

LIBERTY BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

A STUDY OF JOHN PIPER'S SERMON PREPARATION:  
A MODEL FOR PASTORS WHO EMPHASIZE THE SUPREMACY OF GOD IN  
EXPOSITORY PREACHING

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By

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## ABSTRACT

### A STUDY OF JOHN PIPER'S SERMON PREPARATION: A MODEL FOR PASTORS WHO EMPHASIZE THE SUPREMACY OF GOD IN EXPOSITORY PREACHING

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This dissertation aims to answer the question, How can the preacher complete the process of his expository sermon preparation to manifest God's glory and exalt His supremacy in preaching by studying Piper's life and methods? Based on an analysis of Piper's writings and selected sermons, this project investigates Piper's background and influences on his God-centered life and theological system. It then discusses Piper's principles and skills of biblical exegesis, and it looks into the major influence on Piper's biblical exegesis. It also describes Piper's philosophy of preaching: Piper's motivation and purpose of preaching, and it investigate great preachers who impacted Piper's preaching. It then discusses Piper's skills of expository preaching. Finally, it offers a summary of the findings and an application.

Abstract length: 121 words.

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Above all, best thanks to God who called me to preaching ministry and has made me learn the purpose and skills of expository preaching by studying John Piper. My God has opened my eyes to the necessity to glorify Him and exalt His supremacy in my preaching throughout the whole process. Soli Deo Gloria!

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

Church history teaches that strong biblical preaching is the main method God Himself anointed for the vitality and health of the church. P. T. Forsyth states the importance of preaching in Christianity: “With preaching Christianity stands or falls, because it is declaration of the gospel.”<sup>1</sup> Edwin Dargan, also, stresses that “preaching is an essential part and a distinguishing feature of Christianity, and accordingly the larger history of general religious movements includes that of preaching.”<sup>2</sup> In the Apostolic age, Luke proved this fact when he affirmed, “The word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith” (Acts 6:7; cf. 19:20).<sup>3</sup> In the light of this fact, there is no denying that biblical preaching has played an important role in the course of church growth.

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<sup>1</sup> P. T. Forsyth, *Positive Preaching and the Modern Mind* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 5, quoted in R. Albert Mohler, “A Theology in Preaching,” in *Handbook of Contemporary Preaching: A Wealth of Counsel for Creative and Effective Proclamation*, ed. Michael Duduit (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1992), 13. Similarly, John Stott states, “Preaching is indispensable to Christianity.” John R. Stott, *Between Two Worlds: The Challenge of Preaching Today* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1982), 15.

<sup>2</sup> Edwin Charles Dargan, *A History of Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1954), 12, quoted in Richard L. Mayhue, “Rediscovering Expository Preaching” in *Rediscovering Expository Preaching*, John MacArthur, Jr. and the Master’s Seminary Faculty (Nashville: W Publishing Group, 1992), 36-37.

<sup>3</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all scriptural citations are from the English Standard Version, 2001.

Unfortunately, however, in the last few decades, biblical preaching in the pulpits of the church has been weakening. This can happen for several reasons; the first is that messages of evangelical preachers have been secularized. For example, many preachers have been influenced by prosperity theology or the health and wealth gospel, and moral instruction without the heart of the gospel. R. Albert Mohler describes the tragedy like this:

The last few decades have been a period of wanton experimentation in many pulpits. One of the most troubling developments is the decline and eclipse of expository preaching. Numerous influential voices within evangelicalism are suggesting that the age of expository sermon is now past. In its place, some contemporary preachers now substitute messages intentionally designed to reach secular or superficial congregations – messages that avoid preaching a biblical text and thus avoid a potentially embarrassing confrontation with biblical truth.<sup>4</sup>

After all, when preachers abandon preaching biblical truth in their sermon, as Haddon W. Robinson stresses, “God is not in it.”<sup>5</sup>

In addition to secularization of messages, that preaching has been pushed back on the priority list of pastors’ ministry brings about the erosion of biblical preaching. This is the result from the loss of authority of the Word of God and a decrease of the belief in the Truth.<sup>6</sup> For some preachers, therefore, counseling ministries or organizational leadership or some other pressing agenda becomes more alluring than preaching and an essential

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<sup>4</sup> R. Albert Mohler, Jr, *He Is Not Silent: Preaching in a Postmodern World* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2008), 16. Similarly, Bryan Chapell posits, “Evangelical preachers reacting to secularization of both culture and church can mistakenly make moral instruction or societal reform the *primary* focus of their message.” Italics his. Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 19.

<sup>5</sup> Haddon W. Robinson, *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 20.

<sup>6</sup> D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching and Preachers* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1971), 13.

ministry priority.<sup>7</sup> Other preachers, moreover, think that preaching is an outdated way of communicating the Word of God so that the sermon needs to be substituted with modern techniques such as videos, music, drama, and multimedia presentations.

Finally, ignorance of the methodology and preparation of the sermon have had a negative effect on biblical expository preaching. For many people, even pastors, the term “expository preaching” has held a negative meaning. In other words, the expository sermon has been stigmatized as a form of preaching that is dry, lifeless and “recitations of biblical trivia or dogmatic defense of doctrinal distinctive.”<sup>8</sup> After all, this misunderstanding about expository preaching has given people the wrong idea about it. In other words, the expository sermon is irrelevant to ordinary life.

The church growth and decline in Korea can be understood in the same context. On one hand, churches in Korea have experienced a remarkable growth with powerful biblical preaching. On the other hand, messages of preachers have tended to miss the heart of the gospel and the authority of the gospel has hit rock bottom. The writer thinks that the reason is that Christianity in Korea has been influenced by indigenous belief in which Koreans’ thought is rooted. Moreover, many pastors have not been well grounded in biblical expository preaching.

Nevertheless, it is hopeful and encouraging that the number of Christians in Korea who long to hear biblical preaching from their preachers have increased these days. It is more noticeable that young pastors today show commitment to the subject of biblical

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<sup>7</sup> Ramesh Richard, *Preparing Expository Sermons: A Seven-Step Method For Biblical Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2001), 17. He says, “Some preachers have just let go of preaching as the central thrust of their ministry ... Preaching the Bible has become secondary in the hierarchy of ministry task, and the urgent needs of society extract the primary energy of the preacher.”

<sup>8</sup> Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon*, 19.

preaching, especially expository preaching. In other words, they are interested in issues surrounding expository preaching such as historical background of preaching, theology of preaching, and preparing and presenting the sermon as practical aspects of expository preaching in the modern world. Moreover, publishers and theological seminaries now offer even more textbooks for expository preaching and seminars on it. As a result of this, pastors have a better understanding of biblical preaching than ever before.

In the light of this situation, John Piper, an influential pastor,<sup>9</sup> theologian, and conservative evangelical leader, can be a good role model for pastors, especially as a biblical expository preacher. Piper has served as pastor for preaching and vision at Bethlehem Baptist Church in Minneapolis since 1980. Piper, also, founded the teaching ministry called Desiring God that exists to spread a God-centered vision by offering books, seminars, sermons, conferences, articles and more. Piper is the author of over fifty books<sup>10</sup> on theology, preaching, missions, pastoral ministry, Christian life and more, including his most famous book, *Desiring God: Meditations of a Christian Hedonist*. It is notable that over thirty of Piper's books have been translated into Korean and he has been in the spotlight recently as a biblical expository preacher in Korea. Although many young pastors in Korea are interested in Piper's expository preaching based on God-centered theology, which shows clearly the heart of the gospel, his preaching hardly has been

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<sup>9</sup> David Wells, distinguished professor of History of Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, describes John Piper as "one of the extraordinary pastors of our generation, who in many ways broke the mold." He adds, "[John Piper] has big thoughts about God in a time when God and his glory have been much diminished in the church." Sam Storms and Justin Taylor, eds., *For the Fame of God's Name: Essay in Honor of John Piper* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2010), cover.

<sup>10</sup> Piper won ECPA Christian Book Awards through such books as *Spectacular Sins* in 2009, *What Jesus Demands from the World* in 2007, *Pierced by the Word* in 2004, and *God's Passion for His Glory* in 1999. *The Pleasure of God* was named one of the top 100 one hundred books of the twentieth 20 Century's by World Magazine. See, <http://www.worldmag.com/articles/3366> (accessed March 7, 2011).

studied. Therefore, it is necessary to study Piper's sermon preparation as well as his theology.

### **The Statement of the Problem**

The purpose of this dissertation is to systematically study John Piper's background of preaching ministry, hermeneutic and homiletic skills. Piper teaches "Christian Hedonism" that is expressed in his personal motto: "God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him."<sup>11</sup> His ministry including preaching is rooted in "Christian Hedonism." Piper's main goal of preaching is to demonstrate the supremacy of God in preaching to advance a movement of God-centered worship and life by way of the Trinity's role in preaching: God the Father as the goal of preaching, Jesus Christ as the ground of preaching and the Holy Spirit as the gift of preaching. Jonathan Edwards' ministry serves as his model: his life, his theology, and his preaching.<sup>12</sup>

Piper is eager to glorify to God through expositional preaching. Preaching is the primary ministry to him. He says, "The ministry of preaching is the central labor of my life. My prayer is that through that ministry and everything else I do the great glory of our God and Savior Jesus Christ would be magnified as more and more people come to live out the obedience of faith more and more deeply."<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> John Piper, *Desiring God: Meditations of a Christian Hedonist*, 25th Anniversary ref. ed. (Colorado Springs, CO: Multnomah Books, 2011), 10. Chapter 2 discusses this concept in detail.

<sup>12</sup> In *The Supremacy of God in Preaching*, Piper introduces Jonathan Edwards as his role model of preaching ministry. An excerpt from this book entitled "Theology and Preaching of Jonathan Edwards" was featured in the March 1994 *The Word* in Korea.

<sup>13</sup> John Piper, "Extended Biography of John Piper," *Desiring God*, <http://www.desiringgod.org/about/john-piper/extended-biography> (accessed March 7, 2011).

One book that shows Piper's philosophy of preaching, *The Supremacy of God in Preaching*, has been widely read among pastors.<sup>14</sup> J. I. Packer comments on this book: "[This is] a powerful tonic for tired preachers—a book that digs deep into the theology, strategy, and spirituality of pulpit ministry."<sup>15</sup> Erwin Lutzer, senior pastor of The Moody Church, says, "Here's a book that every preacher should read at least once a year. This book is a powerful antidote to the unbalanced, self-centered preaching of Today."<sup>16</sup> David H. Chung recommends Piper to pastors as a good model of an expository preacher. He states,

The preaching of faithful preachers never disappoints hearers. All sermons of these preachers cannot be perfect so as to get A plus in homiletics. However, they invest enough time in preaching the well-prepared sermon that the structure and flow of the sermon are clear and hearers can easily understand the main point of the messages. . . . Piper's preaching emphasizes the sovereignty of God and God-centered life. Although Piper rarely uses entertaining illustrations, the audience can obtain great help through his theological understanding of the gospel.<sup>17</sup>

It is evident in the light of these facts that Piper has a solid theological foundation, burning zeal and practical methods for expository preaching. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to analyze Piper's books and sermons in order to answer the question, How can preachers complete the process of their preparation of expository sermons to manifest God's glory by studying Piper's life and methods?<sup>18</sup> Piper will give a warning to

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<sup>14</sup> In this book, Piper offers his philosophy of preaching: "God is the goal of preaching, God is the ground of preaching, and all the means in between are given by the Spirit of God." John Piper, *The Supremacy of God in Preaching*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, Baker Books, 2004), 23.

<sup>15</sup> J. I. Packer, in John Piper, *The Supremacy of God*, rev. ed. cover.

<sup>16</sup> Erwin Lutzer, in John Piper, *ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> David Chung, *Ten Commandments for Biblical Preaching* (Seoul: Duranno Academy, 2011), 290-291, 296.

<sup>18</sup> *Biblical preaching* and *expository preaching* are used synonymously throughout this research.

secularized preachers or those who just hold to solid theological doctrines yet without holy affections. Moreover, he will not only give fresh vigor and fervent passion to preachers who are willing to pursue the glory of God in their ministry but also provide practical principles and methods of hermeneutics and homiletics.

### **The Statement of Limitations**

This project will only be a study of John Piper's sermons. In other words, this project will not include all aspects of Piper's ministry such as evangelism, missions, and pastoral ministry, because this dissertation will center itself exclusively on Piper as an expository preacher.<sup>19</sup>

This dissertation will not discuss the issue of Piper's sermon delivery as a crucial element for successful biblical preaching. That is not because presenting the sermon is not essential. The researcher agrees with Joel Gregory when he stresses the importance of presentation of the sermon:

A sermon is not a sermon until it is a delivered or preached sermon. Sermons are not intended to compositions for reading; rather, they are declarations in which the communicator, the thing being communicated, and the recipients of the communication are involved in an unusual triadic relationship. Preaching is a word event. The language of preaching ought to be different from other kinds of language. It is not merely a cognitive, cerebral, informing task; it creates a speech event. After that speech event, those hearing pulpit discourses ought not to be the same. . . . On paper a sermon is a creation; on Sunday morning it ought to be a resurrection.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> For more information on Piper's theology, pastoral ministry, and missionary philosophy see three resources as follows: Philip O. Hopkins, "Missions for the Glory of God: An Analysis of the Missionary Theology of John Piper," Ph.D. diss., The Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2005; Shawn Stanton Merithew, "Theological Tenets of the Evangelistic Ministry of John Piper During the Years 1980-2002," Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2003; Sam Storms and Justin Taylor, eds., *For the Fame of God's Name: Essays in Honor of John Piper* (Wheaton: Crossway), 2010.

<sup>20</sup> Joel Gregory, "The Voice in Preaching," in Dudit, 393.

There is no doubt that effective communication of the word of God to the congregation plays a vital role in expository preaching. This project, however, will be limited to Piper's sermon preparation.

Some people disagree with Piper's theological view - Christian Hedonism. Manuel Kuhs, for example, considers Christian Hedonism as utilitarianism - serving God ultimately in order to get spiritual pleasure from Him.<sup>21</sup> Peter Masters says that the term "Hedonism" is an unbiblical and unsuitable word for Christians because it is related to "the mystical - emotional basis of charismatic experience."<sup>22</sup> This paper, however, will not defend the theology of Piper. Instead, this study will focus especially on how Piper's theology influences his preaching, because this paper is a homiletical paper, not a theological one.

### **The Theological and Biblical Basis**

Preaching is the primary means for revival and reform of the church. Preaching is both a privilege and a heavy responsibility that God gives the pastor. God has used preachers to save the lost and enlarge His kingdom through proclaiming His Word. In this light, this dissertation is founded on four theological and biblical bases: the gravity and urgency of preaching, the power of the Word applied in preaching, a theology of expository preaching, and the preacher's character.

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<sup>21</sup> Manuel Kuhs, "A Critical Examination of John Piper's "Christian Hedonism" (1)," *British Reformed Journal* 52 (Spring/Summer 2010): 15.

<sup>22</sup> Peter Masters, "Christian Hedonism Is it Right?," *Sword & Trowel*, no.3 (2002), <http://web.archive.org/web/20071109164448/www.metropolitantabernacle.org/?page=articles&id=3> (accessed March 7, 2011).



## The Gravity and Urgency of Preaching

The task of preaching God's Word is both a solemn and urgent ministry for the pastor. In other words, gravity and urgency are woven together in the preaching ministry of a pastor. Matthew Simpson stresses the nature of pastors' preaching ministry:

His throne is the pulpit; he stands in Christ's stead; his message is the Word of God; around him are immortal souls; the Savior, unseen, is beside him; the Holy Spirit broods over the congregation; angels gaze upon the scene, and heaven and hell await the issue. What association, and what vast responsibility!<sup>23</sup>

Lloyd-Jones likewise states the urgency of the ministry of the Word in this way:

The most urgent need in the Christian Church today is true preaching; and as it is the greatest and the most urgent need in the church, it is obviously the greatest need of the world also . . . preaching always comes first and is given priority. If this [salvation] is the greatest of need of man, if his ultimate need is something that arises out of this ignorance of his which, in turn, is the result of rebellion against God, well then, what needs first and foremost is to be told about this, to be told the truth about himself, and to be told of the only way in which this can be dealt with. So I assert that it is the peculiar task of the church, and of the preacher.<sup>24</sup>

Perhaps the puritan pastor Richard Baxter's statement is the most famous about the gravity and urgency of preaching. He once remarked, "I preached as never sure to preach again and as a dying man to dying men."<sup>25</sup> Mohler says that with stunning expression and a sense of gospel solemnity, Baxter considered preaching as literally a life or death task: "Eternity hangs in the balance as the preacher proclaims the Word."<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Matthew Simpson, *Lectures on Preaching*, (New York: Phillips & Hunt, 1879), 166, quoted in Robinson, *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages*, 16.

<sup>24</sup> D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching and Preachers*, 9, 28-29. Charles Spurgeon supports this opinion: "Life, death, hell, and worlds unknown may hang on the preaching and hearing the sermon." Charles H. Spurgeon, *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit* 39 (London: Alabaster and Passmore, 1862-1917), 170, quoted in Dudit, 19.

<sup>25</sup> Quoted in Mark Galli and Ted Olsen, eds., *131 Christians Everyone Should Know* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2000), 87.

<sup>26</sup> R. Albert Mohler, "From a Dying Man to Dying Men - Recovering a Bold Vision for Biblical Preaching," AlbertMohler.com, <http://www.albertmohler.com/2007/10/12/from-a-dying-man-to-dying->

The Scriptures introduce great preachers who have this gravity and urgency about their preaching ministry. Paul understood the weighty mandate of the preacher better than anyone: “Woe is me if I do not preach the gospel” (1 Cor. 9:16). “How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? How are they to hear without someone preaching?” (Rom. 10:14).

Paul encourages young pastor Timothy to preach the Word in 2 Tim. 4:1-2. In these verses, Paul stresses, using the imperative, a solemn charge of preaching in two ways<sup>27</sup>: 1) in the presence of witnesses: “I charge you in the presence of God and the Christ Jesus” 2) with the eschatological view: Christ’s appearing and his kingdom. In addition to a gravity of preaching, Paul exhorts Timothy in an urgent tone to preach: “preach the word; be ready in season and out of season.” Here, when Paul talks about the importance of being ready in season and out of season, he emphasizes that the need of preaching the Word is “so extremely urgent that truth must be addressed to the church immediately and persistently.”<sup>28</sup>

Furthermore, the Scriptures show a vivid picture of Jesus Christ, who is the greatest preacher of all time. In the ministry of Jesus, preaching was the most important task. John Broadus stresses the primacy and urgency of preaching in Jesus’ ministry:

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men-recovering-a-bold-vision-for-biblical-preaching (accessed March 24, 2011).

<sup>27</sup> Phillip Towner stresses, “The opening phrase of the Greek sentence emphasizes a solemn charge in the presence of witnesses: God and Christ Jesus. This formulaic charge of similar tone related to charges of Moses who called on heaven and earth as witness (Deut 4:26).” Phillip H. Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2006), 599.

<sup>28</sup> Howard I. Marshall, *The Pastoral Epistles*, International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999), 800.

Although greatly tempted to give primacy to other methods of approach to the world, he came preaching . . . all the gospels give unforgettable pictures of the itinerant Preacher, in the synagogues, on the mountains, by the seaside, going from village to village, drawing after him almost unbelievably large crowds, and amazing the people by his words of grace, and the authority of his teaching. . . . His preaching was a cry, urgent in its compassion and masterful in its urgency.<sup>29</sup>

Jesus, who was full of the Holy Spirit, began his ministry by preaching in Nazareth. Luke describes Jesus as an anointed messenger “to preach the gospel good to the poor . . . to preach release to the captives . . . to preach the favorable year of the Lord” (Luke 4:18-19, NASV). Before being taken up into heaven, Jesus commanded His disciples, “Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation” (Mark 16:15). Likewise, today all preachers have been urgently commanded to preach with urgent concern for their hearers.

### **A Theology of Expository Preaching**

Expository preaching focuses not on hearers’ needs-based message but on a biblical text. Preachers who are driven by human-centered approach may get to the text in the course of the sermon, but the text does “not set the agenda or establish the shape of the message.”<sup>30</sup> In the end, they abandon the text. However, expository preachers start with a Scripture text with the authority of God’s word, and proclaim not their opinions or philosophies but God’s Word. In order to do so, expository preachers devote their energies to interpretation or explanation of the Word, including historical, grammatical and literary study of the text, and outline of the structure of it. Moreover, preachers put a

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<sup>29</sup> John A. Broadus, *On the Preparation and Delivery of Sermon*, 4th ed. Revised by Vernon L. Stanfield (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1979), 3-4.

<sup>30</sup> R. Albert Mohler, “From a Dying Man to Dying Men - Recovering a Bold Vision for Biblical Preaching.”

lot of effort into biblical and practical application of the Scripture meaning to themselves and the audience.<sup>31</sup> By doing this, the living God speaks through the expository preachers; the audience hears what God speaks to them.

This theology of expository preaching is exemplified well in Nehemiah 8:5-8:

And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people, for he was above all the people, and as he opened it all the people stood. And Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God, and all the people answered, “Amen, Amen,” lifting up their hands. And they bowed their heads and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground. Also Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodiah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiah, the Levites, helped the people to understand the Law, while the people remained in their places. They read from the book, from the Law of God, clearly, and they gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading.

When Ezra opened God’s word to the Israelites, they felt the presence of God and fell down before Him because they believed that God Himself spoke to them. In verse 8, Ezra and the Levites read the law of God, making it distinct,<sup>32</sup> and gave the sense. The word translated “gave the sense” means “to set forth the insight, understanding or the meaning.”<sup>33</sup> This is interpretation or explanation of God’s word. In verse 7, people understood what was being read because the priests caused all people to understand the

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<sup>31</sup> Robinson teaches preachers to focus on first and foremost the passage itself for expository preaching: 1) The passage governs the sermon; 2) The expositor communicates a concept; 3) The concept comes from the text; 4) The concept is applied to the expositor; and 5) The concept is applied to the hearers. Haddon W. Robinson, *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages*. 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2001), 21-30. Chapell states that three elements of expository preaching: 1) Explanation of what a text means 2) Illustration as demonstrations of what it means 3) Application of what it means to our personal lives). Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon*, 89.

<sup>32</sup> The Hebrew word used here, *parash* (“Cleary” in the ESV) can be translated “making distinct” because it is pual participle masc. singular. See F. Brown, S. Driver, and C. Briggs, eds., *The Brown Driver Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1997), 831. Kidner suggests, “The basic meaning of the word in question is ‘to make distinct or separate’, which could denote either that the reading was well articulated or that the law was read and expounded section by section.” Derek Kidner, *Ezra & Nehemiah* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1979), 106.

<sup>33</sup> Brown, Driver, and Briggs, eds., *The Brown Driver Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 968.

law while probably moving among them. In other words, the Levites taught the meaning of the text “in such a way that they could use the information that was imparted.”<sup>34</sup> This is application of what a text means.

This sermon pattern, also, appears in Jesus’ preaching ministry (Luke 4:16-29). Jesus explained the meaning of the text after reading Isa. 61:1-2 in the synagogue (4:21), and then applied it to hearers, illustrating the ministries of Elijah and Elisha (4:23-27). So from that point, it is inferred that the heart of expository preaching is clearly explaining God’s word, vividly illustrating it and effectively applying it to hearers’ personal lives so that they may understand the Word of God.

### **The Power of the Word through Expository Preaching**

When the Word is preached through human lips, it has an ability to transform hearers because God’s Spirit-inspired Word is preachers’ only source, authority and power for preaching. God speaks when preachers speak the truths of God’s Word.<sup>35</sup>

Therefore, hearers meet God Himself through preaching. J. I. Packer captures this point well:

Authority is also integral to the notion of what preaching is, namely, as is now clear, human lips uttering God’s message. . . . The authority of preaching flows from the transparency of the preacher’s relation to the Bible and to the three Persons who are the one God whose Word the Bible is. . . . Preaching mediates

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<sup>34</sup> Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon*, 88. Mervin Breneman comments, “The exposition helps students of the Word understand the overall message and the implications of the text for doctrine and practice. Furthermore, although the message and content of Scripture does not change, it does need fresh application in every situation.” Mervin Brenemen, *Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther*, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1993), 226.

<sup>35</sup> Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon*, 32.

not only God's authority, but also His presence and His power. . . . Preaching effects an encounter not simply with truth, but with God Himself.<sup>36</sup>

Paul was convinced that the Word applied in expository preaching is powerful. Before giving a solemn charge of preaching to Timothy in 2 Tim. 4:1-2, Paul reminded him of the divine power of Scripture: "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness" (2 Tim. 3:15-17). In Eph. 6:17, Paul expresses the power of God's word metaphorically: "[Take] the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God." The writer of Hebrews explains it concretely: "The word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart" (Heb. 4:12).

A good example of the power of the Word is in Luke 24:27-32. After listening to Jesus' sermon about His death and resurrection on the road to Emmaus, some disciples said to each other, "Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the Scriptures?" Another example of the power of the Word appeared in the early Christian church: "The word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith" (Acts 6:7). In this light, there is no doubt that the Word of God, which acts as God himself, through expository preaching, is measured by power.

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<sup>36</sup> J. I. Packer, "Introduction: Why Preach?," in Samuel T. Logan, Jr, ed., *The Preacher and Preaching: Reviving the Art in the Twentieth Century* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1986), 11-13.

## The Preacher's Character

Phillips Brooks once defined preaching as “the bringing of truth through personality.”<sup>37</sup> Preachers deliver not their own words but God’s message. And through the expository preacher, God speaks to the audience and displays His glory and power. In this context, it cannot be emphasized enough that the preacher must be prepared to not only be the expositor but also have a godly character. A life of holiness is of the greatest importance in the preacher’s sermon preparation. Charles Haddon Spurgeon once gave the following advice to students at his Pastor’s College: preachers “must cultivate the highest degree of godliness” because their work necessarily requires it.<sup>38</sup> E. M. Bounds echoes this conviction: “The preacher is the golden pipe through which the divine oil flows. The pipe must not only be golden, but open and flawless. . . . God must make the man. The messenger is, if possible, more than message.”<sup>39</sup>

God purified Isaiah’s lips with a burning coal before he was sent to preach God’s Word (Isaiah 6:6-13). Paul, also, lived a godly life. He had been “crucified with Christ” (Gal. 2:20). He added, “Our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction. You know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake” (1 Thess. 1:5).

The best example appears in Jesus’ life. He was full of the Spirit’s power. He said, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor” (Luke 4:18). Jesus was saturated with God’s word (Matt. 4:1-11) and lived a deep prayer life (Mark 1:35). He was in God the Father and God the Father was in him.

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<sup>37</sup> Phillips Brooks, *The Joy of Preaching*, 4th ed. (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1989), 26.

<sup>38</sup> Charles. H. Spurgeon, *Lectures To My Students* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 17.

<sup>39</sup> Edward M. Bounds, *Power Through Prayer* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1979), 11.

God the Father, who dwelled in Jesus, did His work through Him (John 14:10). In this light, to be God's messenger, the expository preacher must be a man of godly character.

### **The Statement of Methodology**

This study attempts an investigation of John Piper's sermon preparation. Chapter one as an introduction of this study dealt with purpose, importance, limitations, the theological and biblical basis, and the method of this dissertation.

Nothing is more important than the spiritual preparation of the preacher in preparing sermons. Therefore, this study will commence with an outline of Piper's background and influences on his preaching ministry. Chapter two will include Piper's conversion experience, the call to preaching ministry, his godly life, his theology focusing on "Christian Hedonism" and people who have impacted his theological system.

Piper's principles of biblical interpretation will follow Piper's background of preaching ministry. Chapter three will explore Piper's approach to the Bible while reading it. It will also discuss Piper's solid Bible study method, called "Bible Arching." Finally, it will look into the major influence on Piper's biblical exegesis.

Piper's philosophy of preaching will be treated in chapter four. It will first discuss Piper's preaching motivation: "The Supremacy of God in Preaching." Then it will describe Piper's objective of preaching such as preaching as worship, exposition, and exultation. It will finally look into Piper's major mentor of preaching, Jonathan Edwards, and other preachers who have influenced him.

Chapter five will establish Piper's skills for expository preaching. First, this section will delineate how Piper selects a text. Then it will describe how he structures his



expository sermon. Piper's sermon structure is divided into three areas: introduction to the sermon, body of the sermon (explanation, illustration, and application), and conclusion. It will finally describe Piper's homiletical application of the genres of Scripture.

The final chapter of this study will summarize the findings with conclusion. It will reiterate the importance of the supremacy of God in preaching ministry. Finally, it will look at some implications for expository preachers who emphasize the supremacy of God in preaching today.

### **A Review of the Literature**

This section will review some of the most relevant literature to this study. Because this study is concerned with John Piper's sermon preparation, first Piper's central writings will be surveyed. Then books discussing the fields of the preacher's character, biblical interpretation and expository preaching will be reviewed.

Piper's ten books in particular will serve as key sources for this study. First, *Desiring God* is Piper's main work on his theology based on Christian Hedonism. In addition to this book, *Future Grace* and *God is the Gospel* set forth God-centered and faithful life related to Christian Hedonism. Fourth, *The Pleasures of God* describes Piper's theology that emphasizes the fact that God's greatest gladness is being God. Fifth, along with *Desiring God* and *The Pleasures of God*, *God's Passion for His Glory: Living the Vision of Jonathan Edwards* is a fundamental book for Piper's theology and life. Sixth, *Brothers, We Are Not Professionals* is Piper's major book on biblical and radical pastoral ministry. The sixth book is *When I don't Desire God*. This book explains how to pursue Bible-saturated and prayer-centered life in the fight for joy. The sixth and seventh

books together explain well how pastors maintain strong devotional lives. Eighth, *Biblical Exegesis: Discovering the Meaning of Scriptural Text* (unpublished) introduces Piper's hermeneutical skills. This book shows a method of reading Scripture that Piper learned from Daniel Fuller, professor emeritus at Fuller Theological Seminary. Ninth, *The Supremacy of God in Preaching* is his primary book on his philosophy of preaching. It briefly introduces his decision to be a preacher and clearly shows a God-centered and God-glorifying vision of preaching in a Trinitarian way from the Scriptures and in examples from Jonathan Edwards. Finally, *The Pastor as Prophet* is a booklet on his homiletics, which Piper taught at The Resurgence Training Center of Mars Hill Church, in February 26-27, 2010. It provides not only his philosophy of preaching, but also his method of sermon preparation.

A great book on John Piper's ministry, personal relationships and insight into his personality was published in 2011 entitled *For the Fame of God's Name: Essays in Honor of John Piper*. It is the work where Piper's friends and colleagues, including D. A. Carson, John MacArthur, Wayne Grudem, Sinclair Ferguson, and William D. Mounce, wrote on important aspects of his ministry: Piper's character, Christian Hedonism, the sovereignty of God, preaching and pastoral ministry, marriage, prayer, Jonathan Edwards' theology and preaching, and more.

To study Piper's character and philosophy of preaching, the following books will be reference sources. The first book is Charles Spurgeon's *Lectures to My Students*. This book is actually about being a pastor who God uses for his glory. It sets forth important themes such as pastors and God's calling, pastors and growth, pastors and prayer, pastors and the Holy Spirit, and pastors and preaching. A second significant book is Martin

Lloyd-Jones' *Preacher and Preaching*. This text deals with the call to preach, the character of preachers, the preparation of the sermon and preachers themselves, and the sacred anointing of the Holy Spirit in preaching.

The general approach to Piper's principles of biblical interpretation is outlined in various works. First, Thomas R. Schreiner's *Interpreting the Pauline Epistles: Guides to New Testament Exegesis* shows well the process of developing an accurate exegesis of any Pauline Epistle. Especially, chapter 5, "Diagramming and Conducting a Grammatical Analysis" provides various logical relationships between the propositions. Second, Doriani M. Daniel's *Getting the Message* provides not only six principles for interpretation (context, analysis, problems, themes, obligations, and reflection) but also practical examples for interpreting and applying Scripture. Third, *Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics* written by William W. Klein, Craig L. Blomberg, and Robert L. Hubbard, Jr. investigates characteristics of the interpreter, sets up vital principles to know the function of the Bible as literature, describes the precise kinds of genres in the Bible, and considers how to apply the Scriptures today. Last, Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart's *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth* deals with all major genres of Scripture focusing on exegesis related to original background and audience, as well as hermeneutics related to the audience today.

Works treating Piper's skills for expository preaching include the following books. First, Bryan Chapell's *Christ-Centered Preaching* is an excellent source for sermon preparation, development and delivery, and it helps preachers speak with authority of God's Word and glorify God through redemptive preaching. Second, Haddon Robinson's *Biblical Preaching* is a great overall work on expository preaching along with Chapell's

book. This book walks preachers through a ten-stage process of preparing and delivering expository message. Especially, the emphasis on having one main point in one sermon and life applicable sermon help preachers make powerful expository sermons. Third, David Chung's *Ten Commandments for Biblical Preaching* not only provides effective methods of sermon preparation and delivery using his actual sermons as an example, but also helps preachers deeply see inside of their character. Fourth, *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture* written by Graeme Goldsworthy deals with the biblical theological approach for redemptive-historical preaching. This book was recommended for preaching class at Bethlehem Seminary where Piper teaches. Finally, Richard Ramesh's *Preparing Expository Sermons* offers the scripture sculpture method for biblical expository sermon preparation. This book efficiently shows how a hermeneutical exercise connects the homiletical exercise through a seven-step process.

## CHAPTER TWO

### JOHN PIPER’S BACKGROUND OF PREACHING MINISTRY

#### A Godly Upbringing<sup>1</sup>

John Piper was born in Chattanooga, Tennessee, the second child of Bill and Ruth Piper, on January 11, 1946. He spent most of his childhood and youth in Greenville, South Carolina. His father was an itinerant evangelist, who would leave home for several weeks. However, Piper never felt any hurt or anger with his father’s traveling absence, because it was “for such a glorious cause.”<sup>2</sup> Piper rarely had a chance to travel with his father and listen to his preaching, and he would hear about the victories of the gospel from his father at the dinner table on Monday night after his work of evangelism.<sup>3</sup> One great thing happened as a result: spiritual awakening. Piper records,

I trembled to hear my father preach. . . . He would press the warnings and the wooings of Christ into the heart of each person. He had stories, so many stories, for each age group—stories of glorious conversions, and stories of horrific refusals to believe followed by tragic deaths. Seldom could those stories come

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<sup>1</sup> This section heavily collects information from two sources: John Piper, “Extended Biography of John Piper,” *Desiring God*, <http://www.desiringgod.org/about/john-piper/extended-biography> (accessed April 12, 2011); John Piper, *Desiring God*, preface.

<sup>2</sup> John Piper, “Thoughts on My Father,” *Desiring God*, <http://www.desiringgod.org/blog/posts/thoughts-on-my-father> (accessed April 12, 2011). Piper says, “[My father’s] traveling wasn’t like business. It was our life. This is what we lived for: we lived for the gospel as a family. My mother knew what she had gotten into.” He adds, “Mother never hinted that the absence of my father was anything but a glorious privilege for us to support. It never entered into my mind to resent it. Nor does it today.” John Piper, *A Godward Life, Book Two: Savoring the Supremacy of God in All of Life* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Books, 1999), 37-38.

<sup>3</sup> John Piper, *Desiring God*, 15. He adds, “These were the happiest times in my memory.”

without tears. . . . The story of an old man weeping that he had wasted his life. In those early years God awakened in me a fear and a passion not to waste my life.<sup>4</sup> The influence of Piper's mother was also considerable because of her strong

leadership and faith. His mother would pray for his father's ministry with Piper and his sister when his father was away preaching and she would glow on Monday mornings when his father returned home. Her love for the Bible encouraged Piper to love and keep close to the Bible all his life. She wrote in the front leaf of the Bible, which she gave Piper as a fifteenth birthday gift, the following words: "This book will keep you from sin, or sin will keep you from this book."<sup>5</sup> Also, she wrote a letter quoting passages from the Bible to Piper about once a week - from when he started college to when he became a professor at Bethel College - for the last ten years of her life before dying in a bus accident in Israel in 1974. As a result, these letters helped Piper live a faithful life. In the preface to his book *The Purifying Power of Living by Faith in Future Grace*, Piper dedicated this book to his mother:

She was relentless in her love. Scarcely a letter would be without a quote from the Scriptures. She had saturated me as a boy. She would go on saturating me as a man. Of all the text that she quoted, one predominated. I think it must have been her favorite. At least it was the one she believed I needed most often, Proverbs 3:5-6. . . . Over the years I have come to see that this passage is a call to live by *faith in future grace*. . . . Month after month my mother counseled me to live by faith in future grace. She called me to trust the Lord and she showed me that the focus of my trust is what God promised to do for me in the future: "Son, the Lord will direct your paths; trust him, trust him."<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> John Piper, *Don't Waste Your Life*, Group Study ed. (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2007), 11-12. It is certain that his father's impact as a preacher on Piper was great. Chapter 4 discusses this in detail.

<sup>5</sup> John Piper, *When I Don't Desire God: How to Fight for Joy* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2004), 106. Piper's parents taught him Galatians 2:20 on his fifteenth birthday and Piper wrote that verse, which "inspired him to live by faith in the Son of God," on the second leaf of this Bible. David Michael, "A Personal Tribute," in *For the Fame of God's Name: Essay in Honor Of John Piper*, eds., Sam Storms and Justin Taylor (Wheaton: Crossway, 2010), 19.

<sup>6</sup> John Piper, *The Purifying Power of Living by Faith in Future Grace* (Colorado Springs: Multnomah, 1995), 6. Italics his.

In his book *What's the Difference?*, which includes a tribute to his mother, Piper depicts her as an “omni-competent”<sup>7</sup> woman. She dealt with the housework very capably, including nurturing and educating her children, and finally helped instill in Piper “a strong work ethic along with high expectation of character.”<sup>8</sup>

### **His Conversion Experience**

God used Piper's parents to help him become a true Christian. In his childhood, as mentioned earlier, Piper experienced religious impressions through his father's powerful evangelistic preaching and converts' testimonies before coming into an assurance that he was a genuine Christian. His conversion happened during a family summer vacation in Fort Lauderdale, Florida in 1952 when he was six. It was his mother Ruth who drew him to Christ. There Piper confessed a “sinner's prayer”<sup>9</sup> with his mother. After that, he finally came to be convinced of his conversion through Romans. He describes it thus:

I don't remember being converted at age six at my mother's side in Fort Lauderdale, Florida (as my father reminds me). I only remember believing. But I do remember learning the meaning of my conversion - and I learned it from the book of Romans: “All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God”(3:23); and “the wages of sin is death”(6:23); and “God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us”(5:8); and “if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved”(10:9).<sup>10</sup>

In this light, by far the most important influence on molding the spiritual values of

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<sup>7</sup> John Piper, *What's the Difference?: Manhood and Womanhood Defined According to the Bible* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1990), 11.

