His presence, to imagine a time when God does not need to be found because He is right there. This led to some great times of personal and family worship. It also caused great joy in the church.

Becoming the message of praise had several significant practical affects on the expositor and on his church. First, he began to cultivate a deeper and more consistent personal worship time which included journaling, Bible reading, prayer, and singing. Second, the church began to use short Psalm readings during their worship time to enhance their praise. Third, it had a profound impact upon the Spiritual morale of both the congregation and the pastor after a hard year of making tough changes. Because his sermon preparation plan required him to personalize each of the praise passages, the preacher practiced praise himself and slowly saw it reflected in his hearers.

Becoming the Message of Acts (February-May, 2011)

In January of 2011 the leaders of the church felt that God desired them to move forward into local missions. For this reason, a sermon series in the Book of Acts was begun in February with the goal of stimulating greater evangelistic efforts and encouraging a deeper dependence upon the power of the Holy Spirit. So many of these Acts sermons emphasized the movement of the Gospel that the message took on physical form in two ways. First, the expositor knew that in order to preach these texts with integrity on Sunday, he must become the message by practicing a much greater amount of personal evangelism during the week. Therefore, he began a door-to-door personal witnessing program for himself on Saturday afternoons. The need to become the

message in this way prior to preaching it made a great impact upon the expositor and forced him to consider new goals and areas of growth for his life. It also made an impact upon the hearers who knew that their preacher was out distributing tracts and talking to people about the Gospel hours before his sermon about doing such things in the Book of Acts. Without the personal aspect of his sermon preparation plan, the pastor could simply have spoken from theory or pure exegesis but since his plan made him practice, suffer, and embody the message, it had a greater and more genuine impact upon him that could also be seen by others.

Second, the entire church calendar became consumed with Gospel outreach events and missions projects. To help the church practice the message of Acts, the pastor led them for a limited time to do all of their fellowship events off-campus around lost people at parks where they could distribute Gospel tracts and church literature. In this way the sermon series set the agenda for the entire church and became very personal by invading the calendars and schedules of the congregation. They became surrounded by Acts, baptized by Acts, and were forced to either be moved to join the mission or make the conscious decision to stay out of it.

Using the four-part personal preparation plan has had a significant impact upon both the writer and his congregation. Pushing every preaching text through this analysis forces the preacher to become the message himself prior to delivering it to his hearers bringing about better retention and application. The audience retains the message as it affects more of their senses and sees in the preacher how it is to be applied to their own lives. The impact that this method makes upon preaching both in preparation and in delivery make it just as crucial to the homiletical process as the literary or historical

aspects. The personal aspect is another powerful and life-changing facet of Scripture that must not be overlooked.

Conclusion

Every passage of Scripture has a measure of movement within that is designed to move the expositor and then his audience. The expositor moves his listeners to either receive the message or reject it through a variety of measures. Though measuring such motion can be a difficult task, it is one that the expositor must be careful to do in order to know whether or not he is becoming the message. One might imagine a father who has called his family together for a Bible teaching. He watches the eyes, posture, and body language of his children and notices that one or two have begun to lose interest. He adds vocal fluctuation, stands, and moves about to capture his children's attention again. In this way he remains constantly attuned to the response of his hearers. The expositor-pastor behaves the same way toward his congregation. He carefully observes the reactions of his hearers knowing the value of measuring the movement.

CONCLUSION SUCCESS

Genuine biblical relevance finds its ultimate realization only as the message becomes deeply personal to the expositor himself, only as the expositor becomes the message. When the message takes up residence inside the expositor, the sermon has reached its first applicational target and now can powerfully target many more. Jeremiah shows the way to become deeply and personally entangled with the message of the LORD. He shows the way of the personal calling, the way of the suffered message, the way of the embodied message, and the way of the life message. Following his example, the modern expositor can employ a sermon preparation plan that will lead him also into intimate involvement with the text in his own calling, suffering, embodiment, and life message. Then, the preacher may evaluate the effectiveness of his sermon by the responses of his hearers while, at the same time, creatively developing new measures to afford congregants manifold opportunities to respond to the message in repentance or rejection. Using Jeremiah in this way to develop the personal aspect of expository preaching produces measurable results in both the speaker and in his hearers.

A question remains: What about success? Serving God through preaching is a difficult, frustrating, and heartbreaking task so how does the proclaimer know whether or not his work has been successful? When can he be satisfied? Ask the Prophet from Anathoth about his success and the answer might be dubious at best. “One king spared his life only because he was afraid to take it. Professional prophets were jealous of him and denied his right to speak of God. The priests were against him. The people whom he loved mobbed him for lack of patriotism. His brethren and his father’s house betrayed

him....And he did not live to see any solid results of his work.”²³⁰ Jeremiah had his heart broken by both Judah and Jehovah, yet he continued to carry his burden. He desired to recant his calling on occasion and even cursed the day he was born, but still he bore up the message of the LORD. Most did not heed his sermons and yet there was success there. “That he rose always above discouragement, never lost his courage or his faith, was as dauntless at the end of his long life as at the beginning, proves him to have been one of the world’s immortals.”²³¹ His success, then, must not be measured by the positive responses of his hearers but in his faithfulness to the task of embodying the communication of God and moving his hearers to receive or reject the LORD’s message.