<sup>8</sup> David Livingstone, “Three Doors Down from A Power Plant,” Sam Storms and Justin Taylor, 25.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> John Piper, “The Author of the Greatest Letter Ever Written,” *Desiring God*, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/the-author-of-the-greatest-letter-ever-written> (accessed April 21, 2011).

Piper as a child was his parents. He meaningfully reminisces about his godly parents: “Both were strong. Both were bright. Both were kind. Both would kiss me and both would spank me. Both were good with words. Both prayed with fervor and loved the Bible.”<sup>11</sup> Piper loved his parents, admired them, and embraced the truth that they taught him.<sup>12</sup>

### **His Call to Preaching Ministry<sup>13</sup>**

#### **The Call to the Ministry of the Word**

God’s call to the ministry of the word happened during Piper’s college years in September of 1966. At the time, Piper, who was a pre-med student majoring in literature at Wheaton College, was diagnosed with mononucleosis. While he was incapacitated at the health center for three weeks, God started to change Piper’s future plan. Piper says,

In May I had felt a joyful confidence that my life would be most useful as a medical doctor. I loved biology; I loved the idea of healing people. I loved knowing, at last, what I was doing in college. So I quickly took general chemistry in summer school so I could catch up and take organic chemistry that fall. Now with mono, I had missed three weeks of organic chemistry. There was no catching up. . . . The life plan that I was so sure of four months earlier unraveled in my fevered hands.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> John Piper, *What’s the Difference?: Manhood and Womanhood Defined According to the Bible*, 12.

<sup>12</sup> John Piper, “The Pastor as Scholar: A Personal Journey,” *Desiring God*, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/conference-messages/the-pastor-as-scholar-a-personal-journey> (accessed April 21, 2011).

<sup>13</sup> This section gleans heavily from four sources: John Piper, “The Pastor As Scholar: A Personal Journey”; Jon Bloom, “Thank You, Pastor John, for 30 Years,” *Desiring God*, <http://www.desiringgod.org/blog/posts/thank-you-pastor-john-for-30-years> (accessed April 26, 2011); Justin Taylor, “30 Years Ago Today: How God Called John Piper to Become a Pastor,” *The Gospel Coalition*, October 14, 2009, <http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/justintaylor/2009/10/14/30-years-ago-today-how-god-called-john-piper-to-become-a-pastor> (accessed April 26, 2011); David Livingstone, “Three Doors Down from A Power Plant.”

<sup>14</sup> John Piper, *Don’t Waste Your Life*, 21.



While in the college infirmary, Piper heard Harold John Ockenga, who was the pastor of Park Street Church in Boston, preach on the college radio station during Spiritual Emphasis Week. Ockenga's preaching led to an important change in Piper's life. Piper sensed an irresistible call to the ministry of the Word and then gave up his medical path. He recounts,

Never had I heard exposition of the Scriptures like this. Suddenly all the glorious objectivity of Reality centered for me on the Word of God. I lay there feeling as if I had awakened from a dream, and knew, now that I was awake, what I was to do.<sup>15</sup> . . . Under the preaching of the word of God by Pastor Ockenga, the direction of my life was permanently changed. I can remember my heart almost bursting with longing as I listened – longing to know and handle the Word of God like that. Through those messages God called me to the ministry of the Word irresistibly, and I believe, irrevocably. It has been my conviction ever since that the subjective evidence of God's call to the ministry of the Word (to use the words of Charles Spurgeon) "is an intense, all-absorbing desire for the work." When I got out of the health center, I dropped organic chemistry, took up philosophy as a minor, and set my face to get the best biblical and theological education I could.<sup>16</sup>

After that, a desire to study and understand the Word of God was getting hot through John Stott's little book of an exposition of Romans 5-8 entitled *Men Made New*, which was "fuel on the flame that Ockenga had lit,"<sup>17</sup> and came alive to "the glories of exposition."<sup>18</sup>

However, after Piper decided to obey God's calling, Piper did not know what it would mean for him to be a minister of the Word of God. He did not even want to be a

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> John Piper, *The Supremacy of God in Preaching*, 21-22.

<sup>17</sup> John Piper and D. A. Carson, *The Pastor as Scholar & The Scholar as Pastor: Reflections on Life and Ministry* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2011), 36.

<sup>18</sup> John Piper, "John Stott, The Expositor, Sent at a Crucial Point in My Life," *Desiring God*, <http://www.desiringgod.org/blog/posts/john-stott-the-expositor-sent-at-a-crucial-point-in-my-life> (accessed April 26, 2011).

pastor.<sup>19</sup> What he wanted was only to study and understand the Word of God in seminary.

He says,

All I knew was that ultimate Reality had suddenly centered for me on the Word of God. The great Point and Purpose and Essence that I longed to link up with was now connected unbreakably with the Bible. The mandate was clear: “Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15). For me, that meant seminary, with a focus on understanding and rightly handling the Bible.<sup>20</sup>

In 1968, Piper went to Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena to pursue a Master of Divinity degree where Piper became “a Calvinist and a Christian Hedonist” through Jonathan Edwards, his most powerful “dead” teacher and Daniel Fuller, his most influential “living” teacher,<sup>21</sup> and others. Then in 1974, Piper earned his Doctorate of Theology in the New Testament at the University of Munich in Germany.

Following seminary Piper taught biblical studies for six years at Bethel College in St. Paul. Teaching at Bethel brought great joy to Piper because he was respected as a favorite teacher among students<sup>22</sup> and the lives of some his students were transformed through his classes. In addition to teaching at Bethel, Piper eagerly taught the young adult Sunday school class at Olivet Baptist Church in Crystal, MN.

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<sup>19</sup> John Piper, *Don't Waste Your Life*, 23.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> John Piper, *Desiring God*, “Extended Biography of John Piper.”

<sup>22</sup> David Livingstone, “Three Doors Down from A Power Plant,” 32.

## The Call to Be a Preacher and Pastor

While at Bethel, Piper had an opportunity to hear good preaching every Sunday and started to feel a strong desire to preach inside him. In 1979, while studying Romans 9:1-23 daily during his sabbatical, Piper deeply experienced the absolute sovereignty of God and then his “analysis merged into worship.”<sup>23</sup> At the time, unexpectedly, God created in Piper the passion “to address a flock week after week and try to draw them in . . . to an experience of God that gives them more joy in him than they have in anything else and thus magnifies Christ.”<sup>24</sup>

Finally, on Monday, October 14, 1979, Piper discerned an irresistible drawing to the preaching of God’s word. God said to Piper through Romans 9: “I will not simply be analyzed, I will be adored. I will not simply be pondered, I will be proclaimed. My sovereignty is not simply to be scrutinized, it is to be heralded.”<sup>25</sup> Referring to a moment when he sensed an intense calling to preach God’s word, Piper notes,

I longed to see the word of God applied in preaching to the whole range of ages and life situations. I wanted to watch the absolutely sovereign God of Romans 9 build his church. I wanted to see what would happen if the supremacy of God in all things were made the centerpiece of a local church through the word of God. . . . I could not resist any longer. The passion to preach and to see God shape and grow a church by the word of God was overwhelming.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> John Piper, “The Absolute Sovereignty of God: What Is Romans Nine About?,” *Desiring God*, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/the-absolute-sovereignty-of-god-what-is-romans-nine-about> (accessed April 28, 2011).

<sup>24</sup> John Piper, “John Piper’s Candidating Testimony,” *Desiring God*, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/john-pipers-candidating-testimony> (accessed April 28, 2011).

<sup>25</sup> John Piper, “The Absolute Sovereignty of God: What Is Romans Nine About?.”

<sup>26</sup> John Piper and D. A. Carson, *The Pastor as Scholar & The Scholar as Pastor: Reflections on Life and Ministry*, 44-45. Piper adds, “By personal calling and Scripture, I am bound to the word of God and to the preaching of what the Bible says. There are few things that burden me more or refresh me more than saying what I see in the Bible. I love to see what God says in the Bible. I love to savor it. And I love to say it.” John Piper, “In Honor of Tethered Preaching,” *Desiring God*, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/taste-see-articles/in-honor-of-tethered-preaching> (accessed April 28, 2011).

By the end of that sabbatical, Piper made a decision to abandon his teaching position and be a pastor. God, who had ignited a passion to preach His word in Piper, eventually led him to Bethlehem Baptist Church, Minneapolis in 1980. On January 27, Piper preached as a candidate for the first time at Bethlehem. While Piper was a candidate at Bethlehem, he asked for his father's advice on God's calling to be a pastor. Piper's father wrote him,

Now I want you to remember a few things about the pastorate. Being a pastor today involves more than merely teaching and preaching. . . . Then there a hundred administrative responsibilities as pastor. . . . If the Lord has called you, these things will not deter nor dismay you. But I wanted you to know the whole picture. As in all of our Lord's work there will be a thousand compensations. You'll see that people trust Christ as Savior and Lord. You'll see these grow in the knowledge of Christ and his Word. You'll witness saints enabled by your preaching to face all manner of tests. You'll see God at work in human lives, and there is no joy comparable to this. Just ask yourself, son, if you are prepared not only to preach and teach, but also to weep over men's souls, to care for the sick and dying, and to bear the burdens carried today by the saints of God.<sup>27</sup>

Finally, in July he began his pastorate there.<sup>28</sup>

### **His Godly Life**

D. Martin Lloyd-Jones emphasizes the importance of preachers' spiritual preparation: "The preacher must be a man who is characterized in spirituality in an unusual degree. . . . The preacher's first, and most important task is to prepare himself,

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<sup>27</sup> Justin Taylor, "30 Years Ago Today: How God Called John Piper to Become a Pastor."

<sup>28</sup> David Michael, Pastor for Parenting and Family Discipleship of Bethlehem Baptist Church, gave tribute to Piper in *For the Fame of God's Name* thus: "Almighty God and Everlasting Father ... Thank you for opening Bethlehem's pulpit at just right time and for directing the will of the search committee to recommend that John be called to the position of preaching pastor." David Michael, "A Personal Tribute," Sam Storms and Taylor, 19.

not his sermon.”<sup>29</sup> Piper exposed the same idea when teaching to students at The Resurgence Training Center of Mars Hill Church: “Utterly crucial, as in all aspects of ministry is the spiritual condition of the preacher.”<sup>30</sup>

### **Loving the Bible fervently**

Piper has always loved the Bible more than other books. The Bible is more than a sermon resource for him. He eagerly longs to saturate himself in the Bible, and God’s Word has enriched his body and soul. He says,

I was reading in four parts of the Bible—not for any preparation, but just to feed my soul. In every text another text came to mind that made each clearer. And that blew some fog away so I could see and enjoy God more fully. . . . O, how sweet is the word of God! I looked out my window into the bright morning and said: I love you, God. I love you, Lord Jesus. I love your word. O what a privilege to know you and to have your word. Please keep me faithful to it. In Jesus’ name. Amen.<sup>31</sup>

In order to be saturated with Scripture,<sup>32</sup> Piper has practiced three methods. First, at a private place early in the morning, he reads through the Bible once a year through The Discipleship Journal Bible Reading Plan. Second, he spends much time in memorizing verses, paragraphs, chapters, and even whole books at a time.<sup>33</sup> Third, he often takes

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<sup>29</sup> D. Martin Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching and Preachers*, 109, 196.

<sup>30</sup> John Piper, “The Pastor as Prophet,” (Lecture, Ballard Campus of Mars Hill Church, Seattle, WA, February 27, 2010).

<sup>31</sup> John Piper, “Morning Meditations on 4 Parts of the Bible,” *Desiring God*, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/taste-see-articles/morning-meditations-on-4-parts-of-the-bible> (accessed May 12, 2011).

<sup>32</sup> Piper stresses that pastors should be like Charles Spurgeon, when he said, “It is blessed to eat into the very soul of the Bible until, at last, your spirit is flavored with the words of the Lord, so that your blood is Bibleline and the very essence of the Bible flows from you.” John R. Stott, *The Preacher’s Portrait* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1961), 30-31, quoted in John Piper, *When I Don’t Desire God: How to Fight for Joy*, 115.

<sup>33</sup> For how Piper memorizes Scripture, see John Piper, “How do You Memorize Scripture,” *Desiring God*, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/ask-pastor-john/how-do-you-memorize->

“periodic retreats with nothing but the Word of God and a pad of paper and pen” in order to escape his busy daily life, focus on God and meditate on His Word.<sup>34</sup>

As a result of loving the Bible, Piper’s writing and speaking, aside from his soul and mind, have been steeped in God’s Word. What is more amazing is that Piper has “contagious love for the Bible.”<sup>35</sup> For example, David Michael, Executive Pastoral Assistant of Bethlehem Baptist Church, felt a desire to be a man of the Scripture after talking about theology with Piper. He recounts, “[Piper’s] mind defaulted to biblical texts, not to confessional formulations. . . . It was clear to us seminarians that Pastor John not only believed in *Sola Scriptura* but practiced it.”<sup>36</sup>

## Prayer Life

Besides loving the Bible, Piper has lived a praying life to walk with God and pursue his own holiness. Piper strives to pray anywhere, anytime because he believes that “prayer is the splicing of [the pastor’s] limp wire to the lightning bolt of heaven.”<sup>37</sup> Piper

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scripture (accessed May 7, 2011). Piper gives some reasons for memorizing Scripture in the following source: John Piper, “Why Memorize Scripture?,” *Desiring God*, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/taste-see-articles/why-memorize-scripture> (accessed May 12, 2011).

<sup>34</sup> John Piper, *When I Don’t Desire God: How to Fight for Joy*, 123. See also Charles Spurgeon’s excellent advice:

I would seriously recommend to you, when settled in the ministry, the celebration of extraordinary seasons of devotion. If your ordinary prayers do not keep up the freshness and vigour of your souls, and you feel that you are flagging, get alone for a week, even a month if possible. We have occasional holidays, why not frequent holy days? ... I notice that the Romanists are accustomed to secure what they call “Retreats,” where a number of priests will retire for a time into perfect quietude, to spend the whole of the time in fasting and prayer, so as to inflame their souls with ardour. We may learn from our adversaries.

Charles. H. Spurgeon, *Lectures To My Students* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 51.

<sup>35</sup> David Mathis, “Who is John Piper?” Sam Storms and Justin Taylor, 38.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 40. Italics his.

<sup>37</sup> John Piper, *We are Not Professionals: A Plea to Pastors for Radical Ministry* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2002), 53.

has about five half-hour prayer meetings at his church every week.<sup>38</sup> In addition to public prayer, Piper prays at a private place and at a regular time. He has spent “a long time in focused prayer and meditation early in the morning,” and “two or three other shorts times later in the day, roughly corresponding to lunch, dinner, and bedtime.”<sup>39</sup> In his prayer closet, Piper has prayed not only in great agony for the lost, but also persistently and earnestly for the ministry of the Word. He challenges preachers with the following:

Examine yourself: Does it lie within your power right now to weep over the spiritual destruction of the people on your street? Such tears come only through a profound work of God. If we want this work of God in our lives and in our churches, there will be agonizing prayer: “God, break my heart!” . . . Without extended, concentrated prayer, the ministry of the Word withers up and bears no fruits. . . . The more heavily engaged one is in battling the powers of darkness, the greater will be one’s sense of need to spend time in prayer. . . . Brothers, devote yourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the Word.<sup>40</sup>

Likewise, Piper is eager to live daily in a ceaseless fellowship with God through prayer for his godly life and effective ministries.

In particular, Piper has several methods of prayer.<sup>41</sup> The best example of these is to “pray the Word of God” with the help of the Spirit. Piper learned this method from

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<sup>38</sup> David Mathis, “Who is John Piper?” Sam Storms and Justin Taylor, 40.

<sup>39</sup> John Piper, *When I Don’t Desire God: How to Fight for Joy*, 160-162. Piper has used “a prayer bench,” which was designed to kneel and read the Bible or other books at a nook of his study room since 1975. He recalls, “God alone knows the tears and songs that have mingled there.”

<sup>40</sup> John Piper, *We are Not Professionals*, 56, 60-64.

<sup>41</sup> John Piper, *When I Don’t Desire God*, 163. Piper suggests five practical methods for effective prayer life - FADES: 1) F - Free and formed; 2) A - Alone and Assembled; 3) D - Desperate and Delighted; 4) E - Explosive and Extended; and 5) S - Spontaneous and scheduled. John Piper, “Be Devoted to Prayer,” *Desiring God*, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/be-devoted-to-prayer> (accessed May 12, 2011). Also, see the following sermons: John Piper, “Devote Yourselves to Prayer,” *Desiring God*, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/devote-yourselfes-to-prayer> (accessed May 12, 2011). John Piper, “Hold Fast to the Word and Pray for Us,” *Desiring God*, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/hold-fast-to-the-word-and-pray-for-us> (accessed May 12, 2011).

George Muller. Muller has been “a pacesetter” for him in prayer.<sup>42</sup> Through this pattern, Piper prays for as long as he can read the Bible. He says,

The prayer time and the Bible meditation time don’t have to be separate times. It would be best if they were not separate. If you ask, what do I pray for myself and my family and my church and the missionaries and the city and the nations, the answer is pray Scripture. God’s Word reveals God and His will. What you want for yourself and those you pray for is more of God and more of his will.<sup>43</sup> . . . Open the Bible in front of you and put one elbow on one side and one on the other and pray every paragraph of into contrition or praise or thanks or petition.<sup>44</sup> . . . Take a passage of Scripture, and start reading it slowly. After each sentence, pause and go back and turn what you read into prayer. . . . you may pray all day . . . in a God centered, Christ-exalting way.<sup>45</sup>

Piper also has connected his studies to prayer in the Holy Spirit. Depending on the Holy Spirit, Piper has even asked God’s help with speaking, with every e-mail and with every line of every sermon,<sup>46</sup> because he thinks that without prayer, all his scurrying about, all his talking, and all his study amounts to nothing.<sup>47</sup>

### **An Ardent Book Reader**

Piper has read “serious books about the Bible and thinking”<sup>48</sup> as well as the Bible so that he can always stay alive in his soul. In other words, Piper longs to keep his spirit

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<sup>42</sup> John Piper, *We are Not Professionals*, 93. For how Piper learned from George Muller, see chapter 13 of *We are Not Professionals*, chapter 10 of *When I Don’t Desire God* and chapter 5 of *Desiring God*.

<sup>43</sup> John Piper, “Devote Yourselves to Prayer.”

<sup>44</sup> John Piper, “Be Devoted to Prayer.”

<sup>45</sup> John Piper, *When I Don’t Desire God*, 164-165. He adds, “If you ever longed for a life of deep and fruitful prayer; give yourself to the Word of God. Read it. Think about it. Memorize it. Be shaped by it. When saturated by the Word, More surely will our prayers be heard,” 109.

<sup>46</sup> David Mathis, “Who is John Piper?” Sam Storms and Justin Taylor, 40.

<sup>47</sup> John Piper, *Brothers, We are Not Professionals*, 55.

<sup>48</sup> John Piper, *When I Don’t Desire God*, 125.



refreshed, his heart deepened, and his mind enlarged with truth through reading books.<sup>49</sup>

Piper writes,

For your own soul and for the life of your church, fight for the time to feed your soul with rich reading. . . . If you want to stay alive to what is great and glorious and beautiful and eternal, you will have to fight for time to look through the eyes of others who were in touch with God.<sup>50</sup>

Piper has loved reading, especially great books that “have been around forever,” and are “time-proven, classic, deep works on various issues”<sup>51</sup> such as the classic works of Jonathan Edwards, St. Augustine, John Owen, John Calvin, Charles Spurgeon, B. B. Warfield, John Bunyan, Richard Sibbes, Thomas Boston, Richard Baxter, Stephen Charnock, Thomas Watson, J. C. Ryle, John Flavel, D. Martin Lloyd-Jones, C.S. Lewis, and so on.<sup>52</sup>

Piper is a slow reader. Like Spurgeon or Lloyd-Jones, he tries to master one book thoroughly rather than only skimming, or overlapping several books. In order to do that, Piper has created his own way to read. He reads about a different topic, each in a

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<sup>49</sup> John Piper, *Brothers, We are Not Professionals*, 68.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 66-67.

<sup>51</sup> John Piper, “How do you Decide which Books to Read?,” Desiring God, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/ask-pastor-john/how-do-you-decide-which-books-to-read> (accessed May 11, 2011).

<sup>52</sup> For books that have been most influenced John Piper, see the following sources: John Piper, “Piper’s Frequently Asked Questions,” Desiring God, <http://www.desiringgod.org/about/john-piper/faqs> (accessed May 13, 2011); John Piper, “Books That Have Influenced Me Most,” Desiring God, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/articles/books-that-have-influenced-me-most> (accessed May 13, 2011); John Piper, “How do You Decide which Books to Read?” In *Overcoming Sin & Temptation: Three Classic Works of John Owen*, Piper introduces two great saints who have influenced him the most: “The two dead-theologians of the English-speaking world who have nourished and taught me most are Jonathan Edwards and John Owen.” Kelly M. Kapic and Justin Taylor eds., *Overcoming Sin & Temptation: Three Classic Works of John Owen* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2006), 12. Foreword.

different book for twenty minutes three times a day along with prayer: early in the morning, after lunch, and before going to bed.<sup>53</sup>

In addition to great books about God, Piper has read biographies of great saints. He started reading biographies of men of God in order to charge his pastoral batteries and to get guidance and encouragement.<sup>54</sup> About the reading of Christian biography, Piper says,

Hebrews 11 is a divine mandate to read Christian biography. . . . Christian biography is the means by which the 'body life' of the church cuts across the centuries. Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith (Hebrews 13:7). For the good of your soul, I encourage you to read great books about God and about His people. Books by the Puritans are among the richest ever written.<sup>55</sup>

And he continues, "Living theology. Flawed and encouraging saints. Stories of grace. Deep inspiration. The best entertainment. Brothers, it is worth your precious hours. Remember Hebrews 11. And read Christian biography."<sup>56</sup>

Piper likes reading great books by himself but he also enjoys the benefit of reading Christian biographies with others. For example, at Bethlehem's pastoral staff overnight retreat in November 1986, Piper encouraged the pastors to read to each other with a chapter from Brainerd's diary and a chapter from a biography of Ann Judson who was Adoniram's wife. Each pastor took turns reading one page out loud for two hours

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<sup>53</sup> John Piper, *Brothers, We are Not Professionals*, 67. About Piper's reading habits, see John Piper, "How do You Remember What You Read," *Desiring God*, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/ask-pastor-john/how-do-you-remember-what-you-read> (accessed May 19, 2011).

<sup>54</sup> John Piper, "Brothers, Read Christian Biography," *Desiring God*, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/articles/brothers-read-christian-biography> (accessed May 19, 2011).

<sup>55</sup> John Piper, "The Pastor as Prophet."

<sup>56</sup> John Piper, "Brothers, Read Christian Biography."

together. In doing so, they could have a deep time of prayer together.<sup>57</sup> Besides this, he has held the Desiring God Conference for Pastors from 1989 to 2010 in order that he may share biographical studies with pastors.

### **His Theology Focusing on Christian Hedonism**

Piper's theology and philosophy of life are rooted in Christian Hedonism.<sup>58</sup> Books such as *Desiring God*, *The Pleasure of God*, *The Supremacy of God in Preaching*, *Let the Nation be Glad*, *Don't Waste Your Life*, *Future Grace* and *God's Passion For His Glory* are outcomes of Christian Hedonism. This section explains Piper's definition of the term "Christian Hedonism," provides biblical foundation for Christian Hedonism, and introduces people who influenced Piper's Christian hedonism.

### **The Definition of Christian Hedonism**

In one of his books, *Desiring God*, Piper states the five fundamental convictions of Christian Hedonism: 1) All people have the desire to be happy; 2) They should never repress their longing and should deepen this desire with whatever will provide the greatest pleasure; 3) Humans' deepest happiness is not from God, but only in God; 4) The happiness in God reaches its zenith when it is shared with others; and 5) "*The chief end of*

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<sup>57</sup> John Piper, "The Power of Books and How to Use Them," *Desiring God*, December 8, 1986, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/taste-see-articles/the-power-of-books-and-how-to-use-them> (accessed May 19, 2011).

<sup>58</sup> For why Piper uses the term *Christian Hedonism*, see appendix 1 "Why Call It Christian Hedonism?" of *Desiring God*.

*man is to glorify God by enjoying him forever.*”<sup>59</sup> Therefore, Christian Hedonism can be defined as “God is most glorified in humans when they are most satisfied in Him.”<sup>60</sup>

In view of all this, Christian Hedonism is not a “prosperity-obsessed theology,” but a desire of “the vast, ocean-deep pleasures of God more than the mud-puddle pleasures of wealth, power or lust.”<sup>61</sup> In other words, Christian Hedonism is a God-centered longing to magnify God’s glory by delighting in Him.

In *Desiring God*, Piper introduces nine implications for Christian Hedonism: the happiness of God as Christians Hedonism’s foundation, conversion as its creation, worship as its feast, love as its labor, Scripture as its kindling, prayer as its power, money as its currency, marriage as its matrix, missions as its battle cry, and suffering as its sacrifice.

### **Biblical Basis for Christian Hedonism**

Piper believes that Christian Hedonism is solidly based on the Bible.<sup>62</sup> Piper finds the language of Christian Hedonism in the Psalms (37:4, 42:1-2, 63:1, 36:7-8, 34:8, 119:103, 16:11).<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> John Piper, *Desiring God*, 28. Italics his.

<sup>60</sup> John Piper, “We Want You to Be a Christian Hedonist,” *Desiring God*, August 31, 2006, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/articles/we-want-you-to-be-a-christian-hedonist> (accessed May 25, 2011). In *God is Gospel*, Piper explains that delighting in God happens in two ways: 1) Internally or spiritually “Christ-exalting joy” of humans’ heart increases the worth of God as their supreme treasure; 2) Externally or physically “Christ-exalting deeds” flow from the satisfaction in Christ. John Piper, *God is Gospel: Meditations on God’s Love As the Gift of Himself* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2005), 160.

<sup>61</sup> John Piper, “What is Christian Hedonism?,” *Desiring God*, <http://www.desiringgod.org/about/our-distinctives/our-beliefs/what-is-christian-hedonism> (accessed May 24, 2011).

<sup>62</sup> John Piper, *Desiring God*, 28.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

In an interactive roundtable discussion based on his book *Desiring God* with the students at Bethlehem College and Seminary, Piper introduces the best passages that show the concept of Christian Hedonism: Psalm 16:11, 37:4, Phil. 1:20-21.<sup>64</sup> God is the source of complete and eternal delight: “In your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore” (Psalm 16:11). Seeking happiness in God is his commandment: “Delight yourself in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart” (Psalm 37:4). Christ is most magnified in people’s life and death when their hearts are totally satisfied in dying because they can gain Christ: “[I]t is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain” (Phil. 1:20-21).<sup>65</sup>

### **Influencers on Christian Hedonism**

The root of Piper’s concept of Christian Hedonism came from his parents. Piper’s parents were the happiest people he had ever known.<sup>66</sup> Especially, his father, Bill Piper, provided Piper with the concept of God’s glory.<sup>67</sup> When Piper was little, his father taught him 1 Corinthians 10:31: “Whatever you do, whether you eat or whether you drink, do

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<sup>64</sup> Josh Etter, “Desiring God Read-Along: Week 1 Video,” Desiring God, <http://www.desiringgod.org/blog/posts/desiring-god-read-along-week-1-video> (accessed May 24, 2011).

<sup>65</sup> Piper says that these passages are the clearest biblical statement that supports Christian Hedonism. John Piper, *The Dangerous Duty of Delight: The Glorified God and The Satisfied Soul* (OR, Sisters: Multnomah Publishers, 2001), 24.

<sup>66</sup> John Piper, “Evangelist Bill Piper: Fundamentalist Full of Grace and Joy,” Desiring God, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/biographies/evangelist-bill-piper-fundamentalist-full-of-grace-and-joy> (accessed May 24, 2011).

<sup>67</sup> Philip O. Hopkins, “Missions for the Glory of God: An Analysis of the Missionary Theology of John Piper,” 14.

everything to the glory of God.”<sup>68</sup> Moreover, Piper learned from his father that he should rejoice in God. Piper remarks, “Where did I learn that delight in God is our highest duty? Before Jonathan Edwards and before C. S. Lewis and before Daniel Fuller, there was Bill Piper, unsystematically, unapologetically, and almost unwittingly saying: God’s only requirement is that you be satisfied with Christ.”<sup>69</sup> At a funeral message for Bill Piper in 2007, Piper remembered his father’s closing words to him: “This is my father’s final plea—it is what I intend to devote the rest of my life to: Find your supreme satisfaction in Jesus Christ.”<sup>70</sup> Although he never used the term “Christian Hedonism,” Bill Piper planted the seed of Christian Hedonism in his son’s heart.

During his first quarter at Fuller Seminary, Piper’s “conversion” to Christian Hedonism started with Blaise Pascal.<sup>71</sup> The words of Pascal introduced Piper to one of the most significant theses of Christian Hedonism: “All men seek happiness. This is without exception. . . . This is the motive of every action of every men. . . . the infinite abyss can only be filled with by an infinite and immutable object, that is to say, only God Himself.”<sup>72</sup> From Pascal, Piper received insight that seeking happiness is not sin and only God himself can satisfy one’s deepest desires.

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<sup>68</sup> John Piper, “Passion for the Supremacy of God, Part 1,” *Desiring God*, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/conference-messages/passion-for-the-supremacy-of-god-part-1> (accessed May 24, 2011).

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>70</sup> John Piper, “Funeral Message for William S. H. Piper,” *Desiring God*, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/conference-messages/funeral-message-for-william-s-h-piper> (accessed May 24, 2011).

<sup>71</sup> *God-Centered Living: Christian Hedonism & The Life of Faith* (Bethlehem College and Seminary Press, Minneapolis, MN, 2005), 2.

<sup>72</sup> Blaise Pascal, *Pascal’s Pensees*, trans. W. F. Trotter (NY: E. P. Dutton, 1958), 113, quoted in John Piper, *Desiring God*, 19, 21.

While Blaise Pascal helped Piper find the principle of Christian Hedonism, C. S. Lewis provided Piper with “the capstone” of his emerging Hedonism.<sup>73</sup> Lewis says, “Our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures.<sup>74</sup> Furthermore, he states, “I think we delight to praise what we enjoy because the praise not merely expresses but completes the enjoyment.”<sup>75</sup> Therefore, C. S. Lewis taught that Piper should stir up his own pleasure in God.

From Daniel Fuller, Piper learned that the manifestation of God’s glory and the deepest joy of humans are one thing.<sup>76</sup> Through Daniel Fuller’s class “The unity of the Bible” at Fuller Theological Seminary, Piper was more confident of this truth. Piper says, “The hallowing of God’s name flamed up as centered of my prayer. God’s passion for his glory stopped seeming selfish and became the very fountain of grace that flings all wonders of love into being.”<sup>77</sup> And he continues,

If Daniel Fuller was right, God’s passion was the display of his own his glory and delight of my heart. . . . It has become clearer that God being glorified and God

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<sup>73</sup> John Piper, *Desiring God*, 22.

<sup>74</sup> C. S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory and Other Address* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 1-2, quoted in John Piper, *Desiring God*, 20.

<sup>75</sup> C. S. Lewis, *Reflection on the Psalms* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1958), 94-95, quoted in John Piper, *Desiring God*, 20.

<sup>76</sup> John Piper, *God’s Passion For His Glory: Living the Vision of Jonathan Edwards* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1998), 32. Piper adds, “Because the more we find our satisfaction in him, the more we drink deeply from him and eat at the banquet table which is him, the more his worth and his all-sufficiency is magnified. So there’s no competition—and this is the marvel, this is the gospel to me that I discovered in ’68, ’69 and ’70 as God was doing a work in my life. There’s no competition between God’s passion to be glorified and your passion to be satisfied, because they are one.” John Piper, “Passion for the Supremacy of God, Part 1,” *Desiring God*, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/conference-messages/passion-for-the-supremacy-of-god-part-1> (accessed June 15, 2011).

<sup>77</sup> John Piper, in Daniel P. Fuller, *The Unity of the Bible: Unfolding God’s Plan for Humanity* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1992), foreword. Daniel Fuller opened “new insights into Scripture for Piper.” Tim Ellsworth, “John Piper: God’s Glory for His Passion,” *Desiring God*, <http://www.desiringgod.org/about/john-piper/gods-glory-his-passion> (accessed June 15, 2011). The influence of Daniel Fuller was greater. Chapter 3 will deal with the impact of Fuller on Piper’s hermeneutics in detail.

being enjoyed are not separate categories. They relate to each other not like fruit and animals, but fruit and apples. Apples are one kind of fruit. Enjoying God supremely is one way to glorify him.<sup>78</sup>

However, no one has impacted Piper's Christian Hedonism more than Jonathan Edwards,<sup>79</sup> because Jonathan Edwards gave Piper the most powerful confirmation of Christian Hedonism with the Bible.<sup>80</sup> In *Don't Waste Your Life*, Piper states clearly Jonathan Edwards' impact: "For me he has become the most important dead teacher outside the Bible. No one outside Scripture has shaped my vision of God and the Christian life more than Jonathan Edwards."<sup>81</sup>

Jonathan Edwards, like Daniel Fuller, believed God's passion for his glory and one's passion for joy in God are one. Jonathan Edwards says,

God is glorified not only by His glory's being seen, but by its being rejoiced in. When those that see it delight in it, God is more glorified than if they only see it. His glory is then received by the whole soul, both by the understanding and by the heart. God made the world that He might communicate, and the creature receive, His glory.<sup>82</sup>

Through Jonathan Edwards, Piper learned "joy is at the heart of what it means for people to be God-glorifying."<sup>83</sup> In other words, Jonathan Edwards helped Piper conclude the truth that the chief end of man is to glorify God by enjoying him forever, and enjoying

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<sup>78</sup> John Piper, *Don't Waste Your Life*, 28.

<sup>79</sup> John Piper, *God's Passion For His Glory*, 32. The researcher will explain about Jonathan Edwards' influence on Piper's sermons in Chapter 4.

<sup>80</sup> John Piper, *Don't Waste Your Life*, 29. For more detailed explanation, See John Piper, "Was Jonathan Edwards a Christian Hedonist?," *Desiring God*, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/articles/was-jonathan-edwards-a-christian-hedonist> (accessed June 15, 2011).

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Jonathan Edwards, "Miscellanies," in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 13, ed. Thomas Schafer (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 495, quoted in John Piper, *Desiring God*, 22.

<sup>83</sup> John Piper and Justin Taylor, eds., *A God Entranced Vision of All Things: The Legacy of Jonathan Edwards* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2004), 27.



God and glorifying him is not antithetical. Likewise, Jonathan Edwards had a decisive impact on Piper's establishment of Christian Hedonism. As Stephen J. Nichols says, "in the hand of John Piper," the idea that people enjoy and delight in God when their desires are aimed at God became Christian Hedonism.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Stephen J. Nicholas, "Proclaiming the Gospel and the Glory of God," in Sam Storms and Justin Taylor, 377.

## CHAPTER THREE

### JOHN PIPER'S PRINCIPLES OF BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION

Chapter 2 discussed Piper's background of preaching ministry, which is his spiritual sermon preparation, such as Piper's godly life, conversion, calling to preaching ministry, and theology. This chapter will investigate Piper's exegetical method for expository preaching before dealing with homiletical skills, because Piper has a deep and strong conviction that diligent Bible study or devotional reading of God's Word is more important to preachers than homiletics for powerful expository preaching.<sup>1</sup> Piper says,

I think the way that I became a preacher was by being passionately thrilled by what I was seeing in the Bible in seminary. Passionately thrilled! When Philippians began to open to me, Galatians open to me, Romans open to me, the Sermon on the Mount open to me in classes on exegesis (not homiletics, but exegesis), everything in me was feeling, "I want to say this to somebody. I want to find a way to say this because this is awesome, this is incredible!"<sup>2</sup>

He continues,

All Bible study and devotional reading of the Bible is preparation for preaching. No, do not always think "sermon preparation" when reading devotionally, but savor the glory of God and his ways. Yet, a preacher is wired to delight in how this precious promise or that shocking rebuke may become powerful for his people. Read the Bible continually and memorize it steadily so that you are permeated with the Bible and your sermons will drip with the honey of God's

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<sup>1</sup> John MacArthur agrees with this opinion. He says, "Careful and diligent Bible study is the key to effective expository preaching ... An expository preacher must be a diligent student of Scripture." John MacArthur, "A Study Method for Expository Preaching" in *Rediscovering Expository Preaching*, 209.

<sup>2</sup> John Piper, "Where and How did You learn to Preach?," *Desiring God*, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/ask-pastor-john/where-and-how-did-you-learn-to-preach> (accessed June 20, 2011).

own words. Psalm 19:10, “*More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb.*”<sup>3</sup>

Likewise, Piper believes that good preachers cannot be made by a course in homiletics, but by being kindled through the reading and study of Scripture.

The purpose of this chapter is to connect Piper’s theology with his Bible exegesis using the following three categories in the analysis: 1) Piper’s approach to the Bible, 2) his Bible study method, and 3) the major influence on his biblical exegesis.

### **His Approach to the Bible**

J. Scott Duvall emphasizes, “We need a valid, legitimate approach to the Bible, one that is not based strictly on intuition and feeling.”<sup>4</sup> Piper has the right approach to properly interpreting God’s Word and grasping its message. In *Bible Study Magazine*, Piper introduces his five approaches to the Bible: 1) Accept the fact that the Bible is the Word of God; 2) Respect the Bible; 3) Know that preachers are sinners in the view of the Bible; 4) Be confident of forgiveness from God; and 5) Expect that God will give them all the guidance to meet their needs through the Bible.<sup>5</sup> Piper’s five approaches to the Word of God can be classified into two categories: 1) Come to the Bible with a sense of reverence and 2) Come to the Bible with a sense of need and expectation.

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<sup>3</sup> John Piper, “The Pastor as Prophet.” Italics his.

<sup>4</sup> Duvall J. Scott and Daniel Hays, eds., *Grasping God’s Word: A Hands-On Approach to Reading, Interpreting, and Applying the Bible*, 2nd Edition (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 21.

<sup>5</sup> John D. Barry, “Transmitting the Word: An Interview with John Piper On Consistency and community,” *Bible Study Magazine*, September—October ’09, [http://www.biblestudymagazine.com/john\\_piper/BSMSeptOct09JohnPiper.pdf](http://www.biblestudymagazine.com/john_piper/BSMSeptOct09JohnPiper.pdf) (accessed June 28, 2011).

## Come to the Bible with a Sense of Reverence

Piper stresses that first and foremost, Christians must approach the Word of God with a profound respect, because the text, which they read and study, is the very Word of God.<sup>6</sup> Piper believes that the author of the Bible is the Holy Spirit, in that the Holy Spirit inspired the Bible, and therefore it is inerrant and authoritative.<sup>7</sup> In *The Holy Spirit: Author of Scripture*, Piper says that the writers of the Bible not only spoke from God, but also were controlled by the Holy Spirit.<sup>8</sup> With a reverence for God's Word, Piper preaches with authority about the author of the Bible and "brings a refreshing and unashamed sense of truth to the pulpit," reminding hearers that they are listening to the very words of God.<sup>9</sup>

In addition to the absolute authority in preaching, a reverence for Scripture gives Piper a strong thirst for the accurate understanding of God's Word. Piper encourages preachers like this:

It is impossible to respect the Bible too highly, but it is very possible to respect it wrongly. If we do not ask seriously how differing texts fit together, then we are either superhuman (and glance all truth at a glance) or indifferent (and don't care

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> About the Word of God, Bethlehem Baptist church's Congregational Affirmation of Faith says, "We believe that the Bible is the Word of God, fully inspired and without error in the original manuscripts, written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and that it has supreme authority in all matters of faith and conduct (2 Timothy 3:16; 2 Peter 1:20,21; Mark 13:31; John 8:21, 22; 20:31; Acts 20:32)." Bethlehem Baptist Church, "Congregational Affirmation of Faith," <http://www.hopeingod.org/document/congregational-affirmation-faith> (accessed June 30, 2011). For more detailed information about Piper's view about the inspiration, inerrancy, and authority of the Bible, see the following sources: John Piper, "Why We Believe the Bible, Part 1," Desiring God, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/seminars/why-we-believe-the-bible-part-1> (accessed June 30, 2011); and John Piper, "Is the Bible without Error?," Desiring God, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/ask-pastor-john/is-the-bible-without-error> (accessed June 30, 2011).

<sup>8</sup> John Piper, "The Holy Spirit: Author of Scripture," Desiring God, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/the-holy-spirit-author-of-scripture> (accessed June 30, 2011).

<sup>9</sup> William D. Mounce, "The Pastors And His Study," Sam Storms and Justin Taylor, 481.

about seeing more truth). But I don't see how anyone who is indifferent or superhuman can have a proper respect for the Bible. Therefore reverence for God's Word demands that we ask questions and pose problems and that we believe there are answers and solutions, which will reward our labor with "treasures new and old" (Matt. 13:52).<sup>10</sup>

Moreover, respecting the Word of God makes Piper to come to it with humility as well as a desire for the proper interpretation of God's Word. In *Men Moved by the Holy Spirit Spoke from God*, Piper says that Christians must be humble when they study the Bible. He challenges,

If you believe that the Bible is the Word of God with authority over your life, it takes a good deal of humility to interpret it correctly. The reason is simple: the Bible often requires of us that we feel and think and act in ways that go against our natural inclinations. . . . In the long run sound interpretation comes only from the broken and contrite in spirit.<sup>11</sup>

In this light, it is certain that Piper has a profound conviction that the Bible is God's divine revelation. Therefore, he has amazingly devoted himself to read and interpret the very Word of God with the proper attitude – reverence including thirst and humility.

### **Come to the Bible with a Sense of Need and Expectation**

Piper suggests that while reading and studying the Bible, Christians should come to it with the sense of need and hope, as well as reverence.<sup>12</sup> He classifies the sense of need and expectation into two parts.

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<sup>10</sup> John Piper, Brothers, *Brothers, We are Not Professionals*, 76.

<sup>11</sup> John Piper, "Men Moved by the Holy Spirit Spoke from God," Desiring God, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/men-moved-by-the-holy-spirit-spoke-from-god> (accessed July 1, 2011).

<sup>12</sup> John D. Barry, "Transmitting the Word: An Interview with John Piper On Consistency and community."

First, Piper stresses that Christians need to trust that the Bible meets their all needs in this world and gives them all the guidance that they need, because the Bible is the most influential book for humans among all books in the world.<sup>13</sup> He says, “Come to the Bible with a sense of expectation and openness that here you might find something vastly more wise and more penetrating and more world-shaping than any of the contemporary ideas you are presently dealing with.”<sup>14</sup> In so doing, Piper strives to follow not his own thoughts but strictly God’s instructions. In *The Doctrine of Perseverance: The Future of a Fruitless Field*, Piper affirms the need to biblically and faithfully expect God to meet one’s needs. He declares that

The Bible stands ready to meet those needs. . . . If, then, the Bible takes a radically different approach to meeting our need for hope and encouragement and strength, we have to make a very crucial choice: will we reject the biblical prescription and go to another doctor who will endorse our prescription for hope? Or will we humbly admit that God knows us better than we know ourselves—loves us more than we love ourselves—and look patiently for the wisdom in his prescription and counsel?<sup>15</sup>

From this point of view, Piper believes that when Christians approach the Bible, they should eagerly expect God to satisfy their needs through His own method.

Second, Piper emphasizes that Christians should approach the Scriptures with a sense that God has given them the Bible in order to convict them of sin and forgive them.<sup>16</sup> In other words, Piper comes to the Word of God with the sense of need and expectation to be forgiven. Piper says that when he read and study the Bible, his own

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> John Piper, “The Doctrine of Perseverance: The Future of a Fruitless Field,” *Desiring God*, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/the-doctrine-of-perseverance-the-future-of-a-fruitless-field> (accessed July 5, 2011).

<sup>16</sup> John D. Barry, “Transmitting the Word: An Interview with John Piper On Consistency and community.”

conscience, the reality of God, and the Bible testify together that he is guilty before the Sovereign Creator of the world for not glorifying and thanking Him as he should.<sup>17</sup> In addition to the sense of need that he should be forgiven, Piper also comes to a solid confidence and expectation in the Bible that through Jesus Christ forgiveness of sins is proclaimed.<sup>18</sup> He believes that Christians should see the authority Jesus Christ claimed to forgive sin in the Bible and “hear from his lips the sweetest, most-needed words ever spoken: I have come to give my life as a ransom for many.”<sup>19</sup> In *You Will Never Be Thirsty Again*, Piper draws well this approach to the Bible. Piper insists,

This story in John 4 about Jesus’ meeting with the Samaritan woman at the well reveals woeful truth about ourselves and wonderful truth about Jesus. And the wonderful truth that it reveals about Jesus gives hope to us in our woeful. . . . The reason the Bible tells us woeful news about ourselves is to make the greatness of grace and the greatness of salvation feel as wonderful as it really is.<sup>20</sup>

Finally, Piper states that Christians should approach the Bible with a need for “hope and encouragement and strength.”<sup>21</sup> In other words, Piper has an expectation that God will give him joyful hope in afflictions through His Word. For example,

What produces and sustains hope?. . . . We must see our future with him as more precious and satisfying than any other treasure. That is what “rejoicing in hope” is: being satisfied with all that God is, and will be, for us in Christ. So the second answer we give to this question (How do we awaken and sustain this joyful hope?) is that we read and meditate on and memorize the Scriptures.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> John Piper, “The Holy Spirit: Author of Scripture.”

<sup>18</sup> John Piper, “Why We Believe the Bible, Part 1.”

<sup>19</sup> John Piper, “The Holy Spirit: Author of Scripture.”

<sup>20</sup> John Piper, “You Will Never Thirsty Again,” *Desiring God*, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/you-will-never-be-thirsty-again> (accessed July 6, 2011).

<sup>21</sup> John Piper, “The Doctrine of Perseverance: The Future of a Fruitless Field.”

<sup>22</sup> John Piper, “Use the Inspired Scriptures to Rejoice in Hope,” *Desiring God*, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/use-the-inspired-scriptures-to-rejoice-in-hope> (accessed July 6, 2011).

In view of all this, Piper reads, meditates on and studies the inspired Scriptures with a strong and urgent sense that the Bible is to be approached with the expectation that through His Word, God will meet all of his needs in this world including guidance, forgiveness, and hope.

### **His Bible Study Method**

Piper not only has the proper approach to God's Word, but also fervently endeavors to be a careful and diligent interpreter of God's Word for powerful preaching. This section sets out with a general investigation of Piper's exegetical skills. It discusses the need for biblical exegesis and the importance of using the original languages, and provides Piper's goals and procedures in doing so.

### **The Need for Biblical Exegesis**

Piper has the conviction that "the life of the church hangs on the word of God"<sup>23</sup> and the pastoral ministry is primarily to shepherd God's people from the Word.<sup>24</sup> Piper even says, "The faithful study and teaching of God's Word will do more to change the world than anyone imagines."<sup>25</sup> Therefore, Piper does not want treat to the Scriptures in a superficial manner. Piper points out that all preachers should "learn how to read carefully,

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<sup>23</sup> John Piper, "The Ministry of the Word," *Desiring God*, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/the-ministry-of-the-word> (accessed July 8, 2011).

<sup>24</sup> John Piper, "Should pastors get PhDs?," <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/ask-pastor-john/should-pastors-get-phds> (accessed July 8, 2011).

<sup>25</sup> John Piper, "The Ministry of the Word."



accurately, thoroughly and honestly” the Bible more than other books <sup>26</sup> in order to “discover the meaning of Scriptural Text.”<sup>27</sup>

John MacArthur once said, “Fruitful expository preaching demands great efforts. Since nothing is as important as the Word, no energy expended by anyone in any field should surpass the effort of an expositor seeking to rightly divide the Word.”<sup>28</sup> As John MacArthur said, Piper brings all his energy to study the Word of God. Piper calls preacher’s ardent endeavor for the Bible study “scholarly effort” and “hard mental work.”<sup>29</sup>

Piper’s scholarly effort of Bible reading is not a cold intellectual labor but a fervent work with all his heart, all his soul, and all his mind. Naturally, this scholarly effort leads Piper to know, love, and enjoy God, and make him known for the joy of people.<sup>30</sup> In *The Pleasures of God*, Piper wisely comments about the importance of this

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<sup>26</sup> John Piper and D. A. Carson, *The Pastor as Scholar & The Scholar as Pastor: Reflections on Life and Ministry*, 66. Piper challenges, “We must beware of the temptation to replace the study of Scripture with the reading of good books about the Scripture. If you want to know if a man has studied well, don’t ask him to show you his library. Ask him to show you his personal notebooks where he has recorded his own authentic insights into the Word of God.” John Piper, “The Ministry of the Word.”

<sup>27</sup> John Piper, “Biblical Exegesis: Discovering the Meaning of Scriptural Texts,” *Desiring God*, <http://cdn.desiringgod.org/pdf/booklets/BTBX.pdf> (accessed July 8, 2011). Piper calls this “biblical exegesis.” His principles of biblical exegesis will be dealt with later in this chapter.

<sup>28</sup> John MacArthur, “A Study Method for Expository Preaching” in *Rediscovering Expository Preaching*, 209.

<sup>29</sup> John Piper and D. A. Carson, *The Pastor as Scholar & The Scholar as Pastor: Reflections on Life and Ministry*, 49.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 67. In this light, Piper’s study of the Bible springs from his theology, which is rooted in Christian Hedonism. Piper’s theology had a great effect on William D. Mounce, the President of BiblicalTraining.org and a former professor of New Testament and director of the Greek program at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. For example, Mounce changed his way of studying the Bible after he listened to Piper’s address at the 1998 national meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society in Orlando: “The greatest need of every pastor and every missionary is ... to know God better than they know anything and enjoy God more than they enjoy anything ... It would not have occurred to anybody to create a course in spiritual formation if students were walking out of biblical classes aflame with a passion for the glory of God standing forth from the exegesis of the Greek text.” William D. Mounce, “The Pastor and His Study” in *For The Fame of God’s Name*, 478.

hard work of Bible study, “The task of all Christian scholarship—not just biblical studies—is to study reality as a manifestation of God’s glory, to speak and write about it with accuracy, and to savor the beauty of God in it. It is a massive abdication of scholarship that so many Christians do academic work with so little reference to God.”<sup>31</sup>

### **The Importance of the Original Languages in Exegesis**

Piper’s hard intellectual work of Bible study includes his knowledge of the original languages. Whenever he studies the Bible in sermon preparation, Piper makes an effort to interpret the Bible from its original languages. Piper stresses the necessity of studying the original languages in this way:

That inspired word has come to us in the form of a book written in Greek and Hebrew. None of us comes into the world able to read, let alone read Greek and Hebrew. These things must be learned. And they must be learned by study. And even when they are learned, they only become fruitful when used like mining tools to dig out the gold and silver of Scripture. And the only way to dig is to study.<sup>32</sup>

Piper is confident that Hebrew and Greek exegesis is a requirement for the ministry of the Word and that it is a powerful tool for expository preaching.<sup>33</sup>

In this light, it is no accident that Piper sounded the alarm about seminaries and pastors who are indifferent to Greek and Hebrew exegesis, preferring rather to improve

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<sup>31</sup> John Piper, *The Pleasures of God: Meditations on God’s Delight in Being God* (Colorado Springs, CO: Multnomah Books, 2000), 298. This statement shows clearly Piper’s goal of biblical exegesis. It will be dealt with in detail later in this chapter.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid. The Bethlehem Institute, one of ministries of Bethlehem Baptist Church, provides original language classes designed for lay people who long to deepen their understanding of God’s Word through Greek and Hebrew. This plainly shows Piper’s desire for studying the Bible from the original languages.

<sup>33</sup> Piper does not ask pastors to be experts of biblical languages. He means that pastors need an accurate knowledge of the original languages for sound biblical exegesis. Haddon Robinson likewise makes a strong statement for the use of the original languages by the expository preacher, saying that knowledge of Greek and Hebrew is “invaluable” for expository preaching, in that preachers can accurately declare God’s Word the way the Holy Spirit intended. Haddon W. Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 62.

their “professional self-esteem.”<sup>34</sup> In *Brothers, We are Not Professionals*, Piper states four results when the preacher does not study the Scriptures in Greek and Hebrew: 1) Preachers’ confidence about the accurate original meaning of Biblical texts is shaken; 2) They have no option but to rely on various translations and cannot carefully analyze text; 3) They tend to depend on secondary literature to gain insight and ideas instead of digging out Holy Scripture; and 4) Finally, they have lost “the Biblical vision of a pastor”—the proclamation of God—by devaluing the ministry of the Word of God and pursuing “an eldership of the professional academicians.”<sup>35</sup> Although learning the original Scriptures is hard work, for Piper, it is a means of knowing God clearer and proclaiming Him powerfully and accurately. Furthermore, he believes that recovering Greek and Hebrew exegesis can be an instrument for spiritual awakening. Piper challenges preachers to pray “for the day when prayer and grammar will meet each other with great spiritual combustion.”<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> John Piper, *Brothers, We are Not Professionals*, 85. Piper regards this as one of the greatest tragedies in the church today. He even says, “Weakness in Greek and Hebrew also gives rise to exegetical imprecision and carelessness. And exegetical imprecision is the mother of liberal theology.”

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 82-84. Also, see David Alan Black, *Using New Testament Greek in Ministry: A Practical Guide for Students and Pastors* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), 24. In this book, Black warns preachers who do not know Greek in this way:

Pastors who do not know Greek are forced to borrow their ideas from others. They are slaves to the commentators, but have no means to check their accuracy. The best tools of interpretation are beyond their reach. Not even the English translations they use are completely trustworthy. Worst of all, without thorough training in Greek they may discover that they are passing on in the name of God their own ignorance, based upon erroneous interpretations.

Blair A. Yager holds the same view with David Black: “Greek allows the students to critically evaluate and use commentaries, rather than being enslaved to them. Greek offers opportunity for personal discovery of the Bible’s wealth of wisdom.” Blair A. Yager, “An Outcomes Assessment: The Use of Greek in Ministry,” D.Min. diss., Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary, 1994, 44.

<sup>36</sup> John Piper, *Brothers, We are Not Professionals*, 85.

## His Goals for Biblical Exegesis

To do the exegetical task well, it is crucial that preachers need to have solid goals for biblical exegesis. Piper divides his exegetical aims into two sections—the immediate and the ultimate. First, Piper stresses that when preachers study the Bible, they should aim “to understand and state accurately what the original biblical authors wished to communicate.”<sup>37</sup> This point is also defined by Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart: “Exegesis is the careful, systematic study of the Scripture to discover the original, intended meaning ... The goal of exegesis is to find out what the original author intended.”<sup>38</sup>

Piper fulfils this purpose in his sermons by always focusing on the author’s intentions. For example, in *Strengthened to Suffer: Christ, Noah, and Baptism* in talking about 1 Peter 3:18–22, he says, “The main point of these verses is to help us get ready to suffer with Jesus for doing what is right, not for doing what is wrong. For all the puzzling things in these verses we must not forget this main point—*Peter’s intention in this text* is to help us arm ourselves with the faith to suffer for the sake of Christ and his kingdom.”<sup>39</sup>

Piper places far greater emphasis on the ultimate goal of exegesis. He explains it

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<sup>37</sup> John Piper, “Biblical Exegesis: Discovering the Meaning of Scriptural Texts.” In other words, Piper fundamentally studies the Bible to discover the author’s intention. Piper says, “The ‘intention’ of the ancient author/redactor is sought precisely in the language of the text as it stands before us ... An intention, once well-formulated in writing, never changes and is eternal ... This means that the ancient author’s intention is with us today in his writing.” John Piper, “The Authority And Meaning Of The Christian Canon,” *Desiring God*, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/articles/the-authority-and-meaning-of-the-christian-canon> (accessed July 25, 2011).

<sup>38</sup> Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How To Read the Bible for All Its Worth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 23, 28. This aim is further expanded upon by Craig Blomberg in *A Handbook of New Testament Exegesis*: “Exegesis comes from two Greek words, *ek* (‘form, of, out of’) and *argos* (‘to lead’), referring to the process of leading out from a text its original meaning ... exegesis is the actual practice of doing the interpretation. In some contexts, ‘exegesis’ is the term reserved for working with the biblical text in their original language as one seeks to grasp their intent.” Craig L. Blomberg and Jennifer Foutz Markley, *A Handbook of New Testament Exegesis* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), xiv.

<sup>39</sup> John Piper, “Strengthened to Suffer: Christ, Noah, and Baptism,” *Desiring God*, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/strengthened-to-suffer-christ-noah-and-baptism> (accessed July 25, 2011). Italics added.

so as to “embrace the heart as well as the head” because he believes that God’s Word “mediates truth” and it is designed to affect exegetes’ hearts, changing their feelings about God and his will.<sup>40</sup> In *The Pastor as Scholar & The Scholar as Pastor*, Piper describes this ultimate goal like this: “Right thinking about God exists to serve right feelings for God.”<sup>41</sup>

For Piper, on the one hand, exegesis is primarily an intellectual act because God reveals himself through human language. Therefore, he believes that preachers should humbly study the grammar, the historical-cultural context, and the literary context in order to find the author’s intention, giving up his own ideas and opinions.<sup>42</sup> On the other hand, exegesis touches preachers’ hearts, because God’s Word destroys their arrogance and self-reliance, so that they may see and enjoy the glorious eternal truth revealed in the Bible. Finally, exegesis leads them to doxology.<sup>43</sup> In *The Deep Riches and Wisdom and Knowledge of God*, Piper introduces his own experience at the final exegesis class on Romans 9-11 in the spring of 1977.

It was the final class of the year, and I was drawing the final “arcs” on the board to sum up all the relationships between all the units. I drew one last arc over all three chapters, from one side of the board to the other, and underlined Romans 11:36 as the ultimate point of the entire section: “From him, through him, and to him are all things. To him be glory forever.” Before I could turn around, these twelve students—some of the brightest I ever had (including Tom Steller)—began to sing the doxology. I didn’t ask them to. I didn’t plan it. It just came out. . . . All theology, rightly grasped, leads the mind and the heart to doxology. The story of

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<sup>40</sup> John Piper, “Biblical Exegesis: Discovering the Meaning of Scriptural Texts.”

<sup>41</sup> John Piper and D. A. Carson, *The Pastor as Scholar & The Scholar as Pastor: Reflections on Life and Ministry*, 50. Piper adds, “Logic exists for the sake of love. Reasoning exists for the sake of rejoicing. Doctrine exists for the sake of delight. The head is meant to serve the heart.”

<sup>42</sup> John Piper, “Biblical Exegesis: Discovering the Meaning of Scriptural Texts.”

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

God is about the glory of God. All revelation of the ways of God leads to exultation over the wonders of God.<sup>44</sup>

Therefore, Piper's biblical exegesis, to sum it up, can be defined as "the intellectual enzyme that transforms the stupor of [the pastor's] worldly and futile affections into a deep and glad and living hope."<sup>45</sup>

### **His Exegetical Process**

Piper states that good biblical exegesis means to "read well" a text.<sup>46</sup> Mortimer J. Adler's book, *How to Read a Book*, has greatly influenced the way Piper reads the Bible. This book provided for Piper "the methodological superstructure" to discover the intention of the author and gave him "great encouragement to get on with the business of enlarging [his] understanding and [his] appreciation of things that great men have thought and written."<sup>47</sup>

*Reading the Original Greek and Hebrew Text.* To do this task, Piper, first, starts

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<sup>44</sup> John Piper, "The Deep Riches and Wisdom and Knowledge of God," *Desiring God*, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/the-deep-riches-and-wisdom-and-knowledge-of-god> (accessed July 25, 2011). Tom Steller, Pastor for Leadership Development of Bethlehem Baptist church and Academic Dean of Bethlehem College and Seminar, has a vivid memory of that time, "[Piper's] passion was that we would see Reality for ourselves through the eyes of the Biblical writers ... I remember one time, when we were studying Romans 11:33-36, that the weight of glory from that text inspired the class to break forth spontaneously in singing the Doxology. Biblical theology leads to doxology!" Tom Steller, in John Piper, "Biblical Exegesis: Discovering the Meaning of Scriptural Texts." Preface.

<sup>45</sup> John Piper, "Biblical Exegesis: Discovering the Meaning of Scriptural Texts."

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> John Piper, "Books That Have Influenced Me Most." Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart recommend Adler's excellent book for learning to read well. Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How To Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, 26. For a detailed application of this book for good reading the Bible, see the following book. Grant R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006), 40-41.

reading by putting the passage that he chooses for exegesis up on his computer in English-Greek or English-Hebrew.<sup>48</sup> The main reason why Piper reads the original Greek and Hebrew is that he loves to “drink fully at the fountain of the original source.”<sup>49</sup> While reading the Greek or Hebrew Bible, Piper makes every effort to determine the precise meaning of words and phrases that an author wrote. Along with the Greek and Hebrew Bible, Piper mainly uses the English Standard Version as an English version in his study and preaching, because he thinks that the ESV is not only the most literal modern translation, but also “the best balance available of readability and literalness.”<sup>50</sup>

In the process of translation, Piper strives to accurately discover the meaning that the author intended in a given context of a passage instead of totally depending on dictionaries.<sup>51</sup> In other words, Piper is confident that words and phrases in the passage can be understood from their context. In a sermon on Romans 3:21-26, Piper applies well

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<sup>48</sup> John Piper, “How do You Prepare Your Sermons?,” *Desiring God*, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/ask-pastor-john/how-do-you-prepare-your-sermons> (accessed July 25, 2011).

<sup>49</sup> John Piper, “Biblical Exegesis: Discovering the Meaning of Scriptural Texts.” Piper asks pastors to find a reliable text that corresponds with the original author’s intention. Bethlehem Seminary requires students to use the Nestle- Aland *Novum Testamentum Graece* for Greek New Testament along with recommended text, *A Reader’s Hebrew and Greek Bible*. For more information about books of Greek and Hebrew classes, see the following website: <http://astore.amazon.com/bcsbookstore-20>.

<sup>50</sup> John Piper, “Good English With Minimal Translation: Why Bethlehem Uses the ESV,” *Desiring God*, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/articles/good-english-with-minimal-translation-why-bethlehem-uses-the-esv> (accessed July 26, 2011). Here, Piper explains why he wants the English Standard Version to become the most common Bible of the English-speaking church, for preaching, teaching, memorizing, and study. Piper recommends the NSAB along with the ESV because he thinks, “it captures as fully as possible the precise wording of the original Greek, Hebrew, and Aramaic texts.” John Piper, “What Bible Translation does John Piper Recommend?,” *Desiring God*, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/articles/what-bible-translation-does-john-piper-recommend> (accessed July 26, 2011).

<sup>51</sup> This does not mean that Piper never uses dictionaries. Rather, he uses lexicons, word study dictionaries and concordances, and he consults commentaries in order to determine the accurate meaning of words and phrases that the author used while reading the text in the original language. Here Piper stresses that the interpreter, first and foremost, should discover the meaning of words in their context.

this principle of exegesis:

Notice that in the word “justified” is the word “just.” Now “just” is essentially the same as “righteous.” I point this out because in the original language, the word “justified” here (dikaïoumenoi) and “righteousness” in verse 22 (dikaïosune) have the same root (dikai-) which shows that the meaning of “being justified” in verse 24 and the meaning of God’s “righteousness through faith” in verse 22 are very similar.<sup>52</sup>

In *Blessed Are Those Who Hunger and Thirst for Righteousness* (Matthew 5:6), in order to find the meaning of “righteousness,” Piper stresses the fact that the word occurs five times in the Sermon on the Mount (5:6, 10, 20; 6:1, 33). He then states, “So the best way to catch on to Jesus’ meaning in this sermon is to look at these other instances of the word righteousness.”<sup>53</sup>

*The Analysis of Historical and Literary Context.* Second, to discern the precise meaning of words, Piper investigates their historical and literary context. He pays attention to the historical background of the passage, because he thinks that the author used specific terminology from his situation in history. Piper believes that the study of historical context with grammatical analysis is basically to understand the author’s thoughts, and this task does not aim to get at “something behind” the text but get at “something intrinsic” to the text—that is, its meaning.<sup>54</sup> For example, when he started the

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<sup>52</sup> John Piper, “The Demonstration of God’s Righteousness, Part 2,” <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/the-demonstration-of-gods-righteousness-part-2> (accessed July 26, 2011).

<sup>53</sup> John Piper, “Blessed Are Those Who Hunger and Thirst for Righteousness,” *Desiring God*, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/blessed-are-those-who-hunger-and-thirst-for-righteousness> (accessed July 26, 2011).

<sup>54</sup> John Piper, “The Authority And Meaning Of The Christian Canon.” Although Piper admits that historical background is crucial for exegesis, he emphasizes that the exegete should not focus on excessive historical analysis, but maintain balance between historical background and linguistics. See the following source: Jonathan Parnell, “Serving to Master Two? — Historical Background and the Bible,” *Desiring God*,



sermon series on Ruth, Piper drew well this principle to his sermon. He explains the following regarding the historical background of Ruth:

According to 1:1, the story took place during the time of the judges. This was a 400-year period after Israel entered the Promised Land under Joshua and before there were any kings in Israel (roughly 1500 BC to 1100 BC). . . . It was a very dark time in Israel. The people would sin, God would send enemies against them, the people would cry for help, and God would mercifully raise up a judge to deliver them. Again and again the people rebelled, and from all outward appearances God's purposes for righteousness and glory in Israel were failing.<sup>55</sup>

And then he briefly notes that the book of Ruth shows “a glimpse of the hidden work of God during the worst of times.”<sup>56</sup>

In addition to historical context, Piper analyzes literary context. While studying the Bible, Piper strives to identify the author's literary features. One of the examples is in a sermon on John 1:6-36, in which Piper explains that although John 1:6-8 seem to go against the flow of the text, the preacher's job is not to try to develop the author's literary art by themselves, but to “penetrate” the author's literary purposes, so that he may find his theological, spiritual and evangelistic purposes, which the author has “by God's inspiration.”<sup>57</sup>

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<http://www.desiringgod.org/blog/posts/serving-to-master-two-historical-background-and-the-bible> (accessed July 26, 2011).

<sup>55</sup> John Piper, “Ruth: Sweet and Bitter Providence,” Desiring God, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/ruth-sweet-and-bitter-providence> (accessed July 26, 2011). For more examples about historical analysis, see the following sources: John Piper, “Asa's Folly,” Desiring God, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/asas-folly> (accessed July 26, 2011); John Piper, “You Will Never Be Thirsty Again,” Desiring God, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/you-will-never-be-thirsty-again> (accessed July 26, 2011).

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> John Piper, “John Was Not the Light, but a Witness to the Light,” Desiring God, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/john-was-not-the-light-but-a-witness-to-the-light> (accessed July 27, 2011).

In literary analysis, Piper studies both the big picture of the passage and its more immediate context. Piper, first, studies an entire book of Scripture to interpret an expository passage. And then he attempts to see “the connection to what precedes and follows to catch on to what this paragraph is all about.”<sup>58</sup> In a sermon on Romans 11:33:36, Piper outlines the main messages of Romans 1-11 before dealing with the text:

Today we complete our six-year journey through Romans 1-11. We’ve seen the terribly sinful condition of our hearts—and the hearts of all humanity—in Romans 1-3:19; and the great work of Christ on the cross to provide a righteousness and a sacrifice so that we could be justified by faith alone apart from works of the law in Romans 3:20-5:21; and the mighty sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit to conquer sin and make us secure in the love of Christ in Romans 6-8; and then the great defense of the God’s sovereign grace and promise-keeping faithfulness in Romans 9-11, climaxing now with the stunning words in Romans 11:32, “God has consigned all to disobedience, that he may have mercy on all.”<sup>59</sup>

And he expounds the preceding and following context, “This is where God wants us to be when we have heard Romans 1-11. Amazed at mercy, and worshipping God through Jesus Christ. This is the response that will make us able to live out the practical moral demands of Romans 12-15.”<sup>60</sup> Through literal analysis, Piper thus helps listeners clearly understand the authors’ thoughts.

*The Structural Analysis.* Piper’s third step in determining the meaning of the text is the structural analysis in order to grasp the author’s flow of argument. To do so, Piper

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<sup>58</sup> John Piper, “Strengthened to Suffer: Christ, Noah, and Baptism.” For literary analysis, David Alan Black stresses that the exegete should identify the remote context and the immediate context. The former is made up of paragraphs, a chapter, or a whole book of Scripture; the latter includes those verses or paragraphs that immediately precede or follow the passage. David Alan Black, *Using New Testament Greek in Ministry: A Practical Guide for Students and Pastors*, 70. About the importance of analyzing these two contexts, Grant Osborne notes, “First, we chart the whole of a book to analyze its flow of thought in preliminary fashion; next, we study each part intensively in order to detect the detailed argumentation; finally. We rework the thought development of the whole in relation to the parts.” Grand R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 40.

<sup>59</sup> John Piper, “All Things Are from God, through God, and to God. The Glory Is All His,” *Desiring God*, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/all-things-are-from-god-through-god-and-to-god-the-glory-is-all-his> (accessed July 27, 2011).

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

first divides the text into its propositions. To Piper, propositions are “the basic building blocks of a text.”<sup>61</sup> He continues to explain propositions in this way: “Paragraphs are made up of propositions. These are statements, questions, and acclamations. They have a verb; they have a subject, and then other things surrounding those. That’s a proposition.”<sup>62</sup>

According to Piper, the exegete can find the precise meanings of words in the sentence when he sees them as parts of a proposition.<sup>63</sup> Therefore, he stresses that the first, the second, and the third steps are connected to each other “not sequentially, but reciprocally.”<sup>64</sup> In this light, Piper works hard to accurately determine the meanings of the words and phrases in the passage and trace the authors’ thoughts on a broad view such as lexical, historical-cultural, literary, structural analysis.

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<sup>61</sup> John Piper, “Biblical Exegesis: Discovering the Meaning of Scriptural Texts.” Like Piper, Thomas Schreiner notes that the interpreter can find the building blocks of the author’s reasoning in his propositions. Thomas R. Schreiner, *Interpreting the Pauline Epistle* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 99. See also William W. Klein, Crag L. Blomberg, and Robert L. Hubbard, Jr., *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2004), 265.

<sup>62</sup> John Piper, “What is ‘Arcing’ and Why is it Important?,” *Desiring God*, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/ask-pastor-john/what-is-arc-ing-and-why-is-it-important> (accessed July 27, 2011). Thomas Schreiner defines a proposition as “an assertion or statement about something.” Thomas R. Schreiner, *Interpreting the Pauline Epistle*, 99. For the way Piper divides sentences into propositions, see <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/ask-pastor-john/what-is-arc-ing-and-why-is-it-important>; John Piper and D. A. Carson, *The Pastor as Scholar & The Scholar as Pastor*; John Piper, “Biblical Exegesis: Discovering the Meaning of Scriptural Texts.” In order to understand propositions, Piper asks pastors to have knowledge of grammar and syntax of Greek, Hebrew or English.” David Chung further insists that knowing only the basics of biblical Greek and Hebrew and barely translating the original languages means nothing to exegesis, because there are already many good Bible translations. Therefore, it is crucial that pastors should study syntax as well as grammar of the original languages so that they can more accurately interpret the text. David H. Chung, *Ten Commandments for Biblical Preaching*, 73 in footnote.

<sup>63</sup> John Piper, “Biblical Exegesis: Discovering the Meaning of Scriptural Texts.”

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

*Identifying the Logical Relationships between Propositions.* Piper's fourth step of biblical exegesis is to identify the logical relationships between propositions. These propositions are linked together in the passage. He says, "One connects to another, and those two connect to another, and those three connect to another, and so on as the unbreakable arguments of glorious truth extends through a passage."<sup>65</sup>

Piper regards relating the propositions to each other as the most important process in his biblical exegesis because the exegete can grasp the flow of the author's thoughts and arguments until he understands a proposition's accurate meaning "from its use in relationship to other propositions."<sup>66</sup> Piper emphasizes propositions' coherence in this way:

If the Bible is coherent, then understanding the Bible means grasping how things fit together. . . . doing exegesis means querying the text about how its many propositions cohere in the author's mind, and thought that, in God's mind. . . . God's mind is truly coherent and not confused. . . . then exegesis must aim to see the coherence of Biblical revelation and the profound unity of divine truth.<sup>67</sup>

Piper calls this procedure—identifying the propositions and noting the relations between them in sentences—"arc-ing" the passage.<sup>68</sup> He further describes arcing as "a way of forcing us to ask the relational questions that govern the structure and meaning of

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<sup>65</sup> John Piper and D. A. Carson, *The Pastor as Scholar & The Scholar as Pastor: Reflections on Life and Ministry*, 64.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> John Piper, *Brothers, We are Not Professionals*, 73, 75.

<sup>68</sup> John Piper, "Where can I Learn More about the Bible Study Method Called 'Arcing'?" *Desiring God*, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/articles/where-can-i-learn-more-about-the-bible-study-method-called-arc-ing> (accessed July 29, 2011). Arcing totally changed Piper's approach to biblical exegesis. He notes that seeing propositions in relationship was a "life-changing revelation" to him when he found that especially Paul did not only gather divine pronouncements, but also he argued. Therefore, when Piper does his exegetical task, he always seeks to understand the author's argument. John Piper, "Biblical Exegesis: Discovering the Meaning of Scriptural Texts."

a text.”<sup>69</sup> Arcing the text consists in six steps: 1) Split up propositions of a paragraph by drawing lines across the top of each proposition; 2) Put an arc over each proposition; 3) Write a number under each arc; 4) Draw more arcs between them; 5) Record the logical connections; 6) Discern the main or one big point and supporting points of the text.<sup>70</sup>

Piper explains that the relationships between propositions are divided into two types: “coordinate relationships and subordinate (or supportive) relationships” and there are eighteen logical relationships in general used in arcing as below.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> John Piper, “The Pastor as Prophet.”

<sup>70</sup> John Piper, “What is ‘Arcing’ and Why is it Important?.” See also John Piper, “Do You Use Arcing when You Study the Narrative Passages of the Bible?,” *Desiring God*, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/ask-pastor-john/do-you-use-arc-ing-when-you-study-the-narrative-passages-of-the-bible> (accessed July 29, 2011). Good resources for how to arc the passage are <http://www.biblearc.com/web> (accessed August 1, 2011); John Piper, “Biblical Exegesis: Discovering the Meaning of Scriptural Texts.”; Thomas R. Shreiner, “Tracing the Argument,” in *Interpreting the Pauline Epistle*. 97-126.

<sup>71</sup> For detailed explanation of relations of propositions, along with the above three sources, see Daniel M. Doriani, *Getting the Message: A Plan for Interpreting and Applying the Bible* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1996), 217-221.

## Coordinate Relationships

Name	Key logical Conjunctions
A. Series (S)	and, moreover, furthermore, likewise, neither, nor, etc.
B. Progression (P)	then, and, moreover, furthermore, etc.
C. Alternative (A)	or, but, while, on the other hand, etc.

## Subordinate (or Supporting) Relationships

Name	Key logical Conjunctions
A. Support by Restatement	
1. Action-Manner (Ac/Mn)	in that, by, etc.
2. Comparison (Cf)	even as, as...so, like, just as, etc.
3. Negative-Positive (-/+)	not...but, etc.
4. Idea-Explanation (Id/Exp)	that is, etc.
5. Question-Answer (Q/A)	
B. Support by Distinct Statement	question mark
1. Ground (G)	
2. Inference (∴)	for, because, since, etc.
3. Bilateral (BL)	therefore, wherefore, consequently,
4. Action-Result (Ac/Res)	accordingly, etc.
5. Action-Purpose (Ac/Pur)	for, because, therefore, so, etc.
	so that, that, with the result that, etc.
6. Conditional (If/Th)	in order that, so that, that, with a view to, to
7. Temporal (T)	the end that, lest
8. Locative (L)	
C. Support by Contrary Statement	if...then, provided that, except, etc.
1. Concessive (Csv)	when, whenever, after, before, etc.
	where, wherever, etc.
2. Situation-Response (Sit/R)	
	although...yet, although, yet, nevertheless,
	but, however, etc.
	and, etc

Figure 1. The Relationships Between Propositions.<sup>72</sup>

In arcing the text, Piper concentrates on asking himself questions of the text so that he may understand “a chain of logical argumentation”<sup>73</sup>: 1) “How do propositions relate to each other logically?”; 2) “What is the main point of the text ?”; 3) “How is the

<sup>72</sup> This figure depends on two sources: <http://www.biblearc.com/web> (accessed August 1, 2011); John Piper, “Biblical Exegesis: Discovering the Meaning of Scriptural Texts.”