Success for the modern expositor, like Jeremiah, is measured by three things: (1) his faithfulness in exposing every aspect of his Scripture passage; (2) the extent to which he releases the full life changing power of the Word of God through becoming the message; and (3) the degree to which his hearers are moved. It is the Word of God which is most capable of changing the hearts of hearers but it does not speak alone. God’s Word is designed to come into the heart and life of a human mouthpiece until he has become the message and only then to be released upon a congregation of hearers in full life changing power. It is the high calling of the modern expositor to work at the text until, like Jeremiah, he becomes the message. When the expositor personally becomes the message, preaching God’s Word the way God would preach it, moving his hearers either positively or negatively...success!

²³⁰ Calkins, *Jeremiah the Prophet*, 221.

²³¹ Ibid.

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APPENDIX A

OVERVIEW OF SERMON PREPARATION PLAN FOR EXEGETING THE LITERARY, HISTORICAL, REDEMPTIVE, THEOLOGICAL, AND HOMILETICAL ASPECTS OF A PASSAGE

I. Literary Analysis

- A. Form
- B. Inclusio
- C. Catchwords
- D. Structural Analysis
- E. Literary Context
- F. Figurative Language Analysis
- G. Inter-Textuality
- H. Lexical Analysis
- I. Textual Analysis
- J. Analysis of Parallel Gospels (if applicable)

II. Historical Analysis

III. Redemptive Analysis²³²

- A. God Focus—What aspects of the divine nature provide redemption?
- B. Fallen Condition Focus—What aspects of human nature require redemption?
- C. Christocentric Analysis
 - Redemptive-Historical Progression: From Creation to Cross to New Creation*²³³
 - Promise-Fulfillment.*
 - Typological Analysis.*
 - Longitudinal Analysis.*
 - Contrast Analysis.*

IV. Theological Analysis

- A. Canonical Context (Biblical Theology)
- B. Authorial Intent/Purpose
 - How Does the Passage Make You Feel?*²³⁴
 - What Would the Author Have Done with This Passage to His Audience?*
- C. Ultimate Divine Purpose
- D. Analogical Analysis: Transferring the Relevance into Today

²³² All of Scripture is a redemptive sermon using words to bring man back to God.

²³³ See Griedanus, *Preaching Christ*, 235.

²³⁴ In John Piper, *The Supremacy of God in Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1990), 82, Piper notes that Jonathan Edwards believed that “Good preaching aims to stir up “holy affections”—such emotions as hatred for sin, delight in God, hope in His promises, gratitude for His mercy, desire for holiness, and tender compassion. The reason is that the absence of holy affections in Christians is odious.”

- E. What Is this Text Inviting *Me* to Do?
- F. What Will *Hearers* Do?

V. Homiletical Analysis

A. Homiletical Idea

Exegetical Idea:

Subject:

Complement:

Applicational Idea:

Homiletical Idea:

B. Sermon Form: How does the Spirit want this passage preached?

C. Sermon Outline: How does the Spirit want this sermon shaped?

Early Invitation:

Body

Final Invitation:

APPENDIX B

OVERVIEW OF SERMON PREPARATION PLAN FOR EXEGETING THE PERSONAL ASPECT OF A PASSAGE

I. Personal Calling Analysis

- A. I am called to let this text make me unpopular. How might this text make me unpopular?
- B. I am called to let this text put me in danger. How might this text put me in danger?
- C. I am called to let this text break my heart. How might this text break my heart?
- D. I am called to let this text change myself and my family. How might this text change myself and my family?

II. Personal Suffering Analysis

- A. How have I personally experienced the life and message of this text or how am I experiencing it right now?
- B. In what ways does this message challenge me?
- C. In what ways does this message hurt me?
- D. Take time for unhurried prayer through the points of this message.

III. Personal Embodiment Analysis

- A. What kinds of hand or bodily gestures do I need to use more often in the delivery of this message?
- B. Are there any objects or sign acts involved in this text or are there sign acts that I might do to illustrate this message?
- C. What does this passage want me to do this week in order to practice its message myself?
- D. How does this passage want to change my lifestyle?
- E. What emotions do I need to communicate in the delivery of this message that reflect the divine emotions within the text?
- F. What is at stake in this message and why should that make my delivery more passionate?

IV. Personal Life Message Analysis

- A. What is my life message?
- B. How does this message help to develop my life message?
- C. How can I use my life message in the communication of this passage?