<sup>73</sup> Ibid. Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart likewise stress the importance of asking for solid exegesis, “The key to good exegesis ... to learn to read the text carefully and to ask the right questions of the text.” Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How To Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, 22.

text structured?"; and 4) finally, for application, "What do the listeners need?"<sup>74</sup> While asking himself these questions, he is never in a hurry, but slowly queries and ponders on God's Word to grasp Biblical truth.<sup>75</sup> And Piper writes these questions on a piece of paper as John Stott did so that he may discover an outline for his sermons.<sup>76</sup> Finally, Piper finds powerful and proper applications for himself and his people.<sup>77</sup>

*Meditating on the Author's Intention.* Piper's last step of biblical exegesis is to meditate on the author's intention, especially in connection with what he and the other writers have said elsewhere in Scripture as well as the immediate context and the entire book context.<sup>78</sup> A good example of this is in *Not in This or That Mount, but in Spirit and Truth* (John 4:16–30). Piper explains meaning of verse 22b: "We worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews."

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<sup>74</sup> John Piper, "What is 'Arcing' and Why is it Important?" See also John Piper, "The Pastor as Prophet." The term "exegesis" that Piper uses in his booklet, *Biblical Exegesis*, is limited to the analysis of especially expository or discourse books of the New Testament and the Old Testament. For analyzing narrative passage, Piper stresses that pastors should deal in larger chunks of the text, put each of events in the passage under an arc, and then ask narrative relationship questions rather than logic questions in an exegesis of Pauline Epistles. Furthermore, he states, "Exposition wants to expose. It wants to draw out what is there. And stories have a way of meaning. They don't mean the way an expository text (like Romans 5:1–8) means, but they have meaning. They are told for a reason. So an expositor reads the story, studies the story, and tries to discern what is the author telling the story for. How is he telling it in a way to make his point, whatever the point is? So, stories are a glorious gift to us. And faithful exposition should let them be stories and then try to discern with whatever skill we have why they're there and what they mean. John Piper, "Do you use arcing when you study the narrative passages of the Bible?"; John Piper, "How do Stories Fit into Expository Preaching?," *Desiring God*, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/ask-pastor-john/how-do-stories-fit-into-expository-preaching> (accessed August 1, 2011).

<sup>75</sup> John Piper, *Brothers, We are Not Professionals*, 75.

<sup>76</sup> In *The Pastor as Prophet*, Piper introduces John Stott's habit of studying the text by writing questions.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid. About the importance of application in biblical exegesis, Gordon D. Fee notes, "Exegesis ... is an empty intellectual entertainment when divorced from application." Gordon D. Fee, *New Testament Exegesis: A Handbook for Students and Pastors*, 3rd ed., (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 27. Also see, Douglas Stuart, *Old Testament Exegesis: A Handbook for Students and Pastors*, 3rd ed., (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001) 28.

<sup>78</sup> John Piper, "Biblical Exegesis: Discovering the Meaning of Scriptural Texts."

Jesus' point *here* and *elsewhere* in this Gospel is that there is no true worship apart from receiving the Savior that comes from the Jews. . . . [Jesus said], 'Whoever does not know who I really am, and honor me for who I really am, and love me for who I really am, does not know or honor or love God.'<sup>79</sup>

And he quotes related passages from different books.

That's the point of *Luke 10:16*, "The one who rejects me rejects him who sent me." It makes no sense to say they worship when they reject. And *Matthew 10:40*, "Whoever receives me receives him who sent me." It makes no sense to say they worship the one they do not receive. And *John 5:46*, which is especially relevant for the Samaritans and the Jewish people, "If you believed Moses, you would believe me." In other words, if you refuse to own who I truly am, then you don't really believe Moses and the "worship" you do in response to Moses is not true worship.<sup>80</sup>

In doing so, Piper can not only understand accurate meanings of words, but also get insights that take him "deeper and deeper into reality as the author intended," and finally "come to perceive the unity of the Bible."<sup>81</sup>

After all the analysis of Piper's methods of Bible study, biblical exegesis is difficult for him because it requires a lot of time and effort. However, Piper has joyfully disciplined himself with this skill because he believes that insight or understanding comes from only "intensive, headache-producing meditation on two or three propositions and how they fit together."<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> John Piper, "Not in This or That Mount, but in Spirit and Truth," *Desiring God*, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/not-in-this-or-that-mount-but-in-spirit-and-truth> (accessed August 4, 2011). Italics added.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid. Italics added.

<sup>81</sup> John Piper, "Biblical Exegesis: Discovering the Meaning of Scriptural Texts."

<sup>82</sup> John Piper, *Brothers, We are Not Professionals*, 75. Piper even says, "Apart from the discipline of reading, the Bible is as powerless as paper. Someone might have to read it for you; but without reading, the meaning and the power of it are locked up." John Piper, "A Compelling Reason for Rigorous Training of the Mind: Thoughts on the Significant of Reading," *Desiring God*, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/taste-see-articles/a-compelling-reason-for-rigorous-training-of-the-mind> (accessed August 4, 2011).



### **The Major Influence on His Biblical Exegesis**

As mentioned in Chapter 2, Daniel Fuller's hermeneutics was a great influence on Piper's Christian Hedonism. Moreover, he led Piper to accurately exegete the Scriptures in ways that discover what the author intended through the exegetical skill of "arc-ing" which has been regarded as "the methodological key" to all that he has seen in the Bible.<sup>83</sup>

In his class "The Unity of the Bible" at Fuller Theological Seminary, Fuller taught Piper to "see all of Scripture as a whole" and "discover what gives unity" to the Bible "with inductive method of reasoning."<sup>84</sup> Especially, through Fuller's teaching and two books, *Hermeneutics* and *The Unity of the Bible*, Piper learned "the importance of seeing what is there, the importance of asking hard questions, the importance of seeking unity in theology and the importance of a Spirit-given, docile, humility before the text of Scripture."<sup>85</sup> For "The severe discipline" of hermeneutics, Fuller forced Piper to read books by E. D. Hirsch and Matthew Arnold.<sup>86</sup> Moreover, Fuller assigned the account of Agassiz and the fish in order to see "patterns and interrelationships and the lines of thought."<sup>87</sup> Finally, Fuller led Piper into the truth "through the first century door of

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<sup>83</sup> John Piper, "The Pastor As Scholar: A Personal Journey." A group of Fuller's former students, including Piper, called "The Fellowship of the Arc" gathered in Pasadena June 10-12, 1985 in order to "express their affection for his friendship and their admiration for his labor and their gratitude for his vision of the glory of God." John Piper, "A Vision of God for the Final Era of Frontier Missions," *Desiring God*, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/articles/a-vision-of-god-for-the-final-era-of-frontier-missions> (accessed August 19, 2011).

<sup>84</sup> Daniel P. Fuller, *The Unity of the Bible*, xi, xii, xvii.

<sup>85</sup> John Piper, "Books That Have Influenced Me Most."

<sup>86</sup> John Piper, *Don't Waste Your Life*, 27.

<sup>87</sup> John Piper, *Think: The Life of the Mind and the Love* (Wheaton, Crossway, 2010), 205. John MacArthur also recommends pastors to read "The Student and the Fish and Agassiz" find the principle of observation of the Bible. John MacArthur, *Rediscovering Expository Preaching*, 212.

Romans, Galatians and the Sermon on the Mount.”<sup>88</sup> Piper states that Fuller’s hard training of exegesis, proposition by proposition, sentence-diagram by sentence-diagram, and arc by arc, “opened a window on a world of glory that has never been shut.”<sup>89</sup>

Piper notes that Fuller’s book, *The Unity of the Bible: Unfolding God’s Plan for Humanity*, has had the greatest influence on him next to the Bible. Piper even calls Fuller “the key living person under God.”<sup>90</sup> It does not mean that Fuller was a perfect man nor that Piper totally agrees with Fuller’s thoughts.<sup>91</sup> As Piper says, although Fuller was emotionally and personally as broken as others, in his brokenness, Fuller put so many things together for him.<sup>92</sup> Piper says that his love for Fuller is unashamed, and he owes Fuller more than he can explain.<sup>93</sup> Piper is generous in praise of Fuller:

Nobody thought more rigorously than Dan Fuller. . . . Nobody was more riveted on the biblical text in his exegetical method than Dan Fuller. . . . Nobody was more jealous to think the author’s thoughts after them because that’s what meaning was—the author’s intention. . . . Nobody was more practically committed to the truth and authority of Scripture. . . . Nobody communicated a greater sense of gravity of the ultimate things at stake in biblical truth. . . . Nobody was more vulnerable to students’ questions or took them more seriously. . . . Nobody was more committed to showing that much reading is not the essence of scholarship but that assiduous, detailed, meticulous, logical analysis of great texts can lift you into the greatest minds. This gave me hope as a slow reader. . . . Nobody pierced to the essence of true scholarship the way Dan Fuller did.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> John Piper, *God’s Passion for His Glory*, xvi.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> John Piper, “The Pastor As Scholar: A Personal Journey.”

<sup>91</sup> John Piper, “Praise God for Fundamentalists,” *Desiring God*, <http://www.desiringgod.org/blog/posts/praise-god-for-fundamentalists> (accessed August 19, 2011).

<sup>92</sup> John Piper, “The Pastor As Scholar: A Personal Journey.”

<sup>93</sup> John Piper, “Praise God for Fundamentalists.”

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

Piper credits Fuller's hermeneutics and thoughts in his many books. In *Desiring God*, Piper says, "I learned how to dig for gold rather than rake for leaves when I take up the Scriptures. He remains a treasured friend and teacher."<sup>95</sup> In *Don't Waste Your Life*, Piper gives Fuller credit with his view of the unity of the Bible. He states, "Daniel Fuller showed me . . . The verses of the Bible are not strung pearls but links in a chain. The writers developed unified patterns of thought."<sup>96</sup> In *Future Grace*, Piper gives credit to Fuller for the vision of the Christian life: "The conception of the Christian life . . . was the inspiration for my own treatment of how to battle the sins that come from lack of faith in future grace."<sup>97</sup> Last, in *The Justification of God*, which he dedicated to Fuller, Piper says, "Almost 25 years ago I was swept into the love and labor of serious, painstaking, exhilarating exegesis by this man's classes in seminary. Everything I have preached or written is owing in great measure to the inspiration and exegetical discipline I absorbed from Daniel Fuller."<sup>98</sup>

Fuller's impact lasted while Piper was in graduate school and in the early years of his ministry. For a good example, when Piper finished his degree in Germany and was looking for a ministry, Fuller encouraged him with 2 Corinthians 4:1 by using his exegetical method called arcing; "John, God is as willing, ready, and able to give you a

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<sup>95</sup> John Piper, *Desiring God*, 14.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid. Piper recalls that good experience: "I felt like my little brown path of life had entered an orchard, a vineyard, a garden with mind-blowing, heart-thrilling, life-changing fruit to be picked everywhere. Never had I seen so much truth and so much beauty condensed in so small a sphere. The Bible seemed to me then, and it seems today, inexhaustible."

<sup>97</sup> John Piper, *Future Grace*, 7, 404.

<sup>98</sup> John Piper, *The Justification of God: An Exegetical & Theological Study of Romans 9:1-23*, 2nd ed., (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1993), 12.

ministry as he was willing, ready and able to save you. It will be mercy that he saved you, and it will be mercy that you have a job. Trust him.”<sup>99</sup>

In addition to Piper’s studying the Bible, Fuller’s another impact on Piper is that he introduced Piper to the writings of Jonathan Edwards in the late 1960’s.<sup>100</sup> Piper states, “Fuller introduced me, through Scripture and through Jonathan Edwards, to the truth that God is most glorified in us when I am most satisfied in him.”

Therefore, in this light, Fuller is a great teacher and mentor who has continually influenced Piper both theologically and methodologically.

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<sup>99</sup> John Piper, “Who was Your Source of Encouragement during Your Early Years of Ministry?,” Desiring God, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/ask-pastor-john/who-was-your-source-of-encouragement-during-your-early-years-of-ministry> (accessed August 19, 2011).

<sup>100</sup> Tom Steller, “Free Jonathan Edwards Conference in Greenwich Village,” Desiring God, <http://www.desiringgod.org/blog/posts/free-jonathan-edwards-conference-in-greenwich-village> (accessed August 19, 2011).

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **JOHN PIPER’S PHILOSOPHY OF PREACHING**

Chapter 3 described Piper’s principles of biblical exegesis: his approach to the Word of God, his method of exegesis and those who influenced his Bible study. This chapter will explore Piper’s preaching motivation: “The Supremacy of God in Preaching”; will explain Piper’s objective of preaching, i.e. preaching as worship, exposition, and exultation; and will finally describe Piper’s best teacher of preaching, Jonathan Edwards, and the people who have influenced his preaching.

#### **His Motivation of Preaching**

To Piper, preaching is “an awesome thing” because he believes that he does not just tell stories or share his wisdom and opinion, but deals with God’s Word as “a mediator of the living God” to those who hear the Word of God every week.<sup>1</sup> In *The Prophet as Prophet*, Piper defines preaching as “the heralding of good news *about God in Jesus Christ* based on the written word *of God* from a messenger sent *by God* including

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<sup>1</sup> John Piper, “What Bible Passages do You Use to Base Your Claims about How we should Preach?,” *Desiring God*, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/ask-pastor-john/what-bible-passages-do-you-use-to-base-your-claims-about-how-we-should-preach> (accessed August 5, 2011). The passage of the Bible that has most influenced in Piper’s preaching is 2 Timothy 4:1-2. He says, “[These] are the most exalted preface of any command in the Bible, I dare say.”

enough teaching to make the news plain and helpful.”<sup>2</sup> Piper not only strives to live a God-centered life as a Christian, but also as a preacher always longing to stand before his people “as a messenger sent with God’s message to God’s people in God’s name by God’s Spirit.”<sup>3</sup>

As appears out of these statements, Piper’s preaching is absolutely God-centered. He is eager to proclaim God’s Word in redemptive history and present a theologically driven sermon based on Romans 11:36, “For from [God] and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.”<sup>4</sup> Piper’s God-centered preaching is best expressed in his book *The Supremacy of God in Preaching*. He emphasizes that God should be supreme in preaching:

My burden is to plead for the supremacy of God in preaching — that the *dominant note* of preaching be the freedom of God’s sovereign grace, the *unifying theme* be the zeal that God has for his own glory, the *grand object* of preaching be the infinite and inexhaustible being of God, and the *pervasive atmosphere* of preaching be the holiness of God.<sup>5</sup>

Piper’s God-centered vision of preaching can be summed up in a Trinitarian way: “God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit are the beginning, middle, and end in the

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<sup>2</sup> John Piper, “The Pastor as Prophet.” Italics added. Piper continues, “Preaching is not conversation. Preaching is not discussion. Preaching is not casual talk about religious things. Preaching is not simply teaching. Preaching is the heralding of a message permeated by the sense of God’s greatness and majesty and holiness.” John Piper, “Preaching as Expository Exultation,” in *Preaching the Cross: Together for the Gospel*, Mark Dever, J. Ligon Duncan, R. Albert Mohler Jr., and C. J. Mahaney, contributions by John MacArthur, John Piper and R. C. Sproul (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2007), 104-105.

<sup>3</sup> John Piper, “In Honor of Tethered Preaching.”

<sup>4</sup> John Piper, “Interview with John Piper on The Supremacy of God in Preaching,” *Desiring God*, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/interviews/interview-with-john-piper-on-the-supremacy-of-god-in-preaching> (accessed August 9, 2011).

<sup>5</sup> John Piper, *The Supremacy of God in Preaching*, 23-24. Italics his.

ministry of preaching.”<sup>6</sup> In other words, he explains his vision of preaching in the role of Trinity: God the Father as the goal of preaching, Jesus Christ its ground, and the Holy Spirit as its gift.

### **The Goal of His Preaching**

According to Piper, the first reason why God should be supreme in preaching is that the purpose of preaching is to glorify God. Piper believes that “From the beginning to end, nothing in the Bible is more ultimate in the mind and heart of God than the glory of God”<sup>7</sup> and “God aims to exalt himself” through preaching.<sup>8</sup> And he believes that God himself is “the necessary subject matter of his preaching, in his majesty and truth and holiness and righteousness and wisdom and faithfulness and sovereignty and grace.”<sup>9</sup>

Therefore, Piper desires to proclaim God himself who is the heart of Gospel. He says, “The good tidings of the preacher, the peace and salvation that he publishes are boiled down into one sentence: ‘Your God reigns!’ . . . The keynote in the mouth of every prophet-preacher . . . is ‘Your God reigns.’”<sup>10</sup> To proclaim God’s glory through his

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> John Piper, “Preaching as Expository Exultation,” 108.

<sup>8</sup> John Piper, *The Supremacy of God in Preaching*, 23, 28. Piper emphasizes that people can see God’s glory through hearing God’s Word. Succinctly, he says, “Words are *heard* and glory is *seen*.” John Piper, “Preaching as Expository Exultation,” 112. Italics his.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 15. Like Piper, James Shaddix stresses, “Preaching should be driven by a passion for the glory of God . . . A preacher’s call to preach is rooted in his call to Christ, and his call to Christ is rooted in a quest for the glory of God. So if his preaching driven by anything other than a passion for the glory of God, it’s being fueled by wrong substance.” James L. Shaddix, *The Passion Driven Sermon: Changing the Way Pastors Preach and Congregations Listen* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2003), 3-4. Tony Merida also has the same goal of preaching: “The glory of God is the starting place for a faithful preaching ministry.” Tony Merida, *Faithful Preaching: Declaring Scripture with Responsibility, Passion, and Authenticity* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2009), 21.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 26. See also, John Piper, *God is Gospel*, 26-27.

preaching, Piper has a keen desire to be governed by a sense of the greatness and the majesty and the holiness of God.<sup>11</sup>

Moreover, he is confident that people who listen to his sermons are hungry for “the greatness of God,” and only “the aroma of God’s greatness” can touch the hidden cry of the soul: ‘Show me thy glory.’<sup>12</sup> Therefore, Piper longs to “carry the weight of God’s glory” to his people<sup>13</sup> and lead his people to see God’s glory every week. This means that Piper does not preach on various topics including the ordinary things of lives of the listeners. Instead, he strives to focus on the supremacy of God in every sermon. And then “when preaching takes up the ordinary things of life (family, job, leisure, friendships) or the crises of our day (AIDS, divorce, addictions, depression, abuses, poverty, hunger, and, worst of all, unreached peoples of the world), these matters are not only taken up. They are taken all the way up into God.”<sup>14</sup> For good example, Piper preached on Isaiah 6:1-8 on January 1, 1984, *Holy, Holy, Holy Is the Lord of Hosts*. This sermon was delivered during the January prayer week. Piper decided to preach on God’s holiness instead of topics related to people’s troubled lives. He expected to experience

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<sup>11</sup> For good examples of preachers who are permeated by God’s glory, Piper introduces two great preachers: George Whitefield and Martyn Lloyd-Jones. Piper prays that God will raise up like-preachers again: “God would raise up thousands of broken-hearted, Bible-saturated preachers who are dominated by a sense of the greatness and the majesty and the holiness of God, revealed in the gospel of Christ crucified and risen, and reigning with absolute authority over every nation and every army and every false religion and every terrorist and every tsunami and every cancer cell and every galaxy in the universe.” John Piper, “Preaching as Expository Exultation,” 104-105.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 13. Piper strongly feels the need for people to realize God’s greatness. He says that although people are starving for God, most would not make this diagnosis of their hard lives. Furthermore, he states, “The majesty of God is an unknown cure.” Similarly, Tony Merdia says, “Indeed, many of [pastors’] people not realize that understanding the nature of God is their greatest need.” Tony Merdia, *Faithful Preaching*, 22. Alistair Beg stresses that pastors should begin their sermon with God and his glory instead of man and his need. Alistair Beg, *Preaching for God’s Glory* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2010), 27.

<sup>13</sup> John Piper, “Preaching as Expository Exultation,” 106.

<sup>14</sup> John Piper, *The Supremacy of God in Preaching*, 24.



revival in his church through seeing God's glory: "Revival happens when we see God majestic in holiness, and when we see ourselves disobedient dust. Brokenness, repentance, unspeakable joy of forgiveness, a 'taste for the magnificence of God,' a hunger for his holiness—to see it more and to live it more: that's revival. And it comes from seeing God."<sup>15</sup> And then Piper provided the congregation seven glimpses of God in these verses: 1) God Is Alive; 2) God Is Authoritative; 3) God Is Omnipotent; 4) God Is Resplendent; 5) God Is Revered; 6) God Is Holy; and 7) God Is Glorious.<sup>16</sup>

Although Piper did not give one word of application to the lives of his congregations, the results of that sermon were amazing. By the way of illustration, a young father of his church, who was suffering because their child was sexually assaulted by a close relative, came to see Piper and said, "The vision of the greatness of God's holiness that you gave me the first week of January. It has been the rock we could stand on."<sup>17</sup>

Piper desires for his people not only to see God's glory in his preaching, but also to be transformed into the likeness of God. In *The Pleasure of God in His Son*, Piper defines preaching "the portrayal of the glory of God," because he believes that "the goal

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<sup>15</sup> John Piper, "Holy, Holy, Holy Is the Lord of Hosts," *Desiring God*, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/holy-holy-holy-is-the-lord-of-hosts> (accessed August 10, 2011).

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> John Piper, *The Supremacy of God in Preaching*, 14. Similarly, Merdia introduces a similar experience in his book *Faithful Preaching*, 23. This example does not mean that Piper ignores the importance of application in preaching. He puts his emphasis on primarily the supremacy of God in preaching. Piper considers application as one of the most significant parts of biblical preaching. The next chapter will deal with how to apply the biblical theme to the lives of people.

of preaching is to change people into the likeness of God.”<sup>18</sup> He explains well this with 2 Corinthians 3:18, 4:4-6.

According to Paul, *preaching is a means of conveying light to the darkened heart of men and women*. In verse 4 the gospel is the gospel of the glory of Christ, and in verse 6 the knowledge is the knowledge of the glory of God. So in both verses the light conveyed into the heart is the light of glory—the *glory of Christ and the glory of God ... So the light conveyed by preaching is a light of glory*, and you can speak of this glory as the glory of Christ who is God’s image, or the glory of God perfectly reflected in Christ ... *Preaching is the portrayal or display or exhibition of divine glory to the hearts of men and women* (that’s 4:4–6), *so that by the beholding of this glory they might be changed into the likeness of the Lord from one degree of glory to another* (that’s 3:18).<sup>19</sup>

According to Piper, that change of lives brings in process of people’s glad submission to “the worth and glory of God, the king.”<sup>20</sup> In other words, people, who receives the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 4:6), becomes to submit with joy to God’s kingship.<sup>21</sup>

In this light, Piper’s goal of preaching can be summarized as follows: To make people waken to God’s glory in the gospel of Christ and become like Christ by beholding the glory of God in Christ through hearing God’s Word and gladly submitting to his kingdom.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> John Piper, “The Pleasure of God in His Son,” *Desiring God*, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/the-pleasure-of-god-in-his-son> (accessed August 11, 2011). For more detailed explanations of preaching as a portrait of the glory of God, see John Piper, “Preaching as Expository Exultation,” 108-111.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid. Italics added.

<sup>20</sup> John Piper, *The Supremacy of God in Preaching*, 28.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid. In this light, Piper’s goal of preaching comes from Christian Hedonism: God is most glorified in those who are most satisfied in him.

<sup>22</sup> To see God’s glory on Sunday morning, Piper encourages people to prepare for hearing God’s Word through focusing their mind’s attention and heart’s affection on God. Furthermore, he states, “Let us come on the lookout for God ... Come with a quiet passion to seek God and his power.” John Piper, *Taste and See: Savoring the Supremacy of God in All of Life* (Colorado Spring, CO: Multnomah Books, 2005), 342.

## The Ground of His Preaching

The second reason why God should be supreme in Piper's preaching is that the Cross of Christ is the ground or foundation of preaching. Piper states that there are two obstacles to glorifying God in preaching: "The righteousness of God and the pride of man."<sup>23</sup> In other words, God's righteousness, which is "the zeal for the exaltation of his glory," comes into conflict with man's pride, which is "the zeal for the exaltation of man's glory" and does not delight in God's glory.<sup>24</sup>

In the Cross of Christ, Piper finds only the solution to solve the conflict between God-centered and man-centered preaching. Through the atonement of Jesus Christ, God shows his "infinite outrage of sin" and proclaims "the infinite worth of his glory," and then the Cross of Christ enables a sinful man, who has scorned his glory, to praise joyfully God's glory.<sup>25</sup> In this sense, Piper calls the Cross of Christ "the ground of the objective validity of preaching."<sup>26</sup> In a sermon on Romans 3:23-26, Piper explains well that God shows the infinite value of his glory and that he justifies the sinner through the death of his Son:

God glorified himself in the life of Jesus, and he will glorify himself in the death of Jesus. And so he will show himself to be righteous in justifying the ungodly. . . . At the end of verse 26, Paul shows what God's two great goals were in the death of Jesus. Why did Jesus die? It was "so that [God] would be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus." . . . These seem to contradict each other. God's righteousness would dictate: pour out your wrath on sinners who exchange your glory for other values - that would be righteous. . . . But if God wills that he demonstrate the infinite value of his glory and that he justify the ungodly, then someone - namely, Jesus Christ - had to bear the wrath of God to show that God

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<sup>23</sup> John Piper, *The Supremacy of God in Preaching*, 32.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 32-33.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 33-34.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

does not take lightly the scorning of his glory.<sup>27</sup>

In the following passage, Piper stresses that sinners, who have been justified by faith, should place their hope in the glory of God through the gospel of Christ:

You have to see the glory. You have to hope in the glory that you see. And then you exult in the hope of the glory that you see. There is God's glory. There is hope for God's glory. There is exulting or boasting or rejoicing in the hope of God's glory.<sup>28</sup>

Furthermore, he encourages them to see God's glory in Christ.

Where do you see the glory? Mainly in the gospel story of Christ's life and death and resurrection for us sinners. When the story is told and the gospel is preached, what shines out from it, Paul says in 2 Corinthians 4:4, is "the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God." The gospel is the "gospel of the glory of Christ." And this glorious Christ is "the image of God." So the glory of Christ that we see in the gospel story of his life and death and resurrection is the glory of God. God stands forth from the history of his Son's life and from the preaching of this greatest story in history. His glory shines through the gospel.<sup>29</sup>

It is important to note, therefore, that Piper proclaims hope and joy to sinners who disrespect the glory of God so that they may delight in God's glory through only the Cross of Christ. Piper challenges the pastor to depend on totally Christ-crucified on the cross to glorify God in preaching: "Every sermon should be based on, and interwoven with, the gospel of the living Christ's substitutionary death. . . . *Thus with Christ-*

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<sup>27</sup> John Piper, "The Demonstration of God's Righteousness, Part 3," *Desiring God*, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/the-demonstration-of-gods-righteousness-part-3>, (accessed August 16, 2011).

<sup>28</sup> John Piper, "Let Us Exult in the Hope of the Glory of God, *Desiring God*," <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/let-us-exult-in-the-hope-of-the-glory-of-god>, (accessed August 16, 2011).

<sup>29</sup> Ibid. Here Piper regards the glory of God and the glory of Christ as the same. In *Seeing and Savoring Jesus Christ*, Piper stresses, "The glory of Christ is the glory of God. In one sense, Christ laid the glory of God aside when he came (John 17:5). . . . But in another sense, Christ manifested the glory of God in his coming (John 1:14). . . . Therefore, in the Gospel we see and savor 'the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ' (2 Corinthians 4:6)." John Piper, *Seeing and Savoring Jesus Christ* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2004), 16-17.

*crucified as that ground and goal and matter of every sermon (an all of life) the ultimate aim of God in creation is advanced: the praise of the glory of God's grace, through the joy of his people in him.*"<sup>30</sup>

To Piper, the Cross of Christ is not only the ground of the objective validity of preaching, but also the ground of its subjective humility, because the power of the cross breaks the pride of both preachers and listeners, and enables them to gladly rely on the mercy of God and not on themselves."<sup>31</sup> For example, in *The Great Work of the Only Wise God*, Piper emphasizes that the greatest goal of salvation is God's glory and humans' humility through the Cross of Christ.<sup>32</sup> In a sermon on 1 Corinthians 1:10–31: *Let the One Who Boasts Boast in the Lord*, Piper urges the congregation only boast the Lord, Jesus Christ:

Therefore, we conclude with Paul in verse 31—and is there any wonder?—"Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord." Make Jesus your boast, Bethlehem. Not the preacher, not the church. Let no one say, "I follow Paul," or "I follow Apollos," or "I follow Cephas." But let all say together with me "It is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death" (Philippians 1:20). Magnify Christ in these months, Bethlehem. Amen.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> John Piper, "Pastor as Prophet," 8. Italics added. In this light, it is evident from Piper's sermon that his preaching is Christ-exalting or Christ-centered. For his ten theses about Christ-centered preaching, see John Piper, "Pastor as Prophet." Similarly, Tony Merida states, "Faithful preachers should proclaim the biblical text first in its original setting and then in view of its redemptive historical setting—exalting the person, work, and teaching of Jesus. Ultimately, the purpose of Christ-exalting exposition is to see Christ formed in his people for the glory of God." Tony Merdia, *Faithful Preaching*, 45.

<sup>31</sup> John Piper, *The Supremacy of God in Preaching*, 33, 37.

<sup>32</sup> John Piper, "The Great Work of the Only Wise God," *Desiring God*, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/the-great-work-of-the-only-wise-god> (accessed August 16, 2011).

<sup>33</sup> John Piper, "Let the One Who Boasts Boast in the Lord," *Desiring God*, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/let-the-one-who-boasts-boast-in-the-lord> (accessed August 16, 2011).

Moreover, in *John Was Not the Light, but a Witness to the Light*, Piper warns his people against the preacher who is full of arrogance: “Beware of the preacher who constantly angles to put himself in a good light and returns again and again to his ministry and his achievements. Beware of the preacher’s subtle preoccupation with himself even when he speaks of his own flaws.”<sup>34</sup>

Piper states that preachers as well as listeners should be cautious not to boast of themselves. In *I Will Not Be a Velvet-Mouthed Preacher!*, Piper quotes 18th-century itinerant evangelist George Whitefield’s statement that his life and powerful preaching ministry only depend on God’s grace:

I am nothing, have nothing, and can do nothing without God. What although I may, like a polished sepulcher appear a little beautiful without, yet within I am full of pride, self-love and all manner of corruption. However, by the grace of God I am what I am, and if it should please God to make me instrumental to do the least good, not unto me, but unto him, be all the glory.<sup>35</sup>

And then Piper encourages preachers to fight pride within themselves: “Of course George Whitefield fought pride. Who doesn’t fight pride—pride because we are somebody, or pride because we want to be somebody?”<sup>36</sup> Furthermore, Piper asks preachers to remember John Stott’s argument in order to awaken the danger of pride in them:

Pride is without doubt the chief occupational hazard of the preacher. It has ruined many, and deprived their ministry of power. . . . It is more subtle, more insidious, and even more perverse. For it is possible to adopt an outward demeanor of great meekness, while inside our appetite for applause is insatiable. At the very moment when in the pulpit we are extolling the glories of Christ, we can in reality be seeking our own glory, and when we are exhorting the congregation to praise God, and are even ostensibly leading them in praise, we

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<sup>34</sup> John Piper, “John Was Not the Light, but a Witness to the Light.”

<sup>35</sup> Michael A. G. Haykin, ed., *The Revived Puritan: The Spirituality of George Whitefield* (Dundas, Ontario: Joshua Press, 2000), 103, quoted in John Piper, “‘I Will Not Be a Velvet-Mouthed Preacher!’: The Life and Ministry of George Whitefield,” *Desiring God*, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/biographies/i-will-not-be-a-velvet-mouthed-preacher> (accessed August 16, 2011).

<sup>36</sup> John Piper, “I Will Not Be a Velvet-Mouthed Preacher!”

can be secretly hoping that they will spare a bit of praise for us. We need to cry out with Baxter, “O what a constant companion, what a tyrannical commander, what a sly, subtle and insinuating enemy is this sin of pride!”<sup>37</sup>

Therefore, in order to crucify pride, self-reliance and boasting in man, and to glorify God, Piper stresses as Paul did in 1 Corinthians 2:1-2 that preachers should strive to be saturated with the crucifying power of the Cross of Christ in all his life and preaching.<sup>38</sup>

### **The Gift of His Preaching**

The last reason why God is supreme in Piper’s preaching is that only the sovereign work of the Holy Spirit enables God’s glory to be displayed, and he can break the sin of self-reliance, self-exaltation and self-assurance in both preachers and hearers through the power of the cross of Christ. In this respect, Piper names the power of the Spirit of God as “the gift of preaching.”<sup>39</sup>

According to Piper, in order to glorify God through the Cross of Christ, preachers, first, must esteem “the inerrant Word inspired by the Holy Spirit” (2 Timothy 3:16) in “all lowliness and meekness.”<sup>40</sup> Therefore, preachers primarily should humbly ask the Holy Spirit to help them correctly interpret the Word that He inspired.<sup>41</sup> In other words, preachers must pray that the Holy Spirit overcomes their “proud heart and rebellious nature” in order that they may clearly hear His voice in the Scriptures by yielding to “the

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<sup>37</sup> John Stott, *Between Two Worlds*, 320-321, quoted in John Piper, “Pride in Preachers,” *Desiring God*, <http://www.desiringgod.org/blog/posts/pride-in-preachers> (accessed August 16, 2011).

<sup>38</sup> John Piper, *The Supremacy of God in Preaching*, 33, 37.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 41-42.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 44-45.

uncomplimentary truths of Scripture.”<sup>42</sup> Moreover, Piper stresses that preachers desperately need God’s help, especially for “supernatural illumination” to see spiritual things when they study the Bible.<sup>43</sup> Namely, unless the Spirit opens the eyes of their hearts, preachers can only see words and grammatical constructions, logical connections, historical background, author’s intentions and some human emotions in the Word; but they can never see “the spiritual beauty of God and his Son, and their work in the world.”<sup>44</sup>

After studying God’s Word, preachers should expound the biblical text and apply it to people’s lives. In doing so, people can realize that pastors’ preaching comes from not their ideas or opinions but the Word of God. To Piper, true preaching deals with not the opinions of a mere man but the Word of God.”<sup>45</sup>

Second, in order to achieve the goal of preaching, preachers must depend on the power given by the Holy Spirit. Piper states that the preacher should seek to preach not from his own strength but in the strength that God supplies (1 Peter 4:11).<sup>46</sup> Preachers

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<sup>42</sup> John Piper, “Men Moved by the Holy Spirit Spoke from God.”

<sup>43</sup> John Piper, “Wonderful Things from Your Word,” *Desiring God*, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/wonderful-things-from-your-word> (accessed August 23, 2011). Similarly, Greg Heisler states that when preachers read the biblical text, they should seek “the illumination” of the Holy Spirit in order to find “the Spirit-intended meaning of the text.” Greg Heisler, *Spirit-Led Preaching: The Holy Spirit’s Role in Sermon Preparation and Delivery* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2007), 40.

<sup>44</sup> John Piper, “Wonderful Things from Your Word.”

<sup>45</sup> John Piper, “The Place of Preaching in Worship,” *Desiring God*, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/the-place-of-preaching-in-worship> (accessed August 23, 2011). Similarly, Greg Heisler stresses this point: “We need the Holy Spirit because . . . sinful human beings need a sense of conviction, of supernatural verification, and internal confirmation. . . . Since the goal of all preaching is the glory of God by means of spiritual transformation, preaching is not like every other form of communication where the goal is to get an idea across or to transfer information from source to receptor.” Greg Heisler, *Spirit-Led Preaching*, 33.

<sup>46</sup> John Piper, *The Supremacy of God in Preaching*, 46-47.



should keep asking God for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit when they preach for “the salvation of sinners and the magnifying of God’s glory and the public vindication of Jesus’ name.”<sup>47</sup>

In order to do that, Piper practices five steps, indicated by the acrostic–APTAT. 1) He *Admits* to God that without Him he can do nothing (John 15:5). 2) He *Prays* for help for power, humility, insight, love, memory and freedom that he needs in order to preach His Word for the glory of God (Psalm 50:15). 3) He *Trusts* that God will help him preach powerfully by protecting him from Satan’s assault during preaching (Psalm 40:17). 4) He *Acts* with assurance that God will accomplish His Word. 5) At the end of sermon, he *Thanks* God that he was sustained and that “the truth of his Word and the purchase of his cross have been preached in some measure in the power of his Spirit to the glory of his name.”<sup>48</sup>

Piper urges his people to seek the power of the Holy Spirit in their church. In *Through Our Lord Jesus Christ in the Power of the Holy Spirit*, Piper asks his people to be desperate for the Spirit: “Jesus Christ has released the merciful power of God by His sin-bearing death; and the Holy Spirit is applying it to our church. Let’s ask and seek and knock unrelentingly until He comes in great power. . . . When the Spirit of the Lord comes, the heart of the Lord comes. . . . We must have Him. We must. Seek Him with me. Plead for His fullness and power.”<sup>49</sup> And he continues,

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<sup>47</sup> John Piper, “A Prayer That Brought the Holy Spirit Down,” *Desiring God*, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/a-prayer-that-brought-the-holy-spirit-down> (accessed August 23, 2011).

<sup>48</sup> John Piper, *The Supremacy of God in Preaching*, 48-49. Italics added.

<sup>49</sup> John Piper, “Through Our Lord Jesus Christ in the Power of the Holy Spirit,” *Desiring God*, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/through-our-lord-jesus-christ-in-the-power-of-the-holy-spirit> (accessed August 24, 2011). Like Piper, Zack Eswine encourages both preachers and the

Realize that when Jesus calls us at Bethlehem to join him in making disciples of all nations, he is calling us to raise the dead. But only the Holy Spirit can do that. Do you see what that means? It means that we will be weak and ineffective in our witness until the Holy Spirit comes upon us with power. And when he does, we will say with Paul, “My speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom but in the demonstration of the Spirit and of power.”<sup>50</sup>

In this light, Piper longs to preach God’s inspired Word with the empowerment of the Holy Spirit in his preaching in order to glorify God in Christ. He prays, “Come, Holy Spirit, preach yourself to this people.”<sup>51</sup>

### **The Gravity and Gladness of His Preaching**

An analysis of Piper’s vision of preaching, which emphasizes the supremacy of God, concludes that his preaching is God-centered, Christ-exalted, and Holy Spirit-empowered. This vision finally brings Piper to preach with “the gravity and gladness.”<sup>52</sup>

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congregation to realize the necessity of the Holy Spirit for biblical preaching: “The greatest need of the hour for preachers and churches was neither to scramble for new methods nor to remain stagnant in age-limited decorum. Rather, each preacher must ‘come back’ to God in Christ, and seek a return of His gracious effusions of power for the generation. Without the Holy Spirit no homiletic method will have what it takes to revive a generation.” Zack Eswine, “Lesson in Preaching: Charles Haddon Spurgeon,” (Lecture, Covenant Theological Seminary, St. Louis, MO, Spring 2007). Furthermore, Eswine encourages preachers to seek earnestly and persistently the power of the Holy Spirit in their preaching as well as their daily fellowship with the Holy Spirit, which he exemplified with Spurgeon: “Spurgeon believed . . . Preaching was meant to be lived out by seeking continually the kindled fire of the fresh power of the Spirit of God.” Zack Eswine, *Kindled Fire: How the Methods of C. H. Spurgeon Can Help Your Preaching* (Scotland: Mentor, 2006), 190.

<sup>50</sup> John Piper, “Creation, Fall, Redemption, and the Holy Spirit,” *Desiring God*, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/creation-fall-redemption-and-the-holy-spirit> (accessed August 24, 2011).

<sup>51</sup> John Piper, “The Holy Spirit: He Is God!” *Desiring God*, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/the-holy-spirit-he-is-god> (accessed August 25, 2011). Like Piper, F. B. Meyer emphasizes, “We must seek only the glory of Jesus. The main objective of the Holy Spirit in the present age is to glorify Christ. . . . But—and this is the most pertinent point for our present purpose, the Holy Spirit’s power proceeds along the line of the Word of God, as the electric message along the wires. It is His sword; the life-giving seed which He has vitalized; the word in which the Word is incarnated.” F. B. Meyer, *Expository Preaching Plans and Methods* (New York: Hodder & Stoughton, George H. Doran Co, 1912), 12.

<sup>52</sup> John Piper, *The Supremacy of God in Preaching*, 51

Piper longs to communicate the greatness of God, realize the realities of heaven and hell, save sinners, to revive their churches, and to preserve the saints. Therefore, he strives to preach with “intensity of feeling, the weight of argument, a deep and pervading solemnity of mind, a savor of the power of godliness, fervent of spirit, zeal for God.”<sup>53</sup> In a word, to Piper, preaching ministry is to be done “in blood-earnestness.”<sup>54</sup> In *Why Expositional Preaching Is Particularly Glorifying to God*, Piper draws this principle well: “What gives preaching its seriousness is that the mantle of the preacher is soaked with the blood of Jesus and singed with fire of hell. That’s the mantle that turns mere talkers into preachers.”<sup>55</sup>

Then Piper deplores the tragedy of today’s pulpit ministry that has lost a sense of seriousness:

Yet tragically some of the most prominent evangelical voices today diminish the horror of the cross and the horror of hell—the one stripped of its power to bear our punishment, and the other demythologized into self-dehumanization and the social miseries of this world. . . . Oh that the rising generations would see that the world is not overrun with a sense of seriousness about God. There is no surplus in the church of a sense of God’s glory. There is no excess of earnestness in the church about heaven and hell and sin and salvation. And therefore the joy of many Christians is paper thin. . . . And yet incomprehensibly, in this Christ-diminishing, soul-destroying age, books and seminars and divinity schools and church growth specialists are bent on saying to young pastors, “Lighten up.” “Get funny.” “Do something amusing.” . . . From my perspective, which feels very

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 54.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 54, 59, 62. After examining great preachers like Jonathan Edwards, Thomas Chalmers and Martin Lloyd-Jones, Piper concludes that their success of preaching comes from not their excellent delivery but their blood-earnestness. John Piper, *The Supremacy of God in Preaching*, 51-55; John Piper, “Pointers from a Westminster Pastor,” *Desiring God*, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/taste-see-articles/pointers-from-a-westminster-pastor> (accessed August 25, 2011). To glorify God in preaching, Piper strives to be passionate about God by cultivating God-centeredness, prayer, a serious engagement with God’s Word, and asking certain kinds of God-centered, Christ-exalting questions. Adrian Warnock, “INTERVIEW – John Piper on Passionate Preaching,” [Adrianwarnock.com](http://adrianwarnock.com), <http://adrianwarnock.com/2008/06/interview-piper-on-passionate-preaching> (accessed August 25, 2011).

<sup>55</sup> John Piper, “Why Expositional Preaching Is Particularly Glorifying to God.”

close to eternity these days, that message to pastors sounds increasingly insane.<sup>56</sup>

Likewise, Piper wants himself to be consumed with blood-earnestness in his ministry of the Word. In the early years of his ministry, Piper asked God, as God filled the church at Aberavon through Martin Lloyd-Jones, to bless his Church: “And so may the Lord fill Bethlehem! Not because there is entertainment here. God forbid! But because we are in blood earnest about the cause of God and truth.”<sup>57</sup>

In addition to a “Spirit-given” holy gravity, Piper stresses that preachers should preach with “gladness” as an act of love for their people.<sup>58</sup> In other words, preachers, who love their people and glorify God, must persistently pursue their own happiness in the work of preaching so that preachers may help people obey joyfully God’s Word by sharing the enjoyment in them with their people. Therefore, according to Piper, preachers must enjoy the ministry of the Word (Hebrew 13:17) and do this work willingly and eagerly (1 Peter 5:2-3).<sup>59</sup> In this light, it is certain that Piper is a preacher who consistently pursues and cultivates his joy in preaching in order to glorify God and save sinners.

Regarding the enjoyment of preachers, one must be aware though, that Piper differentiates between the joy of preachers and frivolous jokes or levity. Piper says, “Earnestness is the demeanor that corresponds to the weight of the subject matter of preaching. *The opposite of earnest is not joyful, but trivial, flippant, frivolous, chipper. It*

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> John Piper, “Pointers from a Westminster Pastor.”

<sup>58</sup> John Piper, *The Supremacy of God in Preaching*, 60.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 56-57.

*is possible to be earnest and have elements of humor, though not levity.*”<sup>60</sup> While mentioning his church’s philosophy of corporate worship, including preaching and music, Piper states that his church rejects jokes and levity in the worship service, because he believes, “Jokes are rarely fitting, levity makes true worship harder and there is a difference between natural life-humor and contrived communication-humor.”<sup>61</sup>

Piper sharply comments that one of problems in the American churches today in a media and entertainment-saturated age is that typical worship service makes light of Jesus by using humor in a trivializing way “so that it degenerates from what Spurgeon called the robust belly laugh of something that is truly funny to the levity of trivializing holy things.”<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> John Piper, “Thoughts on Earnestness in Preaching,” an unpublished lecture at The Bethlehem Institute, Minneapolis, 1999, quoting in John Henry Beukema, “Why Serious Preachers Use Humor,” PreachingTodaySermons.Com, <http://www.preachingtodaysermons.com/whyseprusehu.html> (accessed August 29, 2011). Italics added. Similarly, Charles Spurgeon stresses,

Cheerfulness is one thing, and frivolity is another; he is a wise man who by a serious happiness of conversation steers between the dark rocks of moroseness, and the quicksands of levity. . . . We must conquer our tendency to levity. A great distinction exists between holy cheerfulness, which is a virtue, and general levity, which is a vice. There is a levity, which has not enough heart to laugh, but trifles with everything; it is flippant, hollow, unreal. A hearty laugh is no more levity than a hearty cry.

Charles Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students*, 151, 212, quoted in John Beukema, “Why Serious Preachers Use,” in *The Art and Craft of Biblical Preaching: A Comprehensive Resource for Today’s Communicators*, eds., Haddon W. Robinson, and Craig Brian Larson (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 132.

<sup>61</sup> John Piper, “Gravity and Gladness on Sunday Morning, Part 1: The Pursuit of God in Corporate Worship,” Desiring God, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/seminars/gravity-and-gladness-on-sunday-morning-part-1> (accessed August 29, 2011).

<sup>62</sup> John Piper, “How should We Respond to Inappropriate Humor?,” Desiring God, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/ask-pastor-john/how-should-we-respond-to-inappropriate-humor> (accessed August 29, 2011). Although Piper does not like use jokes and levity in his sermons, his preaching and teaching greatly affect on people. DesiringGod.org reports that from July 2010 to April 2011, 24.5 million audio and video files were downloaded free— one download per second 24 hours a day for 304 days. Jon Bloom, “A Year-to-Date Review of Desiring God’s Spreading Mission,” Desiring God, <http://www.desiringgod.org/blog/posts/a-year-to-date-review-of-desiring-gods-spreading-mission> (accessed August 30, 2011).

In sum, to glorify God in preaching, pastors must preach and live with both gladness and gravity in order to “sober the careless soul and sweeten the burdens of the saints” by providing the strength of joy to help them carry them.<sup>63</sup>

### **His Objective of Preaching**

Based on the supremacy of God as his philosophy of preaching, Piper develops his objective of preaching: Preaching as worship, exposition, and exultation.

### **Preaching as Worship**

Piper states that preaching is “the heart of worship” and should be a prominent part in the corporate worship. He believes that by the particular form of proclaiming the Word called preaching, God reveals Himself, performs His work, and leads to new birth and the constant work of reawakening faith.<sup>64</sup> In other words, to Piper, “preaching is worship.”<sup>65</sup> Here, Piper does not mean that preaching should be all of the corporate worship service and other parts such worship music, prayer, offerings and communion in

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<sup>63</sup> John Piper, *The Supremacy of God in Preaching*, 55-56. On pages 63-66 of this book, Piper provides pastors with seven practical methods to cultivate the gravity and gladness in preaching: 1) Strive for practical, earnest, glad-hearted holiness in every area of your lives; 2) Live in continuous communication with God in prayer, especially in your study. “Fruitful study and fervent prayer live and die together”; 3) Read books that were written by those who are blood-earnest about God and the truth; 4) Often seriously contemplate death; 5) Remember that as a preacher you will be judged with greater strictness; 6) Consider Jesus Christ, the greatest example of preachers; and finally 7) Strive with all your strength to know God and to humble yourselves under His mighty hand.

<sup>64</sup> John Piper, “The Place of Preaching in Worship.”

<sup>65</sup> John Piper, *The Supremacy of God in Preaching*, 9. At the Bernard H. Rom Lectures in Preaching at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, November 2-3, 1994, Piper states, “My conviction is that the aim of preaching . . . is God-exalting worship. And not only that, my conviction is-hence the title of these lectures-that true biblical preaching is worship.” John Piper, “Preaching as Worship: Meditations on Expository Exultation,” *Beginning with Moses*, <http://beginningwithmoses.org/preaching/249/preaching-as-worship-meditations-on-expository-exultation> (accessed August 31, 2011).

the worship service are not important. What he emphasizes is that preaching is the heart of worship because true preaching unites well the twofold essence of worship: seeing or understanding God with worshipers' minds and savoring or delighting God with their hearts.<sup>66</sup>

Piper believes that preaching is “worshipping over the Word of God—the text of Scripture—with explanation and exultation.”<sup>67</sup> He continues that preaching does not follow worship in the order of the service in the church. In other words, the preacher worships over God’s Word, striving to draw the audience into “a worshipful response” to God by the power of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>68</sup>

Therefore, Piper, as a preacher, not only worships God over His Word, but also asks his people to worship God while listening to God’s Word. Piper says, “Focus on God, not the messenger. Concentrate on God, not the hymn tune. Pursue God, not just knowledge about God.

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<sup>66</sup> Bethlehem Baptist Church, “Our Values,” <http://www.hopeingod.org/about-us/who-we-are/our-values> (accessed August 31, 2011); John Piper, “The Place of Preaching in Worship.” Piper places much importance on the music in the worship service. The worship music of Bethlehem Baptist Church is Godward, and it is mingled historic and contemporary together, its contents form “the gospel contours of the worship” with redemptive flow, and it also serves as “preparation for additional instructions from God’s Word in the sermon.” John Piper, “What Unites Us in Worship at Bethlehem?” *Desiring God*, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/taste-see-articles/what-unites-us-in-worship-at-bethlehem> (accessed August 30, 2011); Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Worship: Letting the Gospel Shape Our Practice* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 268-269.

<sup>67</sup> John Piper, *The Supremacy of God in Preaching*, 9.

<sup>68</sup> John Piper, “What I Mean by Preaching,” *Desiring God*, <http://www.desiringgod.org/blog/posts/what-i-mean-by-preaching> (accessed August 31, 2011).

## Preaching as Exposition

As mentioned previously, Piper defines preaching as worship involving the explanation and exultation of God's Word. From this idea, Piper presents another concept that preaching is "expository." Piper states that preaching contains "teaching" because the content of preaching is the truth of God's Word.<sup>69</sup> To support this, Piper quotes the following verses: "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for *teaching*" (2 Timothy 3:16); "Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and *teaching*" (2 Timothy 4:2).

Therefore, in preaching, Piper aims to explain biblical texts and apply their meaning to people's lives. Piper believes that preaching is expository in the way that both the preacher and the audience see God and understand His Word with their minds in preaching.<sup>70</sup> Piper clearly shows the purpose of preaching as expository when he says to his people,

The aim of [the Word's] exposition is to help you eat and digest biblical truth that will make your spiritual bones more like steel, double the capacity of your spiritual lungs, make the eyes of your heart dazzled with the brightness of the glory of God, and awaken the capacity of your soul for kinds of spiritual enjoyment your did not even know existed."<sup>71</sup>

In this light, Piper minimizes his own opinions and imagination, and he strives to faithfully "exposit, open, unfold, elucidate, clarify and explain" the words, sentences and paragraphs of Scripture in order to display the glory of God in Christ and see the all-

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<sup>69</sup> John Piper, *The Supremacy of God in Preaching*, 10-11.

<sup>70</sup> John Piper, "The Place of Preaching in Worship."

<sup>71</sup> John Piper, "What I Mean by Preaching."



satisfying God as he speaks and reveals Himself in Scripture.”<sup>72</sup>

### **Preaching as Exultation**

Reflecting on 2 Timothy 4:2, Piper stresses that preaching is more than teaching, and it is “heralding,”<sup>73</sup> because the term “preach (keruxon)” in this verse means “herald,” or “announce,” or “proclaim.”<sup>74</sup> To Piper, preaching is not just explanation. Preaching is manifest and contagious proclamation with passion about what it says.<sup>75</sup> Piper calls this heralding “a public exultation,” because he believes that preaching is “the rising of preacher’s heart to exult over the exposition of truth.”<sup>76</sup> In other words, the preacher not only exposit biblical texts and sees the glory of the truth with his mind, but also savors God and exults over the reality in those texts that he feels with his heart.<sup>77</sup>

By doing so, eventually it is the audience that with the preacher sees God’s glory and exults in the truth, which has been explained and applied. In other words, through the faithful exposition of God’s Word, finally God is glorified in “affections” of both

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<sup>72</sup> John Piper, “Why Expository Preaching Is Particularly Glorifying to God”; Adrian Warnock, “INTERVIEW – John Piper on Passionate Preaching.”

<sup>73</sup> John Piper, “Advice to Pastors: Preach the Word.”

<sup>74</sup> John Piper, *The Supremacy of God in Preaching*, 10. To help preachers understand better, Piper explains the term, which Paul uses for “preach” in this way: “It is not a word for “teach” or “explain.” It is what a town-crier did: “Hear ye, Hear ye, Hear ye! The King has a proclamation of good news for all those who swear allegiance to his throne. Be it known to you that he will give eternal life to all who trust and love his Son.”

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> John Piper, “The Place of Preaching in Worship.”; John Piper, “How My Pastoral Ministry Shapes My Pulpit Ministry,” Desiring God, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/conference-messages/how-my-pastoral-ministry-shapes-my-pulpit-ministry> (accessed September 4, 2011); John Piper, “God So Loved the World, Part 2,” Desiring God, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/god-so-loved-the-world-part-2> (accessed September 4, 2011).

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

preachers and people.<sup>78</sup> That is what Piper really means by preaching. In this respect, it is concluded that to Piper, preaching is a public “expository exultation.”<sup>79</sup> Piper stresses that today preachers must practice expository exultation, because he believes that preachers and listeners together will die “when precious and infinitely valuable realities are handled without feelings and words of wonder and exultation.”<sup>80</sup> Piper encourages pastors practice expository exultation in this way:

God exists to be worshiped—to be admired and treasured and desired and praised. . . . To treasure the Truth, and to love the Truth, and be impassioned about the Truth, and to exult in the Truth, you have to know the Truth. . . . the command of the Lord is, Preach the Word. Keep your *head* on (exposition) and keep your *heart* alive (exultation). Handle the precious living Word of God accurately. And come to this pulpit week after week and do *expository exultation*. Don’t out-exult the Word. And don’t under-exult the Word. There is enough glory in the Word that you need add nothing artificial. Just eat it until your heart is deeply and truly satisfied and then serve the same banquet for your people.<sup>81</sup>

In the light of this fact, it is certain that Piper finds great joy in the preaching ministry although it causes both pressure and pain. To Piper, the preaching of God’s Word is “a great and happy work.”<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> John Piper, “What Is the Philosophy of Worship that Unites Us?,” *Desiring God*, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/articles/what-is-the-philosophy-of-worship-that-unites-us> (accessed September 4, 2011). Therefore, the ultimate goal of Piper’s expository preaching is that preachers not only see and savor God’s glory, but also cause people to experience it. A. T. Robertson notes that such is the privilege of the preacher and can be found in Spirit-filled preaching of Paul: “[Paul] is able to see ‘the light of knowledge of the glory of the God in the face of Jesus Christ,’ as well as ‘give’ it to others. A. T. Robertson, *The Glory of the Ministry* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1911), 117, <http://www.archive.org/stream/gloryofministryp00robe#page/116/mode/2up> (accessed September 6, 2011).

<sup>79</sup> John Piper, “What I Mean by Preaching.”

<sup>80</sup> John Piper, “Advice to Pastors: Preach the Word.”

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.* Italics his.

<sup>82</sup> John Piper, “Preaching as Worship: Meditations on Expository Exultation.”

### Major Mentors of His Preaching

The formative influences on Piper's preaching comes from Jonathan Edwards, Piper's father, John Calvin, George Whitefield, Charles Spurgeon and Martin Lloyd-Jones. As Piper says in *God's Passion for His Glory*, although Piper shows a great deal of respect for them, he does not just follow their preaching styles.<sup>83</sup> Rather, Piper has learned mainly from their pious lives, theology and their philosophy of preaching.

#### Jonathan Edwards

Although Piper was raised by his father, an itinerant evangelist, and has a great respect for him, Piper, who is fairly analytic and given to study, became "a theologically oriented pastor."<sup>84</sup> Piper loves his people and cherishes their lives together in worship and ministry, and he wishes he had some of his father's gifts. However, he says that he will probably never live a fruitfully soul-winning life like his father.<sup>85</sup>

From this point of view, that Edwards, who most focused on writing and preaching among his ministries, became his ideal model of pastor, is a natural consequence. Edwards has provided a great challenge for Piper through "God-entranced

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<sup>83</sup> Piper warns pastors not to blindly copy Jonathan Edwards' style when he says, "Slavish, external simulations of style or language will betray a failure to grasp what Edwards himself was pursuing in the creative adaption of solid, ancient, Biblical truth to his own day." John Piper, *God's Passion for His Glory*, 50. Piper is well known as an expository preacher, while the preaching style of Jonathan Edwards, his major mentor of preaching, is topical preaching and an expository unit is not easily found which supports a single major idea in Edwards' sermons. David Ryu, "Reformed Expository Preaching," (Lecture, Chongshin Theological Seminary, South Korea, Spring, 2005).

<sup>84</sup> John Piper, *God's Passion for His Glory*, 94.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid. Here what Piper means is that compared with his father, he lacks talents as an evangelist. Piper's powerful evangelistic sermons at Bethlehem Baptist Church and several conferences show well that he has a fervent passion for the lost. For example, see the following sermons at [www.desiringgod.org](http://www.desiringgod.org): 1) A series on John 3:16 - The Danger: Perishing, The Design: Love, The Duty: Faith and The Destiny: Eternal Life; 2) A series on Luke 15 - Coming to Yourself and Coming to The Father; The Blinding Effects of Serving God.

worldview” in his life and messages as “a pastor-theologian.”<sup>86</sup> Piper says, “Alongside the Bible, Edwards became the compass of my theological studies. Not that he has anything like the authority of Scripture, but that he is a master of that Scripture, and a precious friend and teacher. . . . he has meant to me theologically and personally in my vision of God and my love for Christ.”<sup>87</sup>

On advice from a professor of Fuller Theological Seminary, Piper’s lifetime journey of understanding and mastering Edwards’ thought started.<sup>88</sup> In *God’s Passion for His Glory*, Piper introduces in detail the influence of Edwards on his thought and devotion:

1) Edwards’ *Essay on the Trinity* played a crucial role in establishing Piper’s view of God’s being.

2) *Freedom of the Will*, the most influential book to Piper, provided him “an unshakable Biblical confidence in the sovereignty of God over the will of man.”

3) *The Nature of True Virtue* inspired in him “a deep long to be “a good man.”

4) *Charity and Its Fruit* caused “the emerging Christian Hedonism” in him.

5) The vision of God displayed in *Dissertation Concerning the End for Which God Created the World* has “put its stamp on every part” of his life and ministry. Piper states that this is a book that “captures the essence or wellspring of Edwards’s theology.”

6) *Treatise Concerning Religious Affections* convicted him that there was “sinful

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<sup>86</sup> John Piper, “The Pastor as Theologian: Life and Ministry of Jonathan Edwards,” *Desiring God*, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/biographies/the-pastor-as-theologian> (accessed September 7, 2011).

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> John Piper, “A Personal Encounter with Jonathan Edwards,” *Desiring God*, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/articles/a-personal-encounter-with-jonathan-edwards> (accessed September 7, 2011).

lukewarmness” in his affections toward God and aroused in him “a passion to know and love God” as he ought.<sup>89</sup>

Likewise, Edwards has made a lasting impression on Piper and consequently he has become “the modern embodiment of Edwardsian theology and philosophy.”<sup>90</sup> It is most noticeable that through Edwards’ life and theology, Piper, finally, has found God-entranced vision of preaching.<sup>91</sup> Briefly stated, to Piper, Edwards is the best model for the supremacy of God in preaching, theology and life. As Piper put it in this way:

[Edwards] has fed my soul with the beauty of God and holiness and heaven when every other door seemed closed to me. He has renewed my hope and my vision for ministry in some very low times. He has opened the window on the world of the Spirit time and again when all I could see were curtains of secularism. He has shown me the possibility of mingling rigorous thought about God and warm affection for God. . . . He had a passion for truth and a passion for the lost sinners. All of this flourished in the pastorate. *Above all, Edwards was a God-besotted preacher. . . . Jonathan Edwards preached the way he did because of the man he was and the God he saw.*<sup>92</sup>

To Piper, preaching God’s Word is more than just a powerful instrument for the ministry of the preacher. After studying Edwards’ ministry in Northampton, Piper concludes that preaching is one of the main instruments for spiritual awakening.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> John Piper, *God’s Passion for His Glory*, 31, 84-92; John Piper, “Books That Have Influenced Me Most.”

<sup>90</sup> Shawn Stanton Merithew, “Theological Tenets of the Evangelistic Ministry of John Piper During the Years 1980-2002,” 59. J. I. Packer states that Piper’s theology in *Desiring God* was rooted in Edwards’s theology when he says, “Jonathan Edwards, whose ghost walks through most of Piper’s pages, would be delighted with his disciple.” J. I. Packer, in John Piper, *The Supremacy of God*, cover.

<sup>91</sup> John Piper, “The Pastor as Theologian: Life and Ministry of Jonathan Edwards.” For detailed information of Edwards’ influence on Piper’s life, theology and preaching, see part 2 (How to Make God Supreme in Preaching: Guidance from the Ministry of Jonathan Edwards) of *The Supremacy of God in Preaching*.

<sup>92</sup> John Piper, *The Supremacy of God in Preaching*, 68. Italics added.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 83. When speaking of revival, Spurgeon similarly says, “An awakening is ‘God pouring out His good Spirit,’ by which the ordinary means of the preached Word is accompanied by an extraordinary effect such that the name of our God shall be glorified and His church shall be greatly

Especially, two books on revival, Edwards' *Thoughts on the revival of religion in New England* and Lloyd-Jones' *Revival*, causes Piper to long for revival at his church. He prays, "May this great Creator that visited New England in the 1740's and that Martin Lloyd-Jones displayed so forcefully in his preaching at Westminster Chapel bare his reviving arm at Bethlehem!"<sup>94</sup>

In *The Supremacy of God in Preaching*, Piper offers the essence of Edwards' preaching in ten characteristics of good preaching for spiritual awakening: Good preaching 1) aims to "stir up holy affections" in the hearers; 2) enlightens the mind of them "with divine truth"; 3) is "saturated with Scripture"; 4) is rich in "vivid images and analogies" that gives impressions in them comparable to reality; 5) delivers the biblical messages of threat and warning to them; 6) pleads with them to "respond" to God's Word; 7) like surgery, "probe the workings of the human heart"; 8) springs from constant and fervent prayer; 9) is born of a spirit of "brokenhearted tenderness"; and 10) is "intense" because it produces "the impression that something very great is at stake."<sup>95</sup>

In sum, Edwards gave Piper real examples of how a God-entranced vision is worked out in weekly preaching as well as the everyday life of the pastor. Furthermore,

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increased." Charles Spurgeon, "Revival Work," *The Sword and the Trowel* (March 1898): 350, quoted in Zack Eswine, *Kindled Fire: How the Methods of C.H. Spurgeon Can Help Your Preaching*, 56.

<sup>94</sup> John Piper, "Two Books on Revival—In One Day!," *Desiring God*, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/taste-see-articles/two-books-on-revival-in-one-day> (accessed September 12, 2011).

<sup>95</sup> John Piper, *The Supremacy of God in Preaching*, 68 86-103. Sean Michael Lucas notes that Edwards believed that "the Spirit used the Word to stir the holy affections of God's people" so that hearers' minds and hearts may "be moved to delight and rejoice in and ardently love Jesus and others." Sean Michael Lucas, "Divine Light, Holy Heat: Jonathan Edwards, the Ministry of the Word, and Spiritual Formation," *Presbyterion* 34, no. 1 (Spring 2008): 8, 11. John D. Hannah stresses that to Edwards, "preaching is the act of conveying the Word of God to others in such a way that the hearers eagerly embrace and live out the truth." John D. Hannah, "The Homiletical Skill of Jonathan Edwards," *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 159 (January-March 2002): 96.

Piper learned what kind of preaching God uses for His glory. Piper expects, “If God in His grace should see fit to open our eyes to the vision of Edwards, if we were granted to taste the sweet sovereignty of the Almighty the way Edwards tasted it, then a renewal of the pulpit in our day would be possible—indeed inevitable.”<sup>96</sup>

### **Other Preachers Who Have Influenced Him**

Besides Jonathan Edwards, there are other preachers who impacted Piper. Six of them need to be explained in short: Piper’s father and his historical heroes: Martin Luther, John Calvin, George Whitefield, Charles Spurgeon and Martin Lloyd-Jones.<sup>97</sup>

Preaching with blood-earnestness comes from his father, Bill Piper. He would tremble to hear his father preach in his boyhood. He reminisces, “In spite of the predictable opening humor, the whole thing struck me as absolutely blood-earnest. There was a certain squint to his eye and a tightening of his lips when the avalanche of biblical texts came to a climax in application.”<sup>98</sup>

Martin Luther is one of Piper’s historical heroes. Luther taught him that preaching

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 104. The sayings of Richard Day, Spurgeon’s biographer can be understood in the same context: “Great awakenings are always delayed, awaiting the coming of men whose souls are inflamed by long exposure to God’s Word and the words of men who best understand it.” Richard Ellsworth Day, *The Shadow of the Broad Brim: The Life Story of Charles Haddon Spurgeon, Heir of the Puritans* (Chicago: The Judson Press, 1942), 126.

<sup>97</sup> Present preachers to whom Piper often listens are as follows: D. A. Carson, R. C. Sproul, C. J. Mahaney, Sinclair Ferguson, John MacArthur, Alistair Begg, John Sailhammer, and Carl Trueman. Adrian Warnock, “INTERVIEW – John Piper on Other Preachers and His Call to Ministry,” [adrianwarnock.com](http://adrianwarnock.com/2008/07/interview-john-piper-on-other-preachers), <http://adrianwarnock.com/2008/07/interview-john-piper-on-other-preachers> (accessed September 12, 2011); Adrian Warnock, “Piper Friday: More Reactions to THAT Message at T4G,” [adrianwarnock.com](http://adrianwarnock.com/2006/04/piper-friday-more-reactions-to-that-message-at-t4g), <http://adrianwarnock.com/2006/04/piper-friday-more-reactions-to-that-message-at-t4g> (accessed September 12, 2011).

<sup>98</sup> John Piper, *Don’t Waste Your Life*, 11.

is expository exultation in the way that “Scripture turns into glad tidings,”<sup>99</sup> and that preachers should approach to studying the Word of God with “prayer and reverent dependence on the all-sufficiency of God.”<sup>100</sup>

The sermon of John Calvin inspired Piper to “press on with the great and glorious task of heralding the Word of God,”<sup>101</sup> and he taught Piper that preaching should be mainly about “the centrality and supremacy and majesty of the glory of God,” so it will not never die.<sup>102</sup>

George Whitefield challenged Piper that preaching should be “passionate, energetic, whole-souled” task, because the preacher speaks “the glorious facts of the gospel as wonderfully, terrifyingly, magnificently real.”<sup>103</sup> About the influence of Whitefield on him, Piper says,

Mighty in the Scriptures, aglow with the great truths of the doctrines of grace, dead to self, willing to labor and suffer, indifferent to the accolades of man, broken for sin, and dominated by a sense of the greatness, the majesty, and holiness of God. . . . Preaching is not conversation. Preaching is not discussion. Preaching is not casual talk about religious things. Preaching is not simply teaching. Preaching is the heralding of a message permeated by the sense of God’s greatness and majesty and holiness. The topic may be anything under the sun, but it is always brought into the blazing light of God’s greatness and majesty in his word. That was the way Whitefield preached.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> John Piper, “Advice to Pastors: Preach the Word.”

<sup>100</sup> John Piper, *The Legacy of Sovereign Joy: God’s Triumphant Grace in the Lives of Augustine, Luther, and Calvin* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2000), 110.

<sup>101</sup> John Piper, “The Glory of Preaching the Bible,” *Desiring God*, <http://www.desiringgod.org/blog/posts/the-glory-of-preaching-the-bible> (accessed September 12, 2011).

<sup>102</sup> John Piper, “The Divine Majesty of the Word: John Calvin: The Man and His Preaching,” *Desiring God*, <http://www.desiringgod.org/blog/posts/the-glory-of-preaching-the-bible> (accessed September 12, 2011).

<sup>103</sup> John Piper, “I Will Not Be a Velvet-Mouthed Preacher!”

<sup>104</sup> John Piper, “Why Expository Preaching Is Particularly Glorifying to God,” *Desiring God*, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/conference-messages/why-expository-preaching-is-particularly-glorifying-to-god> (accessed September 12, 2011).



Piper respects Charles Spurgeon as the preacher who is “consumed with the glory of God and the salvation of men.”<sup>105</sup> From him, Piper also learned that God has mightily used preachers who “embraced the sovereignty of grace.”<sup>106</sup> The biggest lesson from Spurgeon is that “preaching is heart work, not just mental work,” so the preacher should know “how to keep on preaching” when he faces adversity and depression.<sup>107</sup>

Piper’s last historical role model of preacher is Martin Lloyd-Jones. Piper regards Lloyd-Jones as in the last century the preacher who embodied the kind of preacher Whitefield best.<sup>108</sup> In the summer of 1968, between college and seminary, Piper read Lloyd-Jones’ two volumes on the Sermon on the Mount and its impact on him was unforgettable. Piper says, “Not since I was a little boy sitting under the preaching of my father, had I been so moved by what J. I. Packer called ‘the greatness and weight of spiritual issues.’”<sup>109</sup> Moreover, Lloyd-Jones made him realize the importance of historic, God-centered revival, and he encouraged him to earnestly seek “the manifestations of the

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<sup>105</sup> John Piper, “Charles Spurgeon: Preaching Through Adversity,” *Desiring God*, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/biographies/charles-spurgeon-preaching-through-adversity> (accessed September 13, 2011).

<sup>106</sup> John Piper, “How Spurgeon Got Saved,” <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/taste-see-articles/how-spurgeon-got-saved> (accessed September 13, 2011).

<sup>107</sup> John Piper, “Charles Spurgeon: Preaching Through Adversity.” For helpful information of this theme, Piper strongly recommends especially two chapters of Spurgeon’s *Lectures to My Students: The Minister’s Fainting Fits* on how to overcome discouragement and *The Blind Eye and the Deaf Ear* on how to handle criticism. John Piper, “What Books have been most Influential in John Piper’s Life and Thought?”, *Desiring God*, <http://www.desiringgod.org/about/john-piper/faqs> (accessed September 13, 2011). As Spurgeon did, with permission from his church, Piper occasionally takes a rest in order to have time to recharge spiritually himself and check his ministry. From May 1 through December 31, 2010, Piper left from his church because of “a growing sense that his soul, his marriage, his family, and his ministry-pattern need a reality check from the Holy Spirit.” John Piper, “John Piper’s Upcoming Leave,” *Desiring God*, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/taste-see-articles/john-pipers-upcoming-leave> (accessed September 13, 2011).

<sup>108</sup> John Piper, “Why Expositional Preaching Is Particularly Glorifying to God.”

<sup>109</sup> John Piper, “A Passion for Christ-Exalting Power: Martin Lloyd-Jones on the Need for Revival and Baptism with the Holy Spirit,” *Desiring God*, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/biographies/a-passion-for-christ-exalting-power> (accessed September 13, 2011).

Spirit's power" for revival so that God's name may be glorified and magnified among all the nations.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **JOHN PIPER’S SKILLS FOR EXPOSITORY PREACHING**

Chapter 2 dealt with Piper’s background of preaching ministry as spiritual sermon preparation. Chapter 3 investigated Piper’s exegetical method for expository preaching. Chapter 4 discussed Piper’s philosophy of preaching. This chapter will explore the homiletical skill of Piper in the sermon preparation process. First, this section will explain Piper’s considerations of choosing texts for preaching. Then it will explain how Piper structures expository sermons: Introduction, body (explanation, Illustration, application) and conclusion.

#### **His Considerations for Selecting Texts for Sermons**

Bryan Chapell notes, “A preacher’s first expository task is to choose a portion of Scripture from which to preach.”<sup>1</sup> This means that expository preachers must begin with the very Word of God. Similarly, Piper points out that “preaching as expository exultation should be the exposition and application of a text or cluster of texts from the Bible.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon*, 59.

<sup>2</sup> John Piper, “The Pastor as Prophet.”

## The length of a Sermon Text

In selecting a passage, Piper stresses that the preacher should decide the length of the text. In *Pastor as Prophet*, Piper introduces five principles to decide the passage length of a sermon.<sup>3</sup> First, the length of the text depends on “the goal of the message or series message.”<sup>4</sup> For example, while Piper preached eleven messages, one of each of the Minor Prophets, except Nahum,<sup>5</sup> he preached eleven messages on Malachi.<sup>6</sup> In first case, Piper aimed to “give an overview” of the biblical text. Preaching a sermon on Joel, Piper states the goal of the message in this way: “What I would like to do this morning is guide you through the whole book in a summary way, then go back and focus on the main messages of the two halves as they apply to us today.”<sup>7</sup> Piper’s goal of the second instance was to “unpack the theologically laden phrases” of all-important verses that give the thesis of one book.<sup>8</sup> This case is also well displayed in six messages on Romans 1:16-17.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> John Piper, “The Minor Prophets,” Desiring God, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/by-series/the-minor-prophets> (accessed September 14, 2011).

<sup>6</sup> John Piper, “Malachi: The Sun of Righteousness Will Rise,” Desiring God, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/by-series/malachi-the-sun-of-righteousness-will-rise> (accessed September 14, 2011).

<sup>7</sup> John Piper, “The Locust Horde and the Day of the Lord,” Desiring God, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/the-locust-horde-and-the-day-of-the-lord> (accessed September 14, 2011).

<sup>8</sup> John Piper, “The Pastor as Prophet.”

<sup>9</sup> John Piper, “Romans: The Greatest Letter Ever Written,” Desiring God, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/by-series/romans-the-greatest-letter-ever-written> (accessed September 14, 2011).

Second, the length of a passage varies with “what kind of literature the text comes from.”<sup>10</sup> For example, on one hand, Piper selects one to several verses from the Epistles. Piper preached a sermon entitled, *Girding the Mind to Guard Your Hope* with only one verse, 1 Peter 1:13.<sup>11</sup> On the other hand, narrative literature tends to provide longer sermon texts “because the point of the author is not generally made in a single verse or two but by weaving events together in a story.”<sup>12</sup> For good example, Piper divided the story in John 4 about Jesus’ meeting with the Samaritan woman at the well into four parts. He found that there was a progression in this story: “In verses 1–15, Jesus is the living water. In verses 16–19, Jesus is the prophet. In verses 20–24, Jesus is the Savior who makes true spiritual worship possible. In verses 25–26, Jesus is the Messiah.”<sup>13</sup> For another example, in a series sermon on Ruth, Piper preached four messages, one on each chapter.<sup>14</sup>

Third, the length of the text depends on “how dense the text is with theological terminology that needs explanation and application.”<sup>15</sup> Piper stresses, “the more rich

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<sup>10</sup> John Piper, “The Pastor as Prophet.”

<sup>11</sup> John Piper, “Girding the Mind to Guard Your Hope,” *Desiring God*, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/girding-the-mind-to-guard-your-hope> (accessed September 14, 2011).

<sup>12</sup> John Piper, “The Pastor as Prophet.”

<sup>13</sup> John Piper, “The Tragic Cost of Her Cavernous Thirst,” *Desiring God*, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/the-tragic-cost-of-her-cavernous-thirst> (accessed September 14, 2011). Piper asks preachers to read story when they deal with narrative sections in order to find the major idea of the author: “An expositor reads the story, studies the story, and tries to discern what is the author telling the story for. How is he telling it in a way to make his point, whatever the point is? John Piper, “How do Stories fit into Expository Preaching?,” *Desiring God*, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/ask-pastor-john/how-do-stories-fit-into-expository-preaching> (accessed September 14, 2011).

<sup>14</sup> John Piper, “Sermons on Ruth,” *Desiring God*, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/by-scripture/ruth> (accessed September 14, 2011).

<sup>15</sup> John Piper, “The Pastor as Prophet.”

words and phrases that need explaining and applying, the shorter the text.”<sup>16</sup> For instance, Piper preached three messages on Romans 1:16, each entitled *Not Ashamed of the Gospel*, *The Gospel is the Power of God unto Salvation*, and *The Gospel is the Power of God unto Salvation*.<sup>17</sup> And, he preached three messages on John 3:16 by dividing it into four parts that “make a natural presentation of the four ‘D’s’ of the Gospel”: The Danger: perishing, The Design: love, The Duty: faith and The Destiny: eternal life.<sup>18</sup> On Romans 8:10-17, Piper preached four messages on how to kill sin according to four questions: “1) “What are ‘the deeds of the body’ that we are to put to death?” 2) “What does killing them mean? What is this putting to death?” 3) “How do you do it ‘by the Spirit’?” “What does ‘by the Spirit’ mean?” 4) “Does this threat of death mean that I can lose my salvation?”<sup>19</sup>

Other principles to decide the length of the text can be briefly summed up as follows: When the preacher is confident that how quickly he needs to move through a larger unit, he can decide the size of his sermon texts for every Sunday. Piper explains, “If you believe you should spend from New Years to Easter on 1 Peter that will govern the size for your text for each week.”<sup>20</sup> Last, the length of the text depends on how much time the preacher has for his sermon delivery.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> John Piper, “Romans: The Greatest Letter Ever Written.”

<sup>18</sup> John Piper, “The Danger: Perishing,” Desiring God, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/the-danger-perishing> (accessed September 14, 2011).

<sup>19</sup> John Piper, “How to Kill Sin, Part 1,” Desiring God, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/how-to-kill-sin-part-1> (accessed September 14, 2011).

<sup>20</sup> John Piper, “The Pastor as Prophet.”

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

In view of all this, it is evident from Piper's sermons that in planning the length of text he should use for an expository message, Piper follows well "an expository unit," which Bryan Chapell mentions for the Scripture portion an expository sermon covers.<sup>22</sup>

### **The Ways to Select a Sermon Text**

Piper emphasizes that in order to select a text for preaching, the preacher should have "flexibility and responsiveness" to change according to his church circumstances, in social crises and in his personal convictions.<sup>23</sup>

*The Audience and Setting.* A sermon text, first, depends on the audience and setting. According to Piper, evangelistic messages, funeral messages and wedding messages require different texts than an ordinary worship service.<sup>24</sup> For example, Piper preached from John 11:1-44 for funeral messages,<sup>25</sup> and he preached evangelistic sermons using John 3:15, Luke 15:11-24, 25-31 and Romans 5:6-8.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> "An expository unit is," Chapell says, "a larger or small portion of Scripture from which a preacher can demonstrate a single spiritual truth with adequate supporting facts or concepts arising within the scope of the text." Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon*, 61. Haddon Robinson agrees with Chapell's opinion, but he uses different term, *Thought Unit*. Haddon Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 54.

<sup>23</sup> John Piper, "The Pastor as Prophet." For good example, see Appendix A: Sermons from 1996.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> John Piper, "Funeral Message for Luke Kenneth Anderson," Desiring God, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/funeral-message-for-luke-kenneth-anderson> (accessed September 15, 2011).

<sup>26</sup> For more examples of evangelistic sermons, see the following sources: John Piper, "John 3:16," Desiring God, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/by-series/john-316> (accessed September 15, 2011); John Piper, "Coming to Yourself and Coming to The Father," Desiring God, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/coming-to-yourself-and-coming-to-the-father> (accessed September 15, 2011); John Piper, "The Blinding Effects of Serving God," Desiring God, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/the-blinding-effects-of-serving-god> (accessed September 15, 2011); John Piper, "Joy Purchased," Desiring God, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource->

Although he preaches evangelistic sermons only for the lost, in many services Piper does not distinguish between preaching for evangelistic purposes and preaching for the edification of the believers. In other words, Piper focuses on both the believers and the unbelievers, because he believes that “every Sunday the saints need what will help them trust God more. The lost likewise need what will help them trust God.”<sup>27</sup> For example, when he started a series on the Gospel of John, Piper proclaimed that the Gospel of John was written to help unbelievers believe in Jesus Christ and have eternal life. And then he stressed, “But don’t get it in your head that the book is therefore only for unbelievers. Believers on Jesus must go on believing in Jesus in order to be saved in the end. . . . He was writing to awaken faith in unbelievers and sustain faith in believers—and in that way lead both to eternal life.”<sup>28</sup>

*The Church Calendar or Special Events.* Second, the church calendar or special events call for appropriate sermon texts to represent certain truths.<sup>29</sup> In this case, Piper interrupts his series and preaches sermons on certain themes. For example, Piper uses special texts for Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, Easter Sunday, Palm Sunday,

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library/sermons/joy-purchased (accessed September 15, 2011); John Piper, “Why We Need a Savior,” *Desiring God*, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/series-index/why-we-need-a-savior> (accessed September 15, 2011); Beside these, sermons of Good Friday, Easter Sunday and Christmas can be good examples of evangelistic sermons.

<sup>27</sup> Shawn Stanton Merithew, “Theological Tenets of the Evangelistic Ministry of John Piper During the Years 1980-2002,” 112.

<sup>28</sup> John Piper, “In the Beginning Was the Word,” *Desiring God*, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/in-the-beginning-was-the-word> (accessed September 15, 2011). Graeme Goldsworthy supports Piper’s opinion, “[The Gospel of John] is evangelistic but not merely evangelistic. Believing that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, so that we might have life in his name is about more than conversion.” Graeme Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible As Christian Scripture: The Application of Biblical Theology to Expository Preaching* (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 2000), 232.

<sup>29</sup> John Piper, “The Pastor as Prophet.”



Thanksgiving, Christmas and Advent, as well as New Years, Mother's Day, Father's Day, end of the year, and building projects, anniversaries of the church, installations, missions week, ordinations, Racial Harmony Sunday, Sanctity of Life Sunday and Treasuring Christ Together.<sup>30</sup>

*Crises in Society.* Third, a sermon text can be chosen by crises in society, because Piper believes "the upheaval all around demands a word from God for the good of the people's stability and guidance, as well as a word of witness to the watching world."<sup>31</sup> For example, when a major earthquake occurred in San Francisco on October 17, 1989, Piper stopped his series sermon on Psalms 51 and preached a message on Hebrews 12:28, *A Kingdom That Cannot Be Shaken*. Piper stated,

I went back to my room later that night and *the Lord just seemed to come upon me with an unusual great burden to pray* about something I just had no information on at all, except that this could be awesome. So I found myself praying earnestly that God would use whatever had happened there to turn hearts to him and to cause his purposes of mercy in the world to prosper. . . . *As I was praying, the text that came to my mind* was Hebrews 12:25–29, "Let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken." And I read it while we were praying, and the men were moved, and we prayed even more earnestly on the basis of this text that God would turn the tragedy into a triumph by shaking the affections of people loose from the world and putting them on the kingdom of God. . . . I felt so constrained about this that I left the room momentarily and called Shelley long distance and told her that I believed the Lord wanted me to change my text and

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<sup>30</sup> John Piper, "Sermons by Occasion," Desiring God, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/by-occasion> (accessed September 15, 2011). Bethlehem Baptist Church holds Racial Harmony Sunday every year in January, and that event has been followed by Sanctity of Life Sunday. Then Piper has preached about abortion since 1987, except 1988 and 1996. Treasuring Christ Together (TCT) is Bethlehem Baptist Church's strategy for "campus expansion, planting new churches, and providing relief to the poor." Bethlehem Baptist church, "Our Growth Strategy: TCT," <http://www.hopeingod.org/about-us/our-growth-strategy-tct> (accessed September 15, 2011).

<sup>31</sup> John Piper, "The Pastor as Prophet."

sermon for this Sunday and bring a message from the Lord concerning the earthquake.<sup>32</sup>

On September 16, 2001, five days after the World Trade Center attack Piper preached a sermon on the text Romans 8:35-39, *A Service of Sorrow, Self-Humbling, and Steady Hope in Our Savior and King, Jesus Christ*. From the text, he preached on “how can our hope be steady on days like 9-11?”<sup>33</sup>

*A Sermon Series*. Fourth, the preacher can select passages to use in a series of sermon. To Piper, a sermon series can elaborate on either a passage or book, or a single topic.<sup>34</sup> From the beginning of his ministry to the present, Piper has combined series on the biblical book with topical series.<sup>35</sup> According to Piper, both topical series and book

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<sup>32</sup> John Piper, “A Kingdom Cannot be Shaken,” *Desiring God*, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/a-kingdom-that-cannot-be-shaken> (accessed September 16, 2011).

<sup>33</sup> John Piper, “A Service of Sorrow, Self-Humbling, and Steady Hope in Our Savior and King, Jesus Christ,” *Desiring God*, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/by-occasion/disaster> (accessed September 16, 2011). Also see, John Piper, “How shall We Minister to People After the World Trade Tower Terrorism of September 11, 2001?: 21 Ways to Comfort Those Who Are Suffering,” *Desiring God*, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/articles/how-shall-we-minister-to-people-after-the-world-trade-tower-terrorism-of-september-11-2001> (accessed September 16, 2011).

<sup>34</sup> John Piper, “How should a Pastor Decide What to Preach?,” *Desiring God*, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/ask-pastor-john/how-should-a-pastor-decide-what-to-preach> (accessed September 16, 2011). In *Pastor as Prophet*, Piper provides six advantages of preaching sermon series on books. Book series preaching 1) helps the preacher know where he is going from Sunday to Sunday and avoiding “the sense of hit and miss” that often accompanies a random selection for each week; 2) forces him to deal with issues and doctrines that you might otherwise skip, but are valuable for the hearers; 3) gives the message to the hearers that “all scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching”; 4) overcomes the suspicion that he only preaches on his favorite texts and topics; 5) builds a truly Biblical framework into the thinking of the hearers; 6) models for the hearers how to study the Bible systemically, and shows them “the connectedness of the larger units of thought” and how they shed light on each other. John Piper, “The Pastor as Prophet.”

<sup>35</sup> For detail information about mingling book series and topical series, see Appendix B: Series Sermons of John Piper (1980–2011). For topical series, Piper took sequential texts in different books that can be treated expositionally. For example, Piper preached a series on Sermons on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood on Genesis 1:26-28; 2:18-25; 3:16; 4:7, Luke 13:10-17, 1 Timothy 2:8-15; 2:13-14. John Piper, “Sermons on Biblical Manhood & Womanhood,” *Desiring God*,

studies should be textually based and expository. He stresses, “All sermons should be expository. When I say ‘topical,’ I don’t mean non-expository. I mean that you take a text and you expound its message regarding money, and then you take another money-related text and expound it, etc.”<sup>36</sup>

*Convergence of Several Factors.* Last, a sermon text can be selected “by a coming together of several factors in the mind and heart of the preacher.”<sup>37</sup> In this case, Piper stresses that the preacher should ask himself the following questions: 1) What burns in heart of the preacher to say that he loves and has made or is making a great difference to him? 2) What do the hearers need “spiritually, morally, theologically, and relationally?” 3) What parts of the Bible or doctrines have been neglected or overemphasized in them?<sup>38</sup>

Piper applied this principle well to his sermons. On May 4, 1997, Piper interrupted his series on Hebrews and preached a brief four-week series on the Biblical teachings concerning baptism for four weeks. He says, “Today we begin a brief series on the Biblical teachings concerning baptism. There are several reasons for this. One is that in almost seventeen years I have never preached a series of messages on the Biblical

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<http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/by-topic/biblical-manhood-womanhood> (accessed September 16, 2011).

<sup>36</sup> John Piper, “How should a Pastor Decide What to Preach?” Although topical expository sermons are very powerful to deal with what the people need, Piper states that the preacher does not need to suffer from pressure to always preach topical messages. Piper stresses that the preacher can address many of the needs of the people “by steadfastly applying the truth of God with analogies and illustrations to the kind of thing they are dealing with,” because he believes that “sometimes one sentence can turn a whole message into a powerful healing or converting word because it alerted the person that you had their kind of situation in mind.” John Piper, “The Pastor as Prophet.”

<sup>37</sup> John Piper, “The Pastor as Prophet.”

<sup>38</sup> Ibid. Piper urges the preacher to ask himself always about what his people need while selecting and studying the text: “what are the challenges the church is facing, for example, building, budget pressures, death of children, leader’s failure, unemployment?”

meaning of baptism. This is a gaping hole in our treatment of the whole message of the Bible for our time.”<sup>39</sup> On September 7, 1986, Piper began a series of eleven messages, *Faith And Everyday Life* (Ephesians 4:17-5:20), because Piper and his people together had sensed “the need to ponder the significance of their faith in the area of personal relationships and related practical matters.”<sup>40</sup> On April 26, 1988, Piper began preaching a series on Romans almost eighteen years after he started his ministry. In the first message of the series, Piper stated that the time to preach Romans has come in this way:

For almost 18 years of preaching here at Bethlehem I have waited and waited for the time when it would seem most fitting to preach through Paul’s letter to the Romans. *I have considered it again and again*, and backed off from the task - like a mountain climber gazing up into the clouds around the peak of Mount Everest and then turning to lower heights. It has felt very daunting. *But in God’s patience and grace, I have felt in recent months that now is the time.* We are coming to the end of a millenium. And I am well into the second half of my thirty-year pastorate of this wonderful church - if God wills. The pace of time feels quicker now at age 52 than it did when I came at age 34. *And the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God (2 Corinthians 4:4), seems more glorious to me now than it ever has. And there is no greater exposition of the Gospel of God than the book of Romans.*<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> John Piper, “I Baptize You with Water,” Desiring God, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/i-baptize-you-with-water> (accessed September 20, 2011).

<sup>40</sup> John Piper, “Escape from Futility,” Desiring God, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/escape-from-futility> (accessed September 20, 2011).

<sup>41</sup> John Piper, “Romans: The Greatest Letter Ever Written.” Italics added. That Piper had waited for eighteen years for the time for preaching a series on Romans means that he had spent such a large amount of time studying Romans. About choosing a passage, Andrew Blackwood comments wisely that the preacher should allow an abundance of time for selecting and studying a biblical passage until he knows selected passages “more intimately and more lovingly than any other portion of the Bible.” Andrew Watterson Blackwood, *Expository Preaching for Today: Case Studies of Bible Passages* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1943), 45-47.

## Other Considerations of Selecting a Sermon Text

*Two Principles in Text Selecting: Freedom and Discipline.* Piper suggests two principles in text selection. First is the principle of freedom. The preacher should be sensitive to the freedom of the Spirit to interrupt and change his plan. In other words, the preacher must “not be so locked into a verse-by-verse exposition” of a book, but “be in a frame of mind and heart to choose texts that are fitted for maximum impact” so that the Holy Spirit can hit him with other texts on occasion.<sup>42</sup> In order to do that, the preacher should always long to “be passionate for God and pure in heart and full of the Spirit and zealous for the good of your people and longing for the salvation of souls and yearning for the unreached peoples of the earth.”<sup>43</sup>

Piper states he often senses that “God gives him breakthrough in his sermon preparation because he is working to feed the flock on the weekend.”<sup>44</sup> For example, on January 30, 2000, Piper felt the need to unfold his church’s new vision, so he stopped a series of messages on Romans and began to preach a series on Education for Exultation for eleven weeks. He said, “Today marks the beginning of an eleven-week series of messages under the banner ‘EDUCATION FOR EXULTATION.’ *If you ask whether we will pick up again our Romans series, the answer is yes, if God gives me life and health in this pulpit.*”<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Colin Adams, “Piper on Freedom, Discipline and Text Select,” The Unashamed Workman blog, entry posted October 2007, <http://unashamedworkman.wordpress.com/2007/10> (accessed September 20, 2011); John Piper, “The Pastor as Prophet.”

<sup>43</sup> John Piper, “The Pastor as Prophet.”

<sup>44</sup> David Mathis, “Who is John Piper,” Sam Storms and Justin Taylor, 40.

<sup>45</sup> John Piper, “I Am the Lord, and Besides Me There Is No Savior,” Desiring God, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/i-am-the-lord-and-besides-me-there-is-no-savior> (accessed September 20, 2011). Italics added.

In addition to the principle of freedom, the preacher should follow the principle of discipline. Piper believes that the preacher “must find a way not to be so selective,” because he tends to preach what he likes and avoid what he does not like.<sup>46</sup> In order to do that, the preacher should preach through a book of the Bible. In doing so, the preacher needs to control the number of sermons according to his own strength and plan. Piper preached Job in five sermons, while he preached Romans in two hundred twenty-five sermons. Piper encourages pastors to try both methods: “You can take larger blocks and teach single sermons on their main points—even though you know you could easily preach ten sermons on each paragraph—or you can slow down and do a very in-depth study of each verse.”<sup>47</sup>

To Piper, it is crucial that these two principles, freedom and discipline in text selection for series preaching should be well-balanced in order to proclaim the full counsel of God that the people need to hear. However, it is difficult for the preacher to distinguish “a desire to interrupt a series that comes from the Spirit” from “a fear of the next text.”<sup>48</sup> Therefore, the preacher needs to do his best “under God to listen to the prompting of the Spirit and to declare the whole counsel of God.”<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Colin Adams, “Piper on Freedom, Discipline and Text Select.”

<sup>47</sup> John Piper, “How should a Pastor Decide What to Preach?”

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Colin Adams, “Piper on Freedom, Discipline and Text Select.” Piper has been driven by the responsibility to preach “the whole of counsel of God” as Paul stated in Acts 20:27. Like Piper, Stephen F. Oldford and David L. Olford stress, “the preacher must be concerned to communicate biblical truth (the balance of Scripture), preaching the gospel and the whole counsel of God! . . . The preacher must know the truth and be sensitive to the Holy Spirit’s leading.” Stephen F. Olford and David L. Olford. *Anointed Expository Preaching* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1998), 85.

*How to be Guided by the Holy Spirit in Text Selecting.* To be guided by the Holy Spirit, Piper, first, fervently and constantly prays to God “in thinking through all the relevant factors is essential.”<sup>50</sup> For example, Piper started a series on Hebrew on March 31, 1996, after “he pondered and prayed over what to say on the Palm Sunday and Easter.”<sup>51</sup> In *The Aim of Dr. Luke* (Luke 1:1-4), Piper explained to the people why he began a series of messages on the Gospel of Luke. While spending much of his personal devotional time meditating on Jesus Christ’s teachings, especially the Great Commission, he sensed the Holy Spirit’s leading.<sup>52</sup>

In addition to personal prayer and meditation on Scripture, Piper is led to a certain passage for a sermon by consulting and praying with the pastoral staff. He states, “Consult elders and staff if you have spiritually mature partners in ministry and get their input in assessing the past and making suggestions about future series.”<sup>53</sup> When he began a series entitled *I am God Almighty: Be Fruitful and Multiply*, Piper states a reason that he is led to this series by the following conviction: “God is calling us to greater fruitfulness. *This was the sense of those who came to minister to us during Prayer Week.* It strikes a chord over and over among the prayer warriors of this church when we cry out to God together.”<sup>54</sup> After the first strikes against the World Trade Center, the pastoral

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<sup>50</sup> John Piper, “The Pastor as Prophet.”

<sup>51</sup> John Piper, “I Am the Lord, and Besides Me There Is No Savior.” Italics added.

<sup>52</sup> John Piper, “The Aim of Dr Luke,” Desiring God, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/the-aim-of-dr-luke> (accessed September 21, 2011).

<sup>53</sup> John Piper, “The Pastor as Prophet.”

<sup>54</sup> John Piper, “God’s Purpose for Jacob and Bethlehem,” Desiring God, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/gods-purpose-for-jacob-and-bethlehem> (accessed September 21, 2011). Italics added.

staff on Bethlehem Baptist Church listened to the radio together, prayed, and then they planned three services under the title: *Sorrow, Self-Humbling, and Steady Hope in Our Savior and King, Jesus Christ*.<sup>55</sup>

When Piper began a series of sermons on the Gospel of John on September 21, 2008, he explained seven reasons that he was led to do this series. One of them came from advice of the elders. “When I sought counsel from the Elders last year concerning the direction of my preaching,” Piper stated, “they recommended this order: marriage, regeneration, and a new extended expository series. I have followed their wisdom. The two books that rose to the top of their recommendations for exposition were Genesis and John. I have chosen John.”<sup>56</sup>

*Planning Sermons.* Piper stresses that in selecting a sermon text, sermon planning is useful for the preacher in that it is a good discipline and is helpful for his own study.<sup>57</sup> For this reason, Piper strives to plan sermons for several months “by writing down the texts and a possible titles and a sentence or two about where you might go with the texts.”<sup>58</sup> And he continued, “One way to do this is to plan from September through

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<sup>55</sup> John Piper, “A Service of Sorrow, Self-Humbling, and Steady Hope in Our Savior and King, Jesus Christ.”

<sup>56</sup> John Piper, “Why a New Sermon Series on the Gospel of John?,” *Desiring God*, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/taste-see-articles/why-a-new-sermon-series-on-the-gospel-of-john> (accessed September 21, 2011). One can find best the ways to select a sermon text of Piper in seven reasons that he started a series of the Gospel of John. Apart from sixth, the rest are the follows: “1) It is the word of God. And the discipline of preaching through it will protect me from simply focusing on my favorite topics, or even on my fallible judgments about what I think the people need on any given weekend. 2) I have never preached through one of the four Gospels. 3) There is a unique majesty to this portrait of Christ. 4) John is an unparalleled combination of simple diction and profound doctrine. 5) John was written by one who had a uniquely intimate relationship to the Lord Jesus on the earth. . . . 7) Finally, I am hungry for Christ.”

<sup>57</sup> John Piper, “The Pastor as Prophet.”



Christmas, then from New Year through Easter, then from Easter to some point of breaking in the summer, and then perhaps a summer series.”<sup>59</sup> For example, on September 16, Piper announced a nine-week preaching plan for the fall in 1992.<sup>60</sup> A good example of sermon planning is a series of sermons from December 1989 to December 1990. Piper preached a series called *The Word Became Flesh and Dwelt Among Us: Sermons on John 1* in December 3-24, 1989. And from January 7 to April 8, 1990, he had a series of thirteen sermons entitled *Are Signs and Wonders for Today?* On April 15, Easter Sunday, he preached a sermon entitled *Jesus Is Alive to Serve* (John 11:25). And then from September 16, he began a series on Acts, *What Jesus Did After the Beginning*.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid. Like Piper, David Ryu suggests that the preacher plan ahead one year’s sermons. He states that summer vacation and the year-end are the best times to prepare a preaching program. David Ryu, “Exegesis and Sermon Preparation,” (Lecture, Chongshin Theological Seminary, South Korea, Spring, 2005). Lloyd M. Perry similarly notes that the vacation period is one of the best times to plan the preacher’s sermons. He continues, “The preacher can reflect upon the program of the past and then make some projections for the months ahead.” Lloyd M. Perry, *Biblical Sermon Guide; A Step-by-Step Procedure for the Preparation and Presentation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1970), 97. For a comprehensive approach to planning sermons, see Andrew W. Blackwood, *Planning A Year’s Pulpit Work* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House), 1942.

<sup>60</sup> John Piper, “A Preaching Plan for the Fall,” Desiring God, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/taste-see-articles/a-preaching-plan-for-the-fall> (accessed September 21, 2011).

<sup>61</sup> John Piper, “The Word Became Flesh and Dwelt Among Us: Sermons on John 1,” Desiring God, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/series-index/the-word-became-flesh-and-dwelt-among-us-sermons-on-john-1> (accessed September 22, 2011); John Piper, “Are Signs and Wonders for Today?,” Desiring God, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/series-index/are-signs-and-wonders-for-today> (accessed September 22, 2011); John Piper, “Jesus Is Alive to Serve,” Desiring God, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/jesus-is-alive-to-serve> (accessed September 22, 2011); John Piper, “Act: What Jesus Did After the Beginning,” Desiring God, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/series-index/acts-what-jesus-did-after-the-beginning> (accessed September 22, 2011).

## Structure of His Expository Sermons

After selecting a sermon text, the preacher can start studying the text. Chapter 3 explored Piper's exegetical method for expository preaching in detail. This section will explore how Piper structures his expository sermons based on this solid exegesis of the text: determining the main idea, outlining the sermon, and building the sermon—introduction, body and conclusion.

For this purpose of study, the researcher analyzed over one hundred fifty sermon manuscripts, including fifty-two key sermons, which are extracted from an array of topics in Desiring God Resource Library, eleven key sermons from a series of Romans, and the random sermons from six genres of biblical literature.

### Determining a Main Sermon Point (or Idea)

Donald G. Miller once said, "Any single sermon should have just *one major idea*. The points or subdivisions should be parts of this grand thought. . . . Every sermon should have a theme, and that theme should be the theme of the portion of Scripture on which it is based."<sup>62</sup> Haddon Robinson also stresses, "A sermon should be a bullet, not buckshot. Ideally each sermon is the explanation, interpretation, or application of *a single dominant idea* supported by other ideas, all drawn from one passage or several passages of Scripture."<sup>63</sup> Like these scholars, Piper believes that every sermon should have one main

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<sup>62</sup> Donald G. Miller, *The Way to Biblical Preaching* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1957), 53. Italics added.

<sup>63</sup> Haddon W. Robinson, *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages*, 35. Italics added. The term, "the main point," which Piper uses, agrees with Robinson's. Bryan Chapell calls the main point "a single major idea" that is the theme of a sermon. Bryan Chapell, "Preparation and Delivery of Sermons," (Lecture, Covenant Theological Seminary, St. Louis, MO, Fall, 2007). And Ramesh Richard calls it "the central proposition of the text." Ramesh Richard, *Preparing*

point that serves as the theme of the sermon, and other points explain or support it.<sup>64</sup>

Piper's effort to find a main point of the sermon is rooted in his solid biblical exegesis, which makes it possible to discover the main point and the application of the expository text, and to determine its structure.<sup>65</sup> To Piper, determining a main idea of the text is the most foundational step in structuring the sermon for powerful expository preaching.<sup>66</sup>

In introducing his sermons, Piper generally shows a main point of the text. In *Do Not Be Anxious About Your Life*, Piper states, "The main point of today's text is that God does not secure his kingship by cultivating anxiety."<sup>67</sup> In *The Peculiar Mark of Majesty, Part 2* (Psalm 8), Piper explains the main idea of the text in this way: "The main point of the psalm is clear from the first and last verses. Verse 1: 'O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!' Verse 9: 'O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!' God's name—'I am who I am,' my absolute rule—is majestic everywhere. And that is as it should be. That's the main point."<sup>68</sup>

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*Expository Sermons*, 65. All of these terms refer to the major thought of a sermon text that reflects the author's intention.

<sup>64</sup> John Piper, "The Pastor as Prophet"; John Piper, "How Piper Learned to Preach."

<sup>65</sup> See, page 61 of chapter 3.

<sup>66</sup> About the importance of a major idea, Keith Willhite states the following: "Developing a single idea in a sermon is the best way to preach, or at least, to learn to preach." Keith Willhite, "Bullet versus Buckshot: What Makes the Bid Idea Work?" in *The Big Idea of Biblical Preaching: Connecting the Bible to People*, eds., Keith Willhite and Scott M. Gibson (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998), 14.

<sup>67</sup> John Piper, "Do Not Be Anxious About Your Life," *Desiring God*, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/do-not-be-anxious-about-your-life> (accessed September 23, 2011).

<sup>68</sup> John Piper, "On The Peculiar Mark of Majesty, Part 2," *Desiring God*, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/the-peculiar-mark-of-majesty-part-2> (accessed September 23, 2011).

However, Piper emphasizes that the supporting point of the text can be the main point of the sermon because very often the support of the text may be more important than the main point.<sup>69</sup> He exemplifies this principle with Romans 1:15-16. He states,

The most important reality in this text is the divine power of the gospel, NOT the state of Paul's mind in not being ashamed or his eagerness to preach in Rome. YET the divine power of the gospel is logically subordinate to those states of mind and supports them. A good sermon MAY make "eagerness to preach" the main point. But another good sermon could make the power of the gospel the main point (not of the text, but of the sermon). Simply make all this plain to your people so they can see such things and assess the judgment you are making on the basis of the text.<sup>70</sup>

On June 14, 1998, Piper preached a sermon entitled *Not Ashamed of the Gospel*. In this sermon, while calling the hearers' attention to the link between verse 15 and 16a, Piper stresses that Paul was eager to preach the gospel in Rome because he was not ashamed of the gospel.<sup>71</sup> For the following two weeks, Piper preached two sermons on verse 16b, *The Gospel Is the Power of God unto Salvation* and *To the Jew First, and Also to the Greek*.

### **Outlining the Sermon**

After finding one main point (or theme) of the sermon, Piper organizes his sermon's body with the points that he finds. As Faris D. Whitesell stressed that good organization helps the preacher arrange his material in the best possible order,<sup>72</sup> Piper

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<sup>69</sup> John Piper, "The Pastor as Prophet."

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> John Piper, "Not Ashamed of the Gospel," *Desiring God*, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/not-ashamed-of-the-gospel> (accessed September 23, 2011).

<sup>72</sup> Faris D. Whitesell, *Power in Expository Preaching* (Westwood, NJ: F.H. Revell Co, 1963), 47.

strives to make two, three, or four points and find the connection among those points.<sup>73</sup>

To Piper, first and foremost, “unity and coherence” are the most important characteristics when drawing out an effective sermon outline. He notes,

Don’t be artificial and think that a sermon must have three points or only one point. There should be unity and coherence to the sermon, and in that sense it should have one point. But some texts beg to be fleshed out in two or three or four stages of equal importance, any one of which may be too little for one sermon. What is important is that the message not leave incoherent dangling pieces that cause people to wonder what you were getting at when you said such and such. How did it fit. Show them how everything you say fits with the other things you say to make your unified point or points.<sup>74</sup>

*The Propositional Style.* All of Piper’s sermon outlines cannot automatically be categorized into a certain format. However, they can be divided generally into five styles of sermon outlines.<sup>75</sup> First, Piper chooses the propositional style in outlining his sermons. Piper preached a sermon on Jeremiah 32:36-42 entitled *Sustained by Sovereign Grace—Forever*. Using the theme, “sovereign grace will eventually triumph over the calamity,” he listed four promises of sovereign, sustaining grace:

1. God will be our God, (v. 38)
2. God promises to change our hearts (vv. 39, 40b)
3. God promises we will not turn away from Him (v. 40)
4. God promises to do this with infinite intensity (v. 41)<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> John Piper, “How do You Prepare Your Sermons?”

<sup>74</sup> John Piper, “The Pastor as Prophet.” About the importance of the unity in a good outline, Bryan Chapell notes, “Good outlines display unity. Each feature relates to the one thing the sermon is about. This is usually accomplished by making sure that all the main points support or develop the central theme statement or proposition and that all the subpoints support or develop the main point to which they are subordinate.” Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon*, 136.

<sup>75</sup> The terms used here on the style of sermon outlines are adapted from Wayne McDill, *The 12 Essential Skills for Great Preaching*, 2nd ed. (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2006) and from Faris D. Whitesell, *Power in Expository Preaching*.

<sup>76</sup> John Piper, “Sustained by Sovereign Grace—Forever,” *Desiring God*, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/sustained-by-sovereign-graceforever> (accessed September 26, 2011).

And Piper's sermon entitled *Predestined for Adoption to the Praise of His Glory*," based on Romans 1:5-6, has three points:

1. Adoption Is from God (v. 5)
2. Adoption Is through Jesus Christ (v. 5)
3. Adoption Is for God's glory (v. 6)<sup>77</sup>

In the above outlines, each point has good parallel construction. However, in many cases, Piper's sermon outlines do not use parallel phrasing. In a sermon, *Magnifying God with Money*, Piper outlined using the theme, "Today's text, Luke 12:32-34, has to do with the big pattern of how we worship with our money, and so by implication it relates to what we do with our money in corporate worship as well":

1. We should treasure God as our Shepherd and Father and King who is generous and happy to give us the kingdom of God (v. 32)
2. Trusting God in this way carries a strong impulse toward simplicity rather than accumulation. (V. 33)
3. The purpose of money is to maximize our treasure in heaven, not on the earth (V. 33)
4. Your heart moves toward what you cherish, and God wants you to move toward
5. him (v. 34)<sup>78</sup>

And Piper preached a sermon on Proverbs 1:7-9 entitled *Do Not Forsake Your Mother's Teaching*. His outline is as follows:

1. The family is God's idea (v. 8)
2. The family is God's basic school for instructing children how to live in the world (v. 8)
3. The foundation of family instruction is the fear of the Lord (v. 7)
4. Under God both fathers and mothers share in the responsibility of this family instruction (v. 8)

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<sup>77</sup> John Piper, "Predestined for Adoption to the Praise of His Glory," Desiring God, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/predestined-for-adoption-to-the-praise-of-his-glory> (accessed September 26, 2011). For more examples of the propositional style, see the following sources: John Piper, "The Immeasurable Greatness of His Power Toward Us," Desiring God, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/the-immeasurable-greatness-of-his-power-toward-us> (accessed September 26, 2011); John Piper, "Do Not Be Anxious About Your Life."

<sup>78</sup> John Piper, "Magnifying God with Money," Desiring God, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/magnifying-god-with-money> (accessed September 26, 2011).

5. God calls sons and daughters to be submissive to their mothers and fathers (v. 8)
6. God ordains a reward for sons and daughters who do not forsake the teaching of their mother and father (v. 9)<sup>79</sup>

The outlines above by Piper display the main theme well, and each point is not only distinct from the others, but also related to each other through verses, though not expressed through parallelism.

*The Interrogative Style.* Second, Piper uses the interrogative style in outlining his sermons.<sup>80</sup> When Piper preached Hebrews 13:5-9 under the title, *Jesus Christ is the Same Yesterday and Today and Forever*, he outlined saying, “The question rises for Christians: How should we think and feel and act about changes in seasons and centuries? To answer this question I want us to focus on Hebrews 13:8, ‘Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever.’ I have three questions in mind to ask about this verse”:

1. In what sense is Jesus always the same? (vv. 8-10)
2. What is significant about these three time periods: yesterday, today and forever? (v. 8)
3. What is the application of this verse in our lives, according to the connection of Hebrews 13:8 backward to money and forward to false doctrine? (vv. 5-8)<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> John Piper, “Do Not Forsake Your Mother’s Teaching,” *Desiring God*, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/do-not-forsake-your-mothers-teaching> (accessed September 26, 2011).

<sup>80</sup> The interrogative style is well displayed in the inductive sermons of Piper. For examples of outlines of inductive sermons, see the following sources: John Piper, “This Illness Is for the Glory of God,” *Desiring God*, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/this-illness-is-for-the-glory-of-god> (accessed September 26, 2011); John Piper, “Confirm your Election,” *Desiring God*, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/confirm-your-election> (accessed September 26, 2011); John Piper, “Called According to His Purpose,” *Desiring God*, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/called-according-to-his-purpose> (accessed September 26, 2011); John Piper, “Job: Reverent in Suffering,” *Desiring God*, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/job-reverent-in-suffering> (accessed September 26, 2011).

<sup>81</sup> John Piper, “Jesus Christ is the Same Yesterday and Today and Forever,” *Desiring God*, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/jesus-christ-is-the-same-yesterday-and-today-and-forever> (accessed September 26, 2011).

And Piper preached a sermon on Matthew 5:6 under the title, *Blessed Are Those Who Hunger and Thirst for Righteousness*, by the theme, “Jesus has something to say about the insatiable hunger of the human heart, and about the relentless thirst of our soul”:

1. What is the righteousness Jesus Is talking about?
2. What is the nature of our hunger and thirst?
3. How that hunger turns into the satisfaction, which he promises?<sup>82</sup>

*The Applicational Style.* Third, Piper uses the applicational style in outlining his sermons. Preaching on Ephesians 2:1-3 entitled, *Why We Need a Savior: Captive to an Alien Power, by Nature Children of Wrath*, he declared three reasons:

1. We need a Savior because we are dead in sin (v. 1)
2. We need a Savior because we are captive to an alien power (v. 2)
3. We need a Savior because we are children of wrath (v. 3)<sup>83</sup>

When Piper preached a sermon on Romans 4:22-25, he presented the following outline asking, “Who or what must we believe in order to be justified?”

1. We trust one who performs inconceivable power
2. We trust one who performs merciful redemption
3. We trust one who performs a triumphant justice<sup>84</sup>

*The Exhortative Style.* Fourth, Piper chooses the exhortative style in outlining his sermons. He preached a sermon on Hebrews 10:23-25 entitled *Consider Each Other How to Stir Up Love*, presenting the theme, “God created us to be purposeful - to have a focus

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<sup>82</sup> John Piper, “Blessed Are Those Who Hunger and Thirst for Righteousness.” For more examples of the interrogative style, see the following sources: John Piper, “The One Who Loves Lives in Light,” *Desiring God*, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/the-one-who-loves-lives-in-light> (accessed September 26, 2011); John Piper, “How to Receive the Gift of the Holy Spirit,” *Desiring God*, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/how-to-receive-the-gift-of-the-holy-spirit> (accessed September 26, 2011).

<sup>83</sup> John Piper, “Why We Need a Savior: Captive to an Alien Power, by Nature Children of Wrath,” *Desiring God*, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/why-we-need-a-savior-captive-to-an-alien-power-by-nature-children-of-wrath> (accessed September 26, 2011).

<sup>84</sup> John Piper, “Why Was Jesus Put to Death and Raised Again?,” *Desiring God*, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/why-was-jesus-put-to-death-and-raised-again> (accessed September 26, 2011).



and an aim for all our day. Therefore, when you die doing what you were meant to do, you die well and full”:

1. Embrace Your Hope (v. 23)
2. Stir Up Each Other to Love and Good Deeds (v. 24)
3. Consider Each Other (v. 24-25)<sup>85</sup>

And Piper used this theme and outlined, “You will marvel at what is revealed of Christ.

Now we are prepared to meditate on this and marvel. Here are three focuses for our marveling on Philippians 3:20-21.”

1. Marvel at the power of the risen Jesus today to subject all things to himself (v. 21b)
2. Marvel that one day, at his coming, he will use this power to transform your body into a body like his (v. 21a)
3. Marvel that today your citizenship is in heaven where Christ rules—or if it’s not, put it there today (v. 20)<sup>86</sup>

*Using phrases.* Fifth, Piper uses phrases in outlining his sermons. Piper preached on John 1:1-3, using this theme and outline, “Now what does John want to tell us first about this man Jesus Christ whose deeds and words fill the pages of this Gospel? He wants to tell us four things about Jesus Christ.”

1. The time of his existence (v. 1)
2. The essence of his identity (v. 1)
3. His relationship to God (v. 1)
4. His relationship to the world (v.2-3)<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> John Piper, “Consider Each Other How to Stir Up Love,” *Desiring God*, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/consider-each-other-how-to-stir-up-love> (accessed September 26, 2011).

<sup>86</sup> John Piper, “All Things Subject to the Risen Christ,” *Desiring God*, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/all-things-subject-to-the-risen-christ> (accessed September 26, 2011).

<sup>87</sup> John Piper, “In the Beginning Was the Word.”

And Piper outlined using 1 John 3:11-18 as his text, under the title, *Love: A Matter of Life & Death*. He said, “John has some very important things to say to us about love, things we desperately need to hear, especially living, as we do, in a culture that is so confused and mixed-up about what love really is”:

1. The Evidence of Love (v. 14-15)
2. The Essence of Love (v. 12, 16-18)<sup>88</sup>

After analyzing the outline styles of Piper’s sermons, it is obvious that first, Piper clearly presents the main idea or theme. Second, each point grows out of the text, is separated from others and is logically connected with others. Third, most of each point covers all the verses in his main points.

### **Building the Sermon**

After outlining the sermon, Piper begins to write his sermon manuscript on his computer. Piper gives the reason for doing so saying, “I find that I cannot be clear in my own mind on things until I work to write them down. Often in the writing I see things I did not see before. Not only that, the writing helps me see the structural needs for order and clarity. So writing helps me clarify my own convictions, discover new truth, and order things in a more understandable way.”<sup>89</sup> This task takes from four to even eight hours to write about ten double-spaced pages for Sunday’s worship service.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> John Piper, “The Curse of Careless Worship,” *Desiring God*, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/the-curse-of-careless-worship> (accessed September 28, 2011). For more examples of Using phrases, see the following sources: John Piper, “Love: A Matter of Life & Death,” *Desiring God*, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/love-a-matter-of-life-death> (accessed September 28, 2011); John Piper, “Pray for Kings and All in High Positions,” *Desiring God*, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/pray-for-kings-and-all-in-high-positions> (accessed September 28, 2011).

<sup>89</sup> John Piper, “The Pastor as Prophet.” Like Piper, Carter, Duvall and Hays stresses, “Writing is an excellent discipline that helps you in organizing, developing, and forming thoughts into words that communicate clearly and powerfully. You may not read your manuscript to the audience, but writing it out

There is a regular pattern in Piper's expository sermons. He consistently constructs his sermons from the biblical passage and makes applications to the listeners.<sup>91</sup> Piper's sermons generally consist of five major divisions: introduction, body1 (explanation), body2 (illustration), body3 (application), and conclusion. For the sake of convenience, this section will be treated in sequence from introduction to conclusion.<sup>92</sup>

*Introduction.* About the importance of a good introduction for a powerful sermon, Harold Bryson and James Taylor state this in this way, "If the introduction fails, the whole sermon could be a lost cause."<sup>93</sup> Likewise, Piper puts a high valuation on sermon introductions. There are mainly four types of Piper's sermon introductions: Piper starts his sermons 1) by introducing a brief story of people's experience including himself and his family,<sup>94</sup> 2) by presenting the purpose or the main idea of the sermon,<sup>95</sup> 3) by

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will help you immensely." Terry G. Carter, J. Scott Duvall, and J. Daniel Hays, *Preaching God's Word: A Hands-On Approach to Preaching, Developing, and Delivering the Sermon* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 100-101.

<sup>90</sup> John Piper, "How do you prepare your sermons?"

<sup>91</sup> Tony Clifford Merida, "The Christocentric Emphasis in John Piper's Expository Preaching," (Ph.D. diss., New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, 2006), 49.

<sup>92</sup> The terms used here on the analysis of sermon structure are adapted from Bryan Chapell's *Christ-Centered Preaching* and Haddon Robinson's *Biblical Preaching*, Ramesh Richard's *Preaching Expository Sermons*, and Stephen F. Olford and David L. Olford's *Anointed Expository Preaching*.

<sup>93</sup> Harold T. Bryson and James Carter Taylor. *Building Sermons to Meet People's Needs* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1980), 104.

<sup>94</sup> For example, see John Piper, "Quest: Joy! Found: Christ!," Desiring God, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/quest-joy-found-christ> (accessed October 3, 2011); John Piper, "I Have Seen the Lord," Desiring God, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/i-have-seen-the-lord> (accessed October 3, 2011).

<sup>95</sup> For example, see John Piper, "Educating for Hope," Desiring God, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/educating-for-hope> (accessed October 3, 2011); John Piper, "What Is the Will of God and How Do We Know It?," Desiring God, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/what-is-the-will-of-god-and-how-do-we-know-it>

explaining with the text,<sup>96</sup> 4) by summarizing the last sermons,<sup>97</sup> or 5) by asking questions.<sup>98</sup>

Several important features can be observed from introductions of Piper's sermons. First, Piper presents the main idea of the message in the introduction. This view was dealt with in the section, "Determining a Main Sermon Point (or Idea)" in this chapter.

Second, in addition to the main idea, Piper clearly explains why he preaches or why the congregation should listen.<sup>99</sup> For example, in a sermon on John 1:1-18 entitled *The Word Was Made Flesh*, Piper declares, "My aim is that you might see him for who he is and be moved to receive Him as your Lord and your God and your all-surpassing Treasure. And if you have already received Him, I pray that you will embrace Him, and treasure Him and delight in Him and follow Him and display Him more than you ever

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(accessed October 3, 2011).

<sup>96</sup> For example, see John Piper, "The Called of Christ & the Loved of God, Part 1," Desiring God, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/the-called-of-christ-the-loved-of-god-part-1> (accessed October 3, 2011); John Piper, "The Fall of Satan and the Victory of Christ," Desiring God, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/the-fall-of-satan-and-the-victory-of-christ> (accessed October 3, 2011).

<sup>97</sup> This type appears mainly in a sermon series. See, John Piper, "Eternal Security Is a Community Project," Desiring God, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/eternal-security-is-a-community-project> (accessed October 3, 2011); John Piper, "The Righteous Are Bold as a Lion," Desiring God, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/the-righteous-are-bold-as-a-lion> (accessed October 3, 2011).

<sup>98</sup> For example, see John Piper, "Is the Kingdom Present or Future?," Desiring God, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/is-the-kingdom-present-or-future> (accessed October 3, 2011); John Piper, "Twelve Baskets of Bread and the Walk on Water," Desiring God, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/the-righteous-are-bold-as-a-lion> (accessed November 10, 2011).

<sup>99</sup> Similarly, Stephen Olford and David Olford stress, "Generally speaking, the introduction should introduce the subject (the dominating theme) and the object (the burden, the purpose, the motivating thrust) of the message to the listeners." Stephen F. Olford and David L. Olford. *Anointed Expository Preaching*, 158.

have.”<sup>100</sup> In *Is God for Us or for Himself?*, Piper presents the purpose of the message: “My aim in this message is to show, as best I can, that God’s aim and effort to glorify Himself is wholly good and without fault of any kind and is very different from human self-exaltation because it is an expression of love.”<sup>101</sup>

Third, in the introduction, Piper encourages the people to totally depend on God’s grace by sharing his own and the listeners’ weakness and sinfulness.<sup>102</sup> By doing so, Piper prompts the people to respond to the message. For example, in the introduction to *Open My Eyes That I May See*, Piper demonstrates that no one can see wonderful things in the Word of God without God’s supernatural help because people are blind. And then Piper leads the people to ask God for gracious illumination.<sup>103</sup> In *Sustained by Sovereign Grace—Forever*, for instance, where Piper takes as his text Jeremiah 32:36-42, Piper states, “It is grace that overcomes all obstacles and preserves the faith and holiness that brings us home to heaven. This is our only sure confidence for the future. You and I, in ourselves, are utterly fickle and unreliable. If we were left to our own powers to persevere, we would make shipwreck of our faith, it is sure.”<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> John Piper, “The Word Was Made Flesh” Desiring God, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/the-word-was-made-flesh> (accessed September 30, 2011).

<sup>101</sup> John Piper, “Is God for Us or for Himself?” Desiring God, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/is-god-for-us-or-for-himself> (accessed September 30, 2011).

<sup>102</sup> Likewise, Bryan Chapell stresses that preachers should find people’s fallen condition in all Scripture and help them have hope by focusing on His grace. Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 50.

<sup>103</sup> John Piper, “Open My Eyes That I May See” Desiring God, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/open-my-eyes-that-i-may-see> (accessed October 3, 2011).

<sup>104</sup> John Piper, “Sustained by Sovereign Grace—Forever.”

Last, Piper often expresses great expectation to the people as well as the object of the sermon in the introduction. In the first message of a series entitled *You Must Be Born Again*, Piper proclaimed,

So, as I begin this series, I am aware of how unsettling this teaching on the new birth can be. And O how careful I want to be. I do not want to cause tender souls any unnecessary distress. And I do not want to give false hope to those who have confused morality or religion for spiritual life. . . . God loves to magnify the riches of his life-giving grace where Christ is lifted up in truth. *That is my hope:* that this series will not just unsettle but stabilize and save.<sup>105</sup>

In *The Pleasure of God in His Son*, Piper hopes that the listeners will be changed into God's likeness by seeing His glory and that God will send them a "great revival of love and holiness and power as they look to him and pray earnestly."<sup>106</sup>

(*Body 1*) *Explanation.* As mentioned in the section "Preaching as Exposition" in chapter 4, Piper seeks to clarify or explain the text's words, sentences, paragraphs and background in his sermons in order for the listeners to understand God's Word and see God's glory.<sup>107</sup> In other words, to Piper, explanation is the process that reveals the meaning of the text.

In order to do that, in prayer and thought, Piper establishes a competent outline with the main idea and points. And then he begins filling in the outline with

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<sup>105</sup> John Piper, "What Happens in the New Birth? Part 1," *Desiring God*, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/what-happens-in-the-new-birth-part-1> (accessed October 3, 2011).

<sup>106</sup> John Piper, "The Pleasure of God in His Son."

<sup>107</sup> Harold T. Bryson also stresses that the preacher should explain the meaning of Scripture in a way that gives the congregation information about the Bible's words, phrases, sentences, names, places, customs, persons, and ideas. Harold T. Bryson, *Expository Preaching: The Art of Preaching Through a Bible Book* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, May 1999), 375.

explanation.<sup>108</sup> To Piper, the most outstanding method of explanation is rereading the text.

The reason why Piper does so is that he aims to preach God's very Word with divine authority and to encourage the people to look at the text with their eyes. Piper notes,

[Preachers] need to get people to open their Bible and put their fingers on the text. Then we need to quote a piece of our text and explain what it means. Tell them which half of the verse it is in. People lose the whole drift of a message grouping for where the pastor's ideas are coming from. Then we should quote another piece of the text and explain what it means. Our explanation will draw in other passages of Scripture.<sup>109</sup>

For example, in *Eagle Edom Will Come Down*, Piper states: "Let's read the book together, making some explanatory observations along the way. Then we will ask what lessons are here for our life as Christians."<sup>110</sup>

Another major method of explanation of Piper is a framework of questions and answers. In many cases, this is connected with rereading the text.<sup>111</sup> In the first message in a series of Romans entitled *The Author of the Greatest Letter Ever Written*, after he tells that Romans' great impact on many people, he asks the listeners quoting A. M. Hunter, "How did it happen that this man wrote a 22-page, 7100-word letter that 'century after century . . . has been the flame at which one great Christian leader after another . . . has kindled his own torch to the revival of the church and the enrichment of

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<sup>108</sup> Henry Brown similarly considers the dividing of a central idea into several points as a major method of explanation. H. C. Brown, Jr., *A Quest for Reformation in Preaching* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1968), 57. Stephen Olford and David Olford also stress that the preacher can make the point in the outline to represent the important textual truth in the process of explanation. Stephen F. Olford and David L. Olford. *Anointed Expository Preaching*, 165.

<sup>109</sup> John Piper, *The Supremacy of God in Preaching*, 45.

<sup>110</sup> John Piper, "Eagle Edom Will Come Down," *Desiring God*, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/eagle-edom-will-come-down> (accessed October 4, 2011).

<sup>111</sup> For more examples, see, John Piper, "By His Grace, for His Name, Through the Obedience of Faith," *Desiring God*, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/by-his-grace-for-his-name-through-the-obedience-of-faith> (accessed October 4, 2011); John Piper, "How to Kill Sin, Part 1.

Christendom’?” And then he continues, “The answer begins in Romans 1:1, in the first three phrases of the book – ‘Paul, a bond-servant of Christ Jesus, called as an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God.’”<sup>112</sup>

Third, in the process of explanation, Piper strives to define difficult words, phrases and sentences.<sup>113</sup> In *The Pride of Babel and the Praise of Christ*, Piper explains the meaning of “Babel” of Genesis 11:1-9 using a lexicon and Revelation 14:8-9; 17:6.<sup>114</sup> In a sermon on Luke 12:32 entitled *It Is Your Father’s Pleasure to Give You the Kingdom*, Piper rephrases ‘good pleasure’ by explaining: “It is a verb in Greek: ‘to be a pleasure’ or ‘to be pleased by.’ You could translate it: ‘it pleased God,’ or, ‘God chose it gladly.’”<sup>115</sup> In *The Called of Christ & the Loved of God, Part 1* (Romans 1:6-7), Piper rephrases the sentence “You are the called of Jesus Christ (v. 6)”: “When Paul says in verse 6, “You are the called of Jesus Christ,” he probably doesn’t mean “called by Christ Jesus.” He probably means “called by God into the fellowship of Christ Jesus.” And then he states this is what Paul teaches elsewhere in Romans and his other letters by quoting 1 Corinthians 1:9.<sup>116</sup>

In defining some terms, Piper analyzes the tense of verbs. In a sermon on Romans 5:5-8 entitled *God Demonstrates His Love Toward Us*, Piper declares that God loves his people without ceasing by stressing the verb tense in verse 8.

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<sup>112</sup> John Piper, “The Author of the Greatest Letter Ever Written.”

<sup>113</sup> For additional example of this case, see “His Exegetical Process” of Chapter 3.

<sup>114</sup> John Piper, “The Pride of Babel and the Praise of Christ,” *Desiring God*, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/the-pride-of-babel-and-the-praise-of-christ> (accessed October 5, 2011).

<sup>115</sup> John Piper, “Is Your Father’s Pleasure to Give You the Kingdom,” *Desiring God*, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/it-is-your-fathers-pleasure-to-give-you-the-kingdom> (accessed October 5, 2011).

<sup>116</sup> John Piper, “The Called of Christ & the Loved of God, Part 1.”



Do you notice anything unusual in the time of the verbs? Look at the last clause, “Christ died for us.” That’s past. That’s history. That is fixed, objective, unchanging. How natural it would have been, then, for Paul to write: In this historical act, God “demonstrated his own love toward us.” But that is not what he wrote. He wrote, “God demonstrates his own love toward us.” Present tense. Ongoing action. God demonstrates his love today. He commends his love today through the past, historical, objective fact of the death of his Son for us.<sup>117</sup>

In addition to the verb tense, Piper pays attention to prepositions as well as the gender, number and case of the noun. In *All Things Were Created Through Him and for Him*, in order to explain that the universe exists to display the greatness of Christ, Piper emphasizes the importance of three prepositions: by, through and for.<sup>118</sup> In *The Triumph of the Gospel in the New Heavens and the New Earth*, Piper explains that “in this hope we were saved” of Romans 8:24 means “With reference to this hope, we were saved” because “in” is a dative of reference. And then he concludes by making clear that “we were saved, this hope was secured for us.”<sup>119</sup> In a sermon on Psalms 117 entitled *Everlasting Truth for the Joy of All Peoples*, Piper explains that the plural forms of peoples and nations in the Bible refer to ethnic, language or cultural groupings in political states.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> John Piper, “God Demonstrates His Love Toward Us,” Desiring God, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/god-demonstrates-his-love-toward-us> (accessed October 5, 2011).

<sup>118</sup> John Piper, “All Things Were Created Through Him and for Him,” Desiring God, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/all-things-were-created-through-him-and-for-him> (accessed October 5, 2011).

<sup>119</sup> John Piper, “The Triumph of the Gospel in the New Heavens and the New Earth,” Desiring God, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/conference-messages/the-triumph-of-the-gospel-in-the-new-heavens-and-the-new-earth> (accessed October 5, 2011).

<sup>120</sup> John Piper, “Everlasting Truth for the Joy of All Peoples,” Desiring God, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/everlasting-truth-for-the-joy-of-all-peoples> (accessed October 5, 2011).

Fourth, in the process of explanation, Piper describes how propositions of the passage relate to each other logically.<sup>121</sup> In a sermon on the text, *The Danger of Drifting from the Word* (Hebrews 2:1-4), Piper declares that chapter 1 is the reason for the duty of chapter 2 by stressing that chapter 2 begins with “therefore.”<sup>122</sup> Piper has a sermon on John 15:7 with the title, *Ask Whatever You Wish*. Explaining the logical connection among verses 7, 8 and 16, Piper states that prayer is for fruit-bearing:

God designed prayer to give his disciples the joy of bearing fruit while God himself gets the glory. We can see this in the connection between verses 7 and 8 and then in verse 16. . . . The implication is that God gets glory when we bear much fruit because we have prayed and God has answered. Therefore the primary point of prayer is fruit-bearing. Prayer is for fruit-bearing.<sup>123</sup>

And he continues,

The logical connection between the two parts of this verse are tremendously important. Jesus says that he chose and appointed his disciples that they should go and bear fruit that remains . . . “that [in order that] whatever you ask of the Father in my name, he may give it to you.” Shortened down it says, “I have given you a fruit-bearing mission in order that your prayers might be answered!” This only makes sense if prayer is for fruit-bearing.<sup>124</sup>

Other means of explanation that Piper often uses are the following: Using cross-references for the support of truth in another text and referencing several Bible translations such as the ESV, NASV, RSV and NIV.<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> As mentioned in chapter 3, the procedure of finding all the logical connections that can exist between the propositions is called, “arc-ing.”

<sup>122</sup> John Piper, “The Danger of Drifting from the Word,” Desiring God, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/the-danger-of-drifting-from-the-word> (accessed October 6, 2011).

<sup>123</sup> John Piper, “Ask Whatever You Wish,” Desiring God, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/ask-whatever-you-wish> (accessed October 6, 2011).

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

<sup>125</sup> For good examples of using cross-references, see John Piper, “Remember That You Were Hopeless,” Desiring God, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/remember-that-you-were-hopeless> (accessed October 6, 2011); John Piper, “The Present Power of Christ Crucified,” Desiring

In this light, Piper strives to explain the meaning of the text by sharing his exegetical insights. Succinctly, Piper aims to expound the passage in a way that his listeners may grasp the flow of thought and the author's intention in the passage. This corresponds exactly to his purpose of biblical exegesis.

*(Body 2) Illustration.* To Piper, an illustration is closely related to explanation. However, there are not very many illustrations in Piper's sermons, and explanation must not be followed by an illustration. It seems that John Stott's book *Men Made New*, an exposition of Romans 5 through 8, has influenced Piper's using illustrations. Though this book received criticism comparing it to a house without windows" (meaning it had no illustrations), Piper responded,

*Men Made New* did not need windows. It was all window. I was waking up from the soporific effects of the kind of preaching that was one part explanation and 99 parts illustration. I had never heard the sort of thing John Stott did when he preached. It was riveting. Thrilling. Suddenly the meaning of Bible sentences became treasure chests to be opened. . . John Stott turned the words of Bible sentences into windows onto glorious reality by explaining them in clear, compelling, complete, coherent, fresh, silly-free, English sentences."<sup>126</sup>

Rather, Piper carefully uses an illustration when he only believes that it is needed for drawing pictures of what he wants to make clear and clarifying some difficult spiritual truths. Moreover, Piper strives to use illustrations by "opening the chest and showing the people the specific jewels" in the Bible.<sup>127</sup>

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God, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/the-present-power-of-christ-crucified> (accessed October 6, 2011). For good examples of referencing several Bible translations, see John Piper, "Learning to Pray in the Spirit and the Word, Part 1," Desiring God, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/learning-to-pray-in-the-spirit-and-the-word-part-1> (accessed October 6, 2011); John Piper, "Perfect for All Time by a Single Offering," Desiring God, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/perfect-for-all-time-by-a-single-offering> (accessed October 6, 2011).

<sup>126</sup> John Piper, "John Stott, The Expositor, Sent at a Crucial Point in My Life."

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

Piper finds illustrative material from mainly two sources: life experiences and books. Piper believes that illustrations that come from life are more effective than books, because they have “a greater ring of authenticity though good books can capture much of life.”<sup>128</sup> Piper considers the world as a virtual reflex, which connects discoveries and observations to God and changes them into messages of truth to others. Through this view, Piper strives to learn about human nature, including himself. Piper emphasizes that the preacher should think about not only what he feels, thinks and does, but also what others feel, think and do in relation to the teaching of the Bible in everyday living. Piper states, “This is the main school of human nature, and you cannot preach well without deep insight into human nature.”<sup>129</sup> In this light, Piper gets illustrations from both personal stories and others’ life experiences. In a phrase, he always strives to learn important lessons of everyday life.

In *Spiritual Depression in the Psalms*, in order to illustrate how to fight to hope in God, Piper tells about the heaviness of discouragement that he has fought during his church ministry.<sup>130</sup> In *The Danger: Perishing*, Piper introduces John Newton’s story to testify of how the wrath of God drives people to the gospel where God’s love relieves their fear.<sup>131</sup> In a sermon for the 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his church, Piper explained

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<sup>128</sup> John Piper, “The Pastor as Prophet.”

<sup>129</sup> Ibid. Like Piper, Haddon Robinson stresses the importance of observing the world as a good source of illustrations: “The world can be God’s picture book if in ordinary events you see analogies, applications, or spiritual truth. Haddon W. Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 159.

<sup>130</sup> John Piper, “Spiritual Depression in the Psalms,” *Desiring God*, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/spiritual-depression-in-the-psalms> (accessed October 6, 2011).

<sup>131</sup> John Piper, “The Danger: Perishing,” *Desiring God*, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/the-danger-perishing> (accessed October 6, 2011).

sustaining God's grace by using illustrations from a fatal car accident of Bob Ricker's daughter, an experience of his family trip to Georgia, an agony of one church member who was suffering from serious disease and the fire of his church in March 16, 1885.<sup>132</sup>

In addition to true-life experiences, he often uses stories created for the occasion. In *You Will Know the Truth and the Truth Will Set You Free*, Piper explains what full freedom looks like by using skydiving as an illustration.<sup>133</sup> In *Faith: in Hope, Against Hope, for the Glory of God*, Piper uses an effective illustration in order to expound how faith glorifies God:

Let's illustrate this for the children. Your daddy is standing in a swimming pool out a little bit from the edge. You are, let's say, three years old and standing on the edge of the pool. Daddy holds out his arms to you and says, "Jump, I'll catch you. I promise." Now, how do you make your daddy look good at that moment? Answer: trust him and jump. Have faith in him and jump. That makes him look strong and wise and loving. But if you won't jump, if you shake your head and run away from the edge, you make your daddy look bad. It looks like you are saying, "he can't catch me" or "he won't catch me" or "it's not a good idea to do what he tells me to do." And all three of those make your dad look bad. But you don't want to make God look bad. So you trust him. Then you make him look good - which he really is. And that is what we mean when we say, "Faith glorifies God" or "Faith gives God glory." It makes him look as good as he really is. So trusting God is really important.<sup>134</sup>

Preaching a sermon on Exodus 3:13-15 entitled *I Am Who I am*, Piper supposes the story that the President of the United States invited the listeners to the White House for a reception in order to explain that people act as if they do not believe God exists.<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> John Piper, "Sustained by Sovereign Grace."

<sup>133</sup> John Piper, "You Will Know the Truth and the Truth Will Set You Free," *Desiring God*, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/you-will-know-the-truth-and-the-truth-will-set-you-free> (accessed October 6, 2011).

<sup>134</sup> John Piper, "Faith: in Hope, Against Hope, for the Glory of God," *Desiring God*, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/faith-in-hope-against-hope-for-the-glory-of-god> (accessed October 6, 2011).

<sup>135</sup> John Piper, "I Am Who I Am," *Desiring God*, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource->

As mentioned above, in addition to life experiences, Piper gathers illustrative material out of a wide range of his reading: the Bible itself, the newspaper, magazines, biographies, autobiographies, theologies, missions, novels, statistical data, poems, hymns, gospel songs, great preachers' sermons and more.<sup>136</sup> For example, in *The Food of Christ is to Give Eternal Life*, Piper dealt with the shooting incident in the Pittsburg area that happened four days prior to explain the deep distrust, disrespect, and dislike of women.<sup>137</sup> In *Don't Waste Your Life*, on December 29, 2003, Piper warned people to not waste their lives by sharing calamities that happened that year-end such as the earthquake in Bam, Iran, the earthquake in a mudslide in California, an avalanche in Utah, a plane crash in Benin, and a gas leak in China.<sup>138</sup> In a Passion's OneDay 2000 conference message encouraging the young to make their lives a lasting difference in the world, Piper offered two such illustrations, using the car accident of Ruby Eliason and Laura Edwards, medical missionaries in Cameroon, and an article from Reader's Digest on Bob and

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library/sermons/i-am-who-i-am (accessed October 7, 2011).

<sup>136</sup> For good examples, see the following sources: John Piper, "Urgency and Gratitude," Desiring God, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/urgency-and-gratitude> (accessed October 7, 2011); John Piper, "Jesus Is the End of Ethnocentrism," Desiring God, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/jesus-is-the-end-of-ethnocentrism> (accessed October 7, 2011); John Piper, "Strengthen Each Other's Hands in God," Desiring God, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/strengthen-each-others-hands-in-god> (accessed October 7, 2011); John Piper, "God: Refuge for His People, Exalted Among the Nations," Desiring God, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/god-refuge-for-his-people-exalted-among-the-nations> (accessed October 7, 2011).

<sup>137</sup> John Piper, "The Food of Christ is to Give Eternal Life," Desiring God, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/the-food-of-christ-is-to-give-eternal-life> (accessed October 7, 2011).

<sup>138</sup> John Piper, "Don't Waste Your Life," Desiring God, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/conference-messages/dont-waste-your-life--2> (accessed October 7, 2011).

Penny who took early retirement from their jobs and enjoyed their lives in Punta Gorda, Florida.<sup>139</sup>

In view of all this, Piper reads books in a variety of areas as well as theological books. Piper encourages the preacher to broadly read books: “Everything you read, from the newspaper to the assembly instructions for a new bike, from a novel to a recipe, from a biography to map, is grist for mill of fresh language and concrete imagery and striking analogy, not to mention instances of the providence of God in action and of the vagaries of human nature.”<sup>140</sup>

(Body 3) *Application*. Piper believes that the spirit-anointed exposition of the Scripture through both clear explanations and applications changes people’s lives.<sup>141</sup> To Piper, expository preaching aims to both explain and apply the meaning of the Scripture. He stresses, “Every sermon explains and applies the Bible. The reason for this is that the Bible is God’s word, inspired, infallible, and profitable—all sixty-six books of it. The preacher’s job is to minimize his own opinions and deliver the truth of God. Therefore, it is mainly Bible exposition—explanation and application.”<sup>142</sup>

What Piper hopes through application as well as explanation in preaching is to make his people aspire to not only seek specific meanings of particular texts of Scripture

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<sup>139</sup> John Piper, “Boasting Only in the Cross,” *Desiring God*, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/conference-messages/boasting-only-in-the-cross> (accessed October 7, 2011).

<sup>140</sup> John Piper, “The Pastor as Prophet.”

<sup>141</sup> John Piper, “What are Your Thoughts on Drama and Movie Clips in Church Services?,” *Desiring God*, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/ask-pastor-john/what-are-your-thoughts-on-drama-and-movie-clips-in-church-services> (accessed October 11, 2011).

<sup>142</sup> John Piper, “God So Loved the World, Part 2.”

for application to their own lives,” but live their lives according to God’s Word.<sup>143</sup> For the importance of application in preaching, in his daily life, Piper is always concerned about how to apply Bible truths to both himself and his people’s lives. He challenges, “All of life is preparation for preaching. Every experience of the preacher is the laboratory for the application of Biblical texts. If he is alert, he will learn in the laboratory of life how to apply Biblical teaching to the real life of his people.”

Although he places value on application in his preaching, Piper generally gives more amount of space to clearly expound the text than apply it. In some cases, the vast majority of Piper’s sermon is explanation.<sup>144</sup> There are two reasons for Piper to do this. First, Piper is confident that applications do not change people, but seeing glory does. According to Piper, even though application is appropriate, helpful and good and right for preachers to give, it is not the primary way that preaching works. Piper states that the main way that the Bible and preaching works is that the Bible displays “glories.” And he continues, “By the Holy Spirit in a moment of illumination, all of that can be just driven out and something absolutely glorious enter into a human heart and change everything by virtue of its magnitude, *before any application ever arrives*. You are just changed and

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<sup>143</sup> John Piper, “Preaching and Listening at Bethlehem,” *Desiring God*, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/taste-see-articles/preaching-and-listening-at-bethlehem> (accessed October 11, 2011). Similarly, Jerry Vines and Jin Shaddix stress that application in preaching “involves the listeners in the sermon by showing them how to live out particular Bible truths.” Jerry Vines and Jim Shaddix, *Power in the Pulpit: How to Prepare and Deliver Expository Sermons* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1999), 181. Calvin Miller also stresses, “Without application, there is no sermon. Application is what gets the Sermon off the Mount, and down into the valley where the toilers live out their days.” Calvin Miller, *Preaching: The Art of Narrative Exposition* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2006), 79.

<sup>144</sup> See, John Piper, “Final Judgment,” *Desiring God*, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/final-judgment> (accessed October 11, 2011); John Piper, “Be Diligent to Enter God’s Rest!,” *Desiring God*, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/be-diligent-to-enter-gods-rest> (accessed October 11, 2011). Interestingly, Andy Stanley’s style is completely different from Piper’s style. Stanley emphasizes, “Preaching for life change requires far less information and more application. Less explanation and more inspiration.” Andy Stanley and Lane Jones, *Communicating for a Change: Seven Keys to Irresistible Communication* (Sisters: Multnomah Publishers, 2006), 96.



your heart soars with new sense of what you are on the planet for.<sup>145</sup>

Here, Piper's emphasis is that more than all, the preacher must be faithful in explaining the meaning of the text in order for the listeners to see God's glory and something glorious by the illumination of the Holy Spirit. Piper believes that the Holy Spirit applies God's Word, which is accurately explained, to the listeners through the preacher.<sup>146</sup> Second, Piper does not aim to be immediately practical but eternally helpful. He says, "I stand vigilantly on the precipice of eternity speaking to people who this week could go over the edge whether they are ready to or not. I will be called to account for what I said there."<sup>147</sup>

It seems that Piper's view is similar to John MacArthur's: giving application is only the job of the Holy Spirit.<sup>148</sup> However, Piper's view is not extreme like MacArthur's. Although he stresses that the Holy Spirit is the primary agent of application, Piper strives to give practical application to the listeners in his sermons.<sup>149</sup> In other words, Piper

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<sup>145</sup> John Piper, "The Place of Application in Preaching," *Desiring God*, <http://www.desiringgod.org/blog/posts/the-place-of-application-in-preaching> (accessed October 11, 2011). Italics added.

<sup>146</sup> Similarly, Daniel Overdorf points out, "Though effective sermons include application, the application does not drive such sermons. Instead, effective sermons are driven by the Word and the Spirit—God's truth and God's power." Daniel Overdorf, *Applying the Sermon: How to Balance Biblical Integrity and Cultural Relevance* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic & Professional, 2009), 49.

<sup>147</sup> John Piper, "What I Mean by Preaching."

<sup>148</sup> When asked why he does not ever give any application, MacArthur said, "That's not my job." He even believes that "application belongs to the Spirit of God. All I'm interested in is explanation and its implications. And the power comes in the implication and the Spirit of God takes the implications of what I've said." John MacArthur, "Why doesn't John MacArthur add much application to his sermons?," *Grace To You*, <http://www.gty.org/resources/Sermons/GTY117> (accessed October 11, 2011).

<sup>149</sup> About the responsibilities of the Holy Spirit and the preacher in applying the sermon, Daniel Overdorf comments wisely: "Effective sermon application requires the involvement of both the Holy Spirit and the preacher. It is not a case of either/or; it is a case of both/and." Daniel Overdorf, *Applying the Sermon: How to Balance Biblical Integrity and Cultural Relevance*, 47.

strives to maintain a balance between the Holy Spirit's responsibility and the preacher's responsibility of the sermon application.

Piper tends to preach mainly by explaining the text with little practical application when he especially deals with important theological issues.<sup>150</sup> For example, as illustrated in "The Goal of His Preaching" of chapter 4, in a sermon on Isaiah 6:1-8, *Holy, Holy, Holy Is the Lord of Hosts*, Piper did not give one word of application to his people's lives. However, they found great application that related to the preached Word at the end of that sermon. Therefore, Piper points out that God's greatness and glory are relevant to people, and they are starving for God and the supreme greatness of the sovereign God of grace is the deepest need.<sup>151</sup>

However, whenever he deems it necessary, Piper gives enough practical application to his people. For example, in a sermon on Ephesians 5:21-33 entitled *Lionhearted and Lamblike: the Christian Husband as Head, Part 1*, Piper states, "This week will be largely foundation for headship, and next week will be largely application. What does it actually look like in practice?"<sup>152</sup> And then he declares that it is hard to explain the glory of marriage. Having a list of applications may be somewhat helpful, but seeing glory changes everything. Without any application, the Holy Spirit can enter into people's hearts and change their lives by understanding glorious truths about biblical

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<sup>150</sup> Likewise, Haddon Robinson states that the preacher may "not need to spell out practical application when you are dealing with basic theological issues—how we see God and ourselves and each other. . . . The whole sermon may be an explanation with little direct application built into it. Of course, that doesn't mean that there's no application. . . . We need to trust people to make some of their own practical applications." Haddon W. Robinson, and Scott M. Gibson, eds., *Making a Difference in Preaching: Haddon Robinson on Biblical Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999), 89-90.

<sup>151</sup> John Piper, *The Supremacy of God in Preaching*, 14.

<sup>152</sup> John Piper, "Lionhearted and Lamblike: the Christian Husband as Head, Part 1," *Desiring God*, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/lionhearted-and-lamblike-the-christian-husband-as-head-part-1> (accessed October 11, 2011).

manhood. At the end of that sermon, Piper concludes by briefly defining headship and submission.<sup>153</sup> The following week, in *Lionhearted and Lamblike: the Christian Husband as Head, Part 2*, Piper provides practical application of what headship in particular looks like by devoting about 37% space of his sermon to this:

To provide spiritual food for the family, you must know spiritual food. . . . Gather your wife and children for family devotions everyday. . . . The husband bears the primary responsibility to put bread on the table. . . . husbands, pray for your family everyday. . . Fight for them in prayer against the devil and the world and the flesh. . . . Set standards for your wife and children. Work them through with your wife . . . Take the initiative in thinking through what will be allowed on TV. What movies you and the children will go to. What music will be listened to. And how low your daughter's necklines will be. . . . Big or little, strong or weak, night or day, you go up against the enemy first.<sup>154</sup>

Therefore, it is certain that Piper does not ignore the responsibility of the preacher who is to help the listeners apply the biblical truths to their lives.

There are several important characteristics of Piper's sermon application. First, Piper applies the message to the listeners after explanation or illustrations. In a sermon on Psalm 1 entitled *Songs That Shape the Heart and Mind*, after explaining that the only hope against the pleasures of the world is the pleasures of the Word, Piper encourages the people to "meditate day and night on the instruction of God in the Psalms and delight will be awakened. That is what the Psalms are designed to do: inform your thinking in a way that delights your heart. Meditating day and night leads to delighting which frees us from the pleasures of the wicked, the sinner, and the scoffer."<sup>155</sup> In *I Will Go to God, My*

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<sup>153</sup> Ibid.

<sup>154</sup> John Piper, "Lionhearted and Lamblike: the Christian Husband as Head, Part 2," *Desiring God*, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/lionhearted-and-lamblike-the-christian-husband-as-head-part-2> (accessed October 13, 2011).

<sup>155</sup> John Piper, "I Will Go to God, My Exceeding Joy," *Desiring God*, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/i-will-go-to-god-my-exceeding-joy> (accessed October 17, 2011).

*Exceeding Joy*, Piper explains the ultimate goal of life when people feel distant from God and that he has forsaken them, and then he gives application in this way: “So here they are, the two great practical steps you can take when you feel forsaken: pray to God and preach to yourself. Nothing is more important in your mind than preaching the gospel to yourself. Preaching hope when all your circumstances are preaching despair.”<sup>156</sup>

Second, unlike the above case, Piper sometimes provides application at the end of the sermon after much explanation. In *Get Wisdom*, Piper expounds about what the importance of Getting Wisdom is and what wisdom is, and then he suggests five biblical instructions for how to get wisdom in the end of the sermon:

- 1) First, desire wisdom with all your might.
- 2) Second, since wisdom is found in the Word of God, we must apply ourselves in study and meditation to know the Word and do it.
- 3) The third thing we should do to get wisdom is pray.
- 4) The fourth biblical instruction for how to get wisdom is to think frequently of your death.
- 5) Finally, there is one last, absolutely essential thing to do if you would “get wisdom”: you must come to Jesus.<sup>157</sup>

In *Job: Reverent in Suffering*, Piper first explains an overview of Job 1:1-2:10, and then at the end of the sermon, he offers three personal applications to his people: 1) “Let us join with Job and affirm with all our hearts the absolute sovereignty of God,” 2) “Let your tears flow freely when your calamity comes,” 3) “Trust in the goodness of God, and let him be your treasure and your joy.”<sup>158</sup>

Third, Piper’s sermon application is not abstract but concrete. In *Receiving*

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<sup>156</sup> John Piper, “Receiving Children in Jesus’ Name,” *Desiring God*, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/receiving-children-in-jesus-name> (accessed October 17, 2011).

<sup>157</sup> John Piper, “Get Wisdom,” *Desiring God*, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/get-wisdom> (accessed October 17, 2011).

<sup>158</sup> John Piper, “Job: Reverent in Suffering.”

*Children in Jesus' Name*, Piper explains that children are among the people we should serve, and then he gives specific applications:

For example, here' a child. I am taking this child in my arms to show you that if you would be great, if you would be first, you must be the servant of children. You must take time for children. You must not look down on or despise children. You must not say this is simply women's work. If you would be great, you will not rule out nursery duty; you will pray earnestly about teaching primaries; you will think hard about leading a boys' club or girls' club; you will spend yourself in the fight to overcome child-killing.<sup>159</sup>

In *Daniel's Defiance of Darius in Prayer*, after begging of his people to give them the year to prayer and meditation, Piper suggests concluding applications in the end of the sermon: "Ponder the Word day and night, and pray for the Spirit's help day and night. Come to pray in the mornings at 7:00, and come to pray at noon. Come to pray all night on Friday. Get a Bible reading plan from the table. Buy a copy of the Valley of Vision and let the great saints model for you how to pray."<sup>160</sup>

Fourth, in addition to the content of application, Piper's sermon application sometimes aims at the concrete audience.<sup>161</sup> In *God Strengthens Us by the Gospel*, Piper

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<sup>159</sup> John Piper, "Receiving Children in Jesus' Name," *Desiring God*, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/receiving-children-in-jesus-name> (accessed October 17, 2011). While stressing that appropriate application must be made concrete for the audience, Ramesh Richard points out that by the end of the sermon the listeners must have the answer to three important questions for effective application: 1) What? (What truth did the preacher speak about?), 2) So What? (So what difference should the truth make?), and 3) Now What? (Now what do I do with God's claims in this sermon?). Ramesh Richard, *Preparing Expository Sermons*, 113-115. When analyzing application of *Receiving Children in Jesus' Name* in terms of Richard's view, the results are as follows:

- 1) What: Children are among the "all" we are called to serve.
- 2) So What: You must be the servant of children.
- 3) Now What: You must take time for children. You must not look down on or despise children. You must not say this is simply women's work. If you would be great, you will not rule out nursery duty; you will pray earnestly about teaching primaries; you will think hard about leading a boys' club or girls' club; you will spend yourself in the fight to overcome child-killing.

<sup>160</sup> John Piper, "Hold Fast to the Word and Pray for Us." Italics added.

<sup>161</sup> Bethlehem Baptist Church offers age-specific Sunday school classes for Preschool through Grade 12 during the 11:00AM worship service. However, Piper urges parents to bring their children to worship, and many of them bring their children to the Sunday morning worship service instead of sending them to a children's church. For detailed information, see the following source: Bethlehem Baptist Church,

declares to his people, emphasizing that God strengthens his people according to his gospel:

Women, teenage girls, what do you think of when you think of being a strong woman? Or little girls, when you think of growing up to be a strong woman what do you dream? . . . Men, boys, what about you? What do you dream of when you dream of being strong? . . . Children, junior highers, senior highers, college students, single people, married couples, widows, widowers! Are you a part of a cluster of Christian friends who have pledged themselves to help each other fight the fight of faith and protect each other from the subtle encroachments of sin?<sup>162</sup>

In *Help the Children Love the Different People*, in the introduction, Piper encourages children to listen carefully although the message mainly aims at their parents. Moreover, after asking parents to “teach the children that because Jesus died for them and rose again, he becomes for them an all-satisfying Friend and Treasure,” Piper urges children not to be afraid of those who are different from them or get their happiness by feeling superior to others, but to turn toward different people and love them because Jesus Christ is the precious and satisfying friend.<sup>163</sup>

Fifth, Piper’s sermon application is not legalistic, but grace-based. Piper never asks the listeners to obey God’s Word by their own efforts. Rather, he strives to help them live out the Word of God with the power of grace that He provides.<sup>164</sup> In *The*

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“The Family: Together in God’s Presence,” <http://www.hopeingod.org/event/sunday-worship-services> (accessed October 19, 2011).

<sup>162</sup> John Piper, “God Strengthens Us by the Gospel,” <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/god-strengthens-us-by-the-gospel> (accessed October 18, 2011).

<sup>163</sup> John Piper, “Help the Children Love the Different People,” <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/help-the-children-love-the-different-people> (accessed October 18, 2011).

<sup>164</sup> Like Piper, Bryan Chapell stresses that biblical preaching must encourage the listeners to follow God’s Word. It does “not abolish the normative standards of Christian conduct but rather locates their source in the compelling power of grace.” Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 313. Daniel Doriani also encourages the preacher to lead hearts to God by avoiding “soft legalism” by asking what the law requires us to be, seek, or see, not just what we ought to do. Moreover, he states, “Application is deep, varied, and specific, yet God-centered and grace-oriented. . . . If we focus on our attainment, the situation

*Discontented Christian Life*, after declaring that if people cling to the gain of the flesh or of possessions or of pride, they will never have “the true gain of knowing Christ Jesus as their Lord,” Piper strongly urges,

We must love our lives; we must deny ourselves if we ever hope to gain Christ. *But if we have been gripped by the Spirit of God, that won't be a burden; it will be a joy.* Why? Because of “the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.” . . . Where did Paul's holy discontent come from? It came from the way he looked at himself and the way he looked at Christ. *It came from the God-given humility*, which enabled Paul to see himself accurately and not try to cover up his sins, weaknesses, and imperfections. And *it came from the God-given spiritual insight*, which enabled Paul to see and cherish the surpassing greatness and value and worth of knowing Christ.<sup>165</sup>

And then, he encourages, “Where will your holy discontentment come from? From God as well. Brothers and sisters, seek God, go hard after him, persevere in prayer until God pours out on you a spirit of Pauline discontentment.”<sup>166</sup> In *Ruth: Under the Wings of God*, Piper preaches that God's kindness has not forsaken His people by giving the following application: “[God] is good to all who take refuge under his wings. So let us fall on our faces, bow before the Lord, confess our unworthiness, take refuge under the wings of God, and be astonished at his grace.”<sup>167</sup> In *Take Care How You Listen! Part 2*, Piper provides ten exhortations at the end of the sermon about how to prepare to hear the Word of God on Sunday. Then he concludes with the following benediction: “May God make us a people who hear the Word of God and bear fruit a hundredfold so that the lamp of

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looks worse than we thought. But if we focus on the Lord, who graciously makes himself known to us and conforms us to himself, it may be better than we dare to dream.” Daniel M. Doriani, *Putting the Truth to Work: The Theory and Practice of Biblical Application* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P & R Pub, 2001), 259, 304.

<sup>165</sup> John Piper, “The Discontented Christian Life,” <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/the-discontented-christian-life> (accessed October 18, 2011).

<sup>166</sup> Ibid.

<sup>167</sup> John Piper, “Ruth: Under the Wings of God,” <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/ruth-under-the-wings-of-god> (accessed October 18, 2011). Italics added.

our lives will be on a lampstand giving light to all who enter the kingdom of God. Take heed how you hear! Amen.” Through this closing prayer, Piper prompts the listeners to prepare to listen to God’s Word by relying on God’s grace and power.<sup>168</sup>

Finally, it can be found from the above examples of his sermons that in his application, Piper mixes first person plural pronouns using second person plural pronouns. Therefore, his application is directive, provocative and exhortative, and as a result it causes the people to respond to the message.<sup>169</sup>

*Conclusion:* Piper’s sermons usually reach their climax in the conclusion. Piper’s conclusions are mostly brief except in the case of application approach. For effective endings, Piper strives to conclude the message by using various patterns. Of all the several conclusions available to Piper, he brings his sermons to a conclusion mainly with an exhortation or appeal. Through this method, Piper’s sermons empower the audience to respond to and act on the message.<sup>170</sup>

For example, Piper’s sermon, *By His Grace, for His Name, Through the Obedience of Faith* (Romans 1:1-5), has three points:

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<sup>168</sup> About the effect of pronouncement of blessing in the sermon conclusion, Minseog Roh states, “it is to proclaim God’s amazing grace and blessing to listeners, if [preachers] practice the main points of the sermon as God wants.” Minseog Roh, “How to Develop for Writing a Biblical Conclusion to Improve the Effectiveness of Preaching for Korean Pastors.” D.Min. diss., Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary, 2010, 75.

<sup>169</sup> While Jerry Vines and Jin Shaddix stress that using first and second person plural pronouns is strong and directive, Robinson stresses that it is proper for preachers “to leave behind ‘we’ in favor of ‘you’ [singular],” because they are representing God to the listeners the time for application. Jerry Vines and Jim Shaddix, *Power in the Pulpit: How to Prepare and Deliver Expository Sermons*, 183; Haddon W. Robinson, and Scott M. Gibson, eds., *Making a Difference in Preaching: Haddon Robinson on Biblical Preaching*, 94.

<sup>170</sup> One of the reasons why Piper’s sermons are powerful is that he carefully prepares his sermon conclusions expecting the listeners to change. Jay Adams stresses, “Because true sermons always call for change, often decision-making takes place when they are being preached, most frequently during the conclusion.” Jay E. Adams. *Preaching with Purpose: The Urgent Task of Homiletics* (Grand Rapids: Presbyterian and Reformed Pub. Co., Ministry Resources Library, 1982), 96.



1. The nature of grace
2. The effect of grace
3. The ultimate goal of grace

He then concludes this way: “Is [the glory of God] – is [God] – the goal of your longings? If so, then the gospel of grace will make sense and you will embrace it. If not, call upon the name of the Lord so that he would open your eyes to see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, the image of God (2 Corinthians 4:4).”<sup>171</sup> When he preached a sermon entitled *The Pleasure of God in His Son*, based on Matthew 17:5, Piper concluded thus: “Let us stand in awe of this great God! And let us turn from all the trivial resentments and fleeting pleasures and petty pursuits of life, and join in with the gladness that God has in the image of his own perfections, namely, his Son.”<sup>172</sup> Piper finishes his sermon entitled *Sustained by Sovereign Grace—Forever* (Jeremiah 32:36-42) with the following exhortation:

[God] rejoices to sustain you and he rejoices with all his heart and with all his soul. *Now I ask you*, not with any sermonic exaggeration or rhetorical flourish or with any sense of overstatement at all—*I ask you, I challenge you*, can you conceive of an intensity of desire that is greater than a desire empowered by ‘all God’s heart and all God’s soul’? . . . *I invite you* all to sing with me, to bless the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit for the sovereign, sustaining grace.<sup>173</sup>

This type of conclusion also appears in evangelistic invitations. At the end of a sermon *The Design: Love*, Piper urges, “Do not look at yourself this morning. Look to the Son. And to the love of God. And to the promise that whoever believes will never perish but have eternal life.” And then after illustrating Charles Spurgeon’s conversion story, Piper ends his sermon with the following direct appeal: “I say the same to you this

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<sup>171</sup> John Piper, “By His Grace, for His Name, Through the Obedience of Faith.”

<sup>172</sup> John Piper, “The Pleasure of God in His Son.”

<sup>173</sup> John Piper, “Sustained by Sovereign Grace—Forever.”

morning. Look to Jesus. Believe on Jesus. And you will not perish.”<sup>174</sup> In *Preparing to Receive Christ: Something More Than Flesh and Blood*, Piper closes with a powerful invitation: “How shall you prepare your heart this Christmas to receive Christ? Fix your gaze on him in his Word. Look to Christ! Consider Jesus. And pray, beyond your own flesh and blood, that God would give you eyes to see and ears to hear that you might cry out with Peter, ‘You are the Christ the Son of the living God!’”<sup>175</sup> In *Why We Need a Savior: Captive to an Alien Power, by Nature Children of Wrath*, introducing Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones’ final word for the generation of those days before his death: “Jesus delivers us from the wrath to come,” Piper earnestly urges, “For now he is a Savior. Turn to him and be saved—from the sickness of sin, the captivity of Satan, and the sentence of hell. He alone is the way, the truth, and the life. There is no other name given among men by which you can be saved.”<sup>176</sup>

Second, at the end of the sermon, Piper offers practical and concrete application after much explanation. Piper draws well the application out of the passage and presents a clear solution to how to live in people’s daily lives. Because his type of application has already been expounded enough in this chapter, here the researcher introduces two good examples. Piper uses this method to conclude a sermon on Amos 4:4-13 entitled *Prepare to Meet Your God*. In the body of this sermon, Piper summarizes four ways to prepare to

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<sup>174</sup> John Piper, “By His Grace, for His Name, Through the Obedience of Faith.”

<sup>175</sup> John Piper, “Preparing to Receive Christ: Something More Than Flesh and Blood,” <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/preparing-to-receive-christ-something-more-than-flesh-and-blood> (accessed October 18, 2011).

<sup>176</sup> John Piper, “Why We Need a Savior: Captive to an Alien Power, by Nature Children of Wrath.”

meet God. Then he closes his sermon with six practical applications for how people might prepare to meet their God in the worship service:

- 1) Begin orienting your heart on Saturday night. . . . 2) Go to bed early. . . . 3) Get up early enough on Sunday. . . . 4) Begin seeking God as soon as you enter. . . .
- 5) If you have to come late—and we all do from time to time—minister to those who have to sit in the commons and minister to those worshipping in the sanctuary with a spirit of worship and prayer. . . . 6) Finally, become the actor in worship . . .<sup>177</sup>

When he preached the message entitled *Creation, Fall, Redemption, and the Holy Spirit* (Luke 17:20-21), Piper described four things Jesus believes about the unregenerate: They are flesh, they are dead, they will not enter the kingdom of God and their religious efforts are works of flesh. In the conclusion, Piper offers his people three brief applications: 1) We should examine our own hearts and lives. . . . 2) We should humble ourselves. . . . 3) We should be desperate for the Spirit.<sup>178</sup>

Third, Piper brings his sermon to a close with summary or recapitulation. By doing so, the listeners can distinctly remember the main points of Piper's sermons. Piper concludes in this way on 2 Peter 1:1-4 entitled *Liberating Promises*. Piper deals with the text inductively in order that his listeners may be less dependent on Piper and more dependent on the text itself. In the conclusion, Piper states,

We can sum up these first four verses of 2 Peter with four words: power, promises, practice, and prospect. God's divine power (v. 3) flows into our lives when we know (v. 2) and trust (v. 1) his precious and very great promises (v. 4). And this power flowing through these promises produces practice of godliness (v. 3) and

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<sup>177</sup> John Piper, "Prepare to Meet Your God," <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/prepare-to-meet-your-god> (accessed October 19, 2011). Also, see: John Piper, "The Joyful Purpose of God," <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/the-joyful-purpose-of-god> (accessed October 19, 2011).

<sup>178</sup> John Piper, "Creation, Fall, Redemption, and the Holy Spirit."

the prospect of life eternal (v. 3). Let us pray and commit ourselves afresh to see this power!<sup>179</sup>

Piper uses this approach to conclude a sermon entitled *Ruth: Sweet and Bitter Providence*.

After treating the passage inductively, Piper closes his sermon with four summary lessons: “God the almighty reigns in all the affairs of men. . . . God’s providence is sometimes very hard. . . . in all his works his purposes are for the good and happiness of his people. . . . if you trust the sovereign goodness and mercy of God to pursue you all the days of your life, then you are free like Ruth.”<sup>180</sup> In *When is It Right to Repay Evil with Pain?*, Piper explains two main reasons why Christians should love their Enemies in the body of the sermon. Then he finishes his sermon with the following summary: “God calls us to be merciful. . . . God calls us to uphold justice. . . . God calls us above all to trust Christ. . . . So pursue justice, and pursue mercy, and above all hold fast to Christ.”<sup>181</sup>

Fourth, Piper uses an illustration as an effective sermon conclusion. In *God Strengthens Us by the Gospel*, Piper describes Romans 16:25-27 to emphasize that God uses the Gospel to strengthen Believers. At the end of the sermon, Piper closes the sermon by illustrating how he overcame cancer by the gospel, especially Thessalonians 5:9-10 and Romans 16:25-27 from the first cancer diagnosis to the final diagnosis. Then he offers these last words: “Our God has worked in history to defeat sin and Satan and hell and death. He did this through the gospel of Jesus Christ. Embrace this gospel as the

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<sup>179</sup> John Piper, “Liberating Promises,” <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/liberating-promises> (accessed October 19, 2011).

<sup>180</sup> John Piper, “Ruth: Sweet and Bitter Providence.”

<sup>181</sup> John Piper, “When is It Right to Repay Evil with Pain?,” <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/when-is-it-right-to-repay-evil-with-pain> (accessed October 21, 2011).

greatest treasure of your life. God will magnify his glory in making you strong.”<sup>182</sup> In a sermon on 1 John 4 entitled *The Greatest of These Is Love: An Introduction to the Series*, Piper gives ten reasons for a series of messages on love. He then finishes the sermon with a closing illustration of his own struggle for love. When finishing his book, *Living by Faith in Future Grace*, he asked himself whether isolating himself from his people and dealing with ideas and words are works of love or not. Then he says that the way of loving the church and the world will be proved or not by the other ways of loving people that he is called upon to act as husband, father, friend, pastor, and leader. He then concludes with the following remark: “Each different occasion for love in our lives adds to or subtracts from the authenticity of love in all the other areas of our lives. May the Lord use these weeks in his loving Word to fulfill in us Paul’s word in 1 Corinthians 16:14, ‘Let all that you do be done in love’.”<sup>183</sup>

Fifth, Piper quotes Scripture to close out his sermons. He uses a passage related to the theme in order for the listeners to respond to the message. In the body of the sermon *Why We Need a Savior: Dead in Sins*, Piper explains the reason people need a Savior: Without a Savior people are all dead in their trespasses and sins. Then he gives both a warning (they are still spiritually dead on the inside) and an encouragement (they can hear God’s Word and believe Jesus Christ). He concludes the sermon by saying: “If you have any spiritual life within you, you owe it to the sovereign voice of the Savior. And if you don’t yet have life in Christ, the voice says, ‘let him who is thirsty come. Whosoever

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<sup>182</sup> John Piper, “God Strengthens Us by the Gospel.”

<sup>183</sup> John Piper, “The Greatest of These Is Love: An Introduction to the Series,” <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/the-greatest-of-these-is-love-an-introduction-to-the-series> (accessed October 21, 2011).

will, let him take of the water of life freely (Revelation 22:17).”<sup>184</sup> In *Pastoral Thoughts on the Doctrine of Election*, Piper presents five pastoral thoughts on the doctrine of election. Then he concludes the sermon thus: “So in the name of Christ I call you: Come, take him as your Savior and your Lord and the Treasure of your life. He never casts out any who comes in faith. He forgives sin. . . . ‘My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand’ (John 10:27).’ Hear the voice of the good Shepherd and come.”<sup>185</sup>

Sixth, Piper closes his sermon by quoting a poem or a hymn. As is the case of quoting a passage, verses for a poem and a hymn are well connected with the major idea of the message. When preaching a sermon for the Lord’s Supper entitled *The Heart You Know and the Heart You Don’t*, Piper uses this method. Piper begins the sermon by asking “How do you deal with sin in your life if you love God?” In the body of the sermon, he discusses two ways of sinning and about how people who love God deal with sins, as exemplified by David. Then he encourages his people to believe that sins are covered and forgiven when they pray, “Clear thou me of hidden faults,” and to gain a victory over presumptuous sins, even while wrestling with baffling corruption. In the conclusion, he finishes the sermon as follows: “He purchased both the pardon and the power by the shedding of his Son’s blood. That is what the Lord’s Supper is all about,

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<sup>184</sup> John Piper, “Why We Need a Savior: Dead in Sins,” <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/why-we-need-a-savior-dead-in-sins> (accessed October 21, 2011).

<sup>185</sup> John Piper, “Pastoral Thoughts on the Doctrine of Election,” <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/pastoral-thoughts-on-the-doctrine-of-election> (accessed October 21, 2011).

and to that we turn. And as we do, I invite you to pray together by singing hymn 425, verses 1 and 2.

Search me, O God, and know my heart today;  
I praise Thee, Lord, for cleansing me from sin;  
Try me, O Savior, know my thoughts, I pray.  
Fulfill thy Word and make me pure within.  
See if there be some wicked way in me;  
Fill me with fire, where once I burned with shame;  
Cleanse me from every sin, and set me free.  
(Cleanse Me, by Edwin Orr)<sup>186</sup>

At the end of a message for Reformation Sunday entitled *The Bible: Kindling for Christian Hedonism*, Piper pleads with his listeners not to let the blood of the martyrs be spilled in vain, not to let the labors of Luther, Melancthon, Calvin, and Zwingli be spent out in vain and not to treat the Bible as a trifle in their lives. Then he closes the sermon with the poem that Roland Bainton wrote in the year of his deepest depression:

And though this world with devils filled  
Should threaten to undo us,  
We will not fear, for God has willed  
His truth to triumph through us.  
The prince of darkness grim,  
We tremble not for him—  
His rage we can endure,  
For lo, his doom is sure:  
One little word shall fell him.<sup>187</sup>

Finally, Piper uses a simple question in the sermon conclusion. For example, in *Risk and the Cause of God* (2 Samuel 10:12), Piper aims to help dispell the myth of safety, and to deliver the listeners from the deceptive enchantment of security with illustrations of Joab and Abishai, Esther, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, and Paul as

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<sup>186</sup> John Piper, “The Heart You Know and the Heart You Don’t,” <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/the-heart-you-know-and-the-heart-you-dont> (accessed October 21, 2011).

<sup>187</sup> John Piper, “The Bible: Kindling for Christian Hedonism,” <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/the-bible-kindling-for-christian-hedonism> (accessed October 21, 2011).

well as the Israelites in the wilderness. In the conclusion, after emphasizing that God does not promise success to all Christians' ventures in His cause, Piper challenges the listeners to risk their lives for the cause of God like this: "Are you caught in the enchantment of security, paralyzed from taking any risks for the cause of God? Or have you been freed by the Holy Spirit from the mirage of Egyptian safety and comfort? Do you men ever say with Joab, "I'll try it! And may the Lord do what seems good to him!"? Do you women ever say with Esther, "I'll try it! And if I perish, I perish!"?

In the beginning of the sermon *All the Promises of God Are Yes in Christ* (2 Corinthians 1:15-20) on December 31, 1989, Piper asked people three questions: "Are you living in the fullest enjoyment of God's YES to you in Christ Jesus? Have you said yes to all of God's YES to you? Is there any of God's YES to you to which you are saying NO or MAYBE or NOT NOW?"<sup>188</sup> Then by explaining the text, he declared that people should consecrate themselves to forsake the "no", "maybe" and "not now" of their unbelief and say "yes" to everything in God's "yes" to them. Piper concluded the sermon in three stages. First, Piper asks people again three questions that he did in the introduction. Second, he exhorts them to consecrate themselves to God at a week of prayer of the New Year with concrete applications. And finally, he closed the sermon by asking the question once more: "Are you living in the fullest enjoyment of God's YES to you in Christ Jesus? Have you said YES and AMEN to all the promises of God? Would you join us in the first week of the last decade of the last century of the millennium for an extraordinary time of consecration as we say YES to all God's promises in prayer?"<sup>189</sup> In

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<sup>188</sup> John Piper, "All the Promises of God Are Yes in Christ," <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/all-the-promises-of-god-are-yes-in-christ> (accessed October 21, 2011).

<sup>189</sup> Ibid.



this sermon, not only did Piper cause the main idea of the sermon to be embedded in people's hearts and minds by thrice repeating essential questions in the introduction and conclusion, but also he challenged them to obey God's Word with the ending exhortation.

By analyzing the types of Piper's sermon conclusions, it is found that there are several important points to his sermon conclusions. First, Piper drives the message to come to the climax by systematically constructing his sermons from the introduction to the conclusion.<sup>190</sup> Second, Piper closes his sermons persuasively in a way his sermon flows logically from introduction to conclusion so that the listeners can grasp the major point of the sermon. Third, Piper properly adjusts the length of the message although most of his sermon conclusions are succinct. When he feels it is necessary, Piper offers the listeners enough applications. Fourth, with a sense of urgency and passion, Piper encourages the listeners to quickly respond to the message. Fifth, Piper helps the listeners have hope of obeying God's Word by giving a grace-based conclusion. Sixth, by using various patterns to conclude the message, Piper leads the audience to listen attentively to the sermon unto the end and to expect the conclusion of the message. Last, Piper prepares his sermon conclusions with meticulous care. As mentioned at the beginning of "Building the Sermon," Piper carefully writes his sermon manuscript. Although he does not indicate whether he prepares the conclusion first or last, it is clear that Piper must be an earnest craftsman in preparing the sermon.

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<sup>190</sup> Bryan Chapell points out, "All a sermon's components should have prepared for this culmination, a conclusion is the climax of a message." Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 253.

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **CONCLUSION**

#### **Summary of the Findings**

The purpose of this dissertation was to analyze Piper's writings and selected sermons in order to answer the following question: "How can the preacher complete the process of his expository sermon preparation to manifest God's glory by studying Piper's life and methods?" To achieve this goal, the author studied Piper's background of preaching ministry (chapter 2), his exegetical skills (chapter 3), his philosophy of preaching (chapter 4), and his homiletical skills in sermon preparation (chapter 5).

Piper's life, theology, exegetical and homiletical skills and philosophy of preaching are based on the supremacy of God. Through his godly parents, Piper experienced religious awakening and became a faithful Christian. Especially, their love for the Bible and God encouraged Piper to not only love the Bible, but also pursue God Himself all his life. Harold John Ockenga and John Stott's expository preaching prompted Piper to have a sense of glorious objectivity of reality in God's Word and helped him accept an irresistible call to the ministry of the Word. Finally, Piper decided to be a preacher through Romans 9. While studying Romans 9, Piper came to worship God instead of analyzing Him, deeply savoring God's absolute sovereignty, and he was filled with the desire to proclaim and magnify God through preaching.

Piper's longing to magnify God's glory by emphasizing the supremacy of God can be found in his God-centered theology and philosophy of life, called Christian Hedonism. While deeply meditating on the Scriptures, Piper's Christian Hedonism began to form under the influence of his parents, was advanced by Blaise Pascal, C. S. Lewis and Daniel Fuller, and was completed by Jonathan Edwards. Piper believes that God has a passion to manifest His glory and humans can find the greatest pleasure only in God, and that enjoying God and glorifying Him is one. Therefore, he concludes that God is most glorified in people when they are most satisfied in Him.

On the sound foundation of God-centered theology, Piper not only relegates himself to theological thought, but also strives to maintain the best spiritual condition by living a godly life. Meditating on the Bible, living a praying life and reading books mark the basis of Piper's sermon preparation. Piper ardently and continually meditates on and memorizes God's Word so that his soul, mind, speaking, writings and even sermons will be deeply absorbed in the Word of God. In particular, as a preacher, Piper desires to see God's glory and find His ways because he believes that reading the Bible is in itself sermon preparation. Second, Piper devotes himself to pray anywhere and at anytime. Especially, in private, he prays earnestly and persistently not only for his own holiness and powerful ministry of the Word, but for the growth of his people and the conversion of the lost. Last, Piper is a avid reader of various topics, particularly, great books about God and Christian biographies in order that he may charge his spiritual batteries, and keep his soul, mind and heart deepened and expanded with truth.

Piper's passion for the supremacy of God is also well displayed in his principles of biblical interpretation for expository preaching. First, Piper has two approaches to

accurately interpreting the Word of God. Piper believes that the Bible is the Spirit-inspired Word and it is inerrant and absolutely authoritative. Therefore, he comes to the Scriptures with respect, including fervency and humility. Moreover, Piper comes to the Bible with a sense of expectation that God will satisfy all his needs including guidance, forgiveness, and hope.

Second, Piper has solid exegetical skills for powerful expository preaching. Piper studies the Bible with a fervent scholarly effort with both all his heart and mind so that he may know God and see His glory. There are two goals of Piper's biblical exegesis: 1) the immediate goal – discovering the intention of the original biblical authors by an intellectual work, and 2) the ultimate goal – having his heart touched by embracing the glorious eternal truth, and then praising God for what he has discovered. With this solid goal of biblical exegesis, Piper starts interpreting the expository passage by reading the Greek or Hebrew Bible with various Bible translations in order to determine the accurate meaning of words and phrases that an author intended in a given context of a passage. Then he attempts lexical, historical-cultural, literary, structural analysis to trace the authors' flow of thoughts and arguments. Last, Piper identifies how propositions in the text relate logically to each other. By doing so, Piper finds the main idea, sub-points and application of the text. Piper learned this biblical exegesis from Daniel Fuller, especially through his two books *Hermeneutics* and *The Unity of the Bible* and developed his own method later.

Piper's God-centered theology is the foundation of his philosophy of preaching as well as his biblical exegesis. First, Piper's God-centered motivation of preaching is the supremacy of God. This can be summarized in a Trinitarian way: God the Father as the

goal of preaching, God the Son as its ground and God the Holy Spirit as its gift. Piper points out that in their preaching, preachers should aim to not only make people behold God's glory in the gospel of Christ, but also be transformed into the likeness of Christ through listening to the Word of God and gladly submitting to His reign. Only the Cross can make sinful people humble before God and exalt the glory of God with joy. In addition, the power of the Holy Spirit is the only way in which the preacher can accomplish all this. Therefore, the preacher should not only preach with blood-earnestness for the glory of God, but also express his own highest joy in his preaching ministry.

Second, Piper develops his objective of preaching rooted in his motivation. Piper believes that the preacher is a worshiper; preaching is worship in the way that the preacher worships God through His Word in preaching and at the same time the audience worships God while hearing His Word. And he believes that the preacher is a teacher; preaching is exposition in the way that the preacher and people together see God's glory and understand His Word with their minds through explanation of the biblical text. Finally, he believes that the preacher is a herald; preaching is exultation in the way that both the preacher and the listener savor God and exult over the explained and applied truth with their hearts. Some of the most influential preachers to Piper's philosophy of preaching are Jonathan Edwards, Piper's father, John Calvin, George Whitefield, Charles Spurgeon and Martin Lloyd-Jones.

Piper has developed his own skills for expository preaching under God-centered life, theology, exegetical skills and philosophy of preaching. First, Piper starts his expository task by selecting texts for preaching. Piper aims to declare the full counsel of

God. In order to do so, Piper offers two principles in text selection: the preacher should be sensitive to the freedom of the Spirit to interrupt and change the preacher's sermon plan and be disciplined to preach through a book of the Bible to avoid his individual preference in text selecting for a sermon. For a good discipline for selecting a sermon text, Piper strives to plan sermons several months in advance. In this process, Piper seeks the guidance of the Holy Spirit by privately praying and meditating on the Scriptures, and consulting and praying with his pastoral staff.

Under these principles of selecting the text, Piper follows five ways to select the text: 1) The Audience and Setting, 2) The Church Calendar or Special Events, 3) Crises in Society, 4) A Sermon Series, and 5) Convergence of Several Factors. After choosing the text, Piper decides the length of the text for an expository unit according to the following five principles: 1) The goal of the message, 2) The types of literature of the text, 3) The density of theological terminology that needs explanation and application in the text, 4) The need to quickly move through a larger passage, and 5) The amount of time that the preacher has for sermon delivery.

Second, after selecting a sermon text, Piper starts studying it and structures his expository sermons rooted in its solid exegesis. First of all, Piper strives to determine one main sermon point and other supporting points, and discover unity and coherence among those points. Next, Piper draws out an efficient sermon outline. His sermon outlines can be divided usually into five types: 1) The Propositional Style, 2) The Interrogative Style, 3) The Applicational Style, 4) The Exhortative Style, and 5) Using Phrases.

Last, after organizing the sermon, Piper meticulously writes his sermon manuscript on his computer from introduction to conclusion. Piper logically and

persuasively leads the message to come to the climax so that the audience may not only understand the meaning of the Scriptural texts but also grasp the main idea of the message. In the introduction, Piper generally provides the main idea of the sermon and evokes the expectation of the message by presenting the purpose of the sermon. In the body of the sermon, Piper strives to fill in the outline with explanation, illustration and application. These three factors of the sermon body are coherently woven from the main idea. Piper, however, does not mechanically divide his sermons into three elements in similar proportion. If needed, Piper controls the length of each factor, because he believes that the Spirit can make people understand the Word and change their lives without any application. In the conclusion, Piper leads his sermons to reach the climax and drives people to quickly respond to the message by effectively using numerous patterns to finish the message. In doing so, people can have a hope and passion to live according to the message by relying not on their own efforts but on God's sovereign grace.

### **Application**

For pastors who wish both to prepare biblical and expository sermons and to emphasize the supremacy of God in their message, John Piper as an expository preacher, provides practical application.

First, preachers should recognize that their spiritual preparation is the most important factor in preparing the sermon. After studying his mentor, Jonathan Edwards, Piper said once, "[Edwards'] speaking and writing are what are because of what he was. Behind the greatest of his thought was the greatest of his soul. And his soul was great because it was filled with the fullness of God. In our day we need to see his God and to

see the soul that saw this God.”<sup>1</sup> Likewise, Piper strives to prepare his soul for great preaching because he believes that the supremacy of God in the life of the preacher leads straight to God’s supremacy in preaching.”<sup>2</sup> Therefore, it is clear that Piper’s powerful preaching comes from his God-centered life. For spiritual preparation of expository preaching, preachers can learn valuable lessons from Piper as follows:

- 1) Preachers should sense an irresistible call to the ministry of the Word and experience their greatest joy in preaching ministry. Moreover, preacher should believe that the life of the church rests on God’s Word.
- 2) Preachers should be filled with a fervent passion to not investigate or analyze but proclaim God through preaching.
- 3) In order to not be exhausted spiritually, preachers should spend enough time in meditating on God’s Word, praying and reading great books.
- 4) Preachers should stand on the foundation of God-centered theology in order to glorify God in every circumstance by most satisfying in Him so that they may avoid the health, wealth and prosperity gospel.

Second, preachers should have a God-centered philosophy of preaching. First and foremost, preachers should examine their own motivation of preaching while preparing the sermon. In order to display the supremacy of God in preaching, preachers should focus on not satisfying people’s worldly needs but magnifying God’s glory with blood-earnestness and joy. In order to do so, preachers should desperately depend on the crucifying power of the Cross of Christ and the sovereign work of the Holy Spirit. Next, preachers should recognize the identity of preachers as worshipers, teachers and heralds.

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<sup>1</sup> John Piper, *God’s Passion For His Glory*, 50.

<sup>2</sup> John Piper, *The Supremacy of God in Preaching*, 102.



While preparing the sermon, preachers should thirst for God Himself, come to the knowledge of God, see God's glory and finally rejoice with what they understand.

Third, preachers should rigorously hone the principles and skills of biblical exegesis and powerful expository preaching. Most importantly, preachers should acknowledge the authority of the God's Spirit-inspired Word, and believe that the Word applied in expository preaching can transform people. Secondly, under the assistance of the Holy Spirit, preachers should carefully select the sermon text and plan it ahead in order to proclaim a timely message to their people. Moreover, preachers need to mix series on the biblical books and topical series in order to preach the whole counsel of the Bible.

Preachers then should interpret the Scriptures with their minds and hearts so that their intellect and affection may be saturated with the truth and finally see God's glory. In order to do so, preachers need to inductively study the text with the knowledge of the original languages so that they may accurately find the intention of the author and the main idea of the message. Next, preachers should spend an inordinate amount of time logically building the sermon from the introduction to the conclusion with the exegetical findings. Lastly, preachers should persuasively encourage the congregation to live their lives with hope according to the Word by giving a grace-rooted application.

Last, as Piper did to be a faithful expository preacher, preachers should read and study the sermons of great expository preachers who emphasize the supremacy of God. However, there is one thing that preachers need to be careful of while doing this: They should not just imitate their mentors' methods. As Piper strongly advises preachers, who long to learn his technique of sermon preparation, to wear their own armors, pastors

should develop their own methods based on Piper's excellent exegetical and homiletical techniques so that they finally may exalt the supremacy of God while preparing and proclaiming His Word.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> John Piper, "How do you Prepare your Sermons."

## APPENDIX A

### An Example of Planning the Sermon: Sermons from 1996 <sup>1</sup>

Date	Series/Topic/Occasion	Text	Title
January 07, 1996	New Year	Romans 15:30-31	<i>Prayer Changes People's Wills</i>
January 14, 1996	Racial Harmony Sunday (Unfolding Bethlehem's Fresh Initiative #3)	Acts 17:26	<i>Racial Reconciliation</i>
January 21, 1996	Unfolding Bethlehem's Fresh Initiative #6	Various passages	<i>Challenging the Church and Culture with Truth</i>
February 04, 1996	Installation Sermon	2 Timothy 3:16-4:4	<i>Advice to Pastors: Preach the Word</i>
February 04, 1996	Topical Series: I am God Almighty: Be Fruitful and Multiply (1)	Genesis 35:11	<i>God's Purpose for Jacob and Bethlehem</i>
February 11, 1996	Topical Series: I am God Almighty: Be Fruitful and Multiply (2)	Colossians 4:2-6	<i>Walk in Wisdom: Seize the Moment</i>
February 18, 1996	Topical Series: I am God Almighty: Be Fruitful and Multiply (3)	1 Corinthians 9:19-23	<i>Becoming All Things to All Men to Save Some</i>
February 25, 1996	Topical Series: I am God Almighty: Be Fruitful and Multiply (4)	Psalms 78:1-8	<i>Raising Children Who Are Confident in God</i>
March 03, 1996	Topical Series: I am God Almighty: Be Fruitful and Multiply (5)	John 10:16	<i>I Have Other Sheep</i>
March 10, 1996	The Master Planning Process at Bethlehem	Matthew 5:21-26	<i>Getting Right with God and Each Other</i>
March 17, 1996	Commitment Sunday of "Freeing Future" (1)	Psalms 40:16	<i>Let All Who Seek Thee Rejoice and Be Glad in Thee; Let Those Who Love Thy Salvation Say Continually, "The Lord Be Magnified"</i>
March 24, 1996	Commitment Sunday of "Freeing Future" (2)	Luke 11:1-13	<i>When God Says, "Not Now"</i>
March 31, 1996	Palm Day/ A Series on Hebrew (1)	Hebrews 1:1-4	<i>In These Last Days, God Has Spoken by a Son</i>
April 04, 1996	Maundy Thursday/A Series on Hebrew (2)	Hebrews 1:1-4	<i>He Made Purification of Sins</i>
April 07, 1996	Easter Sunday/A Series on Hebrew (3)	Hebrews 1:1-4	<i>He Sat Down at the Right Hand of Majesty</i>
April 14, 1996	A Series on Hebrew (4)	Hebrews 1	<i>Jesus Christ: Infinitely Superior to Angels</i>
April 28, 1996	A Series on Hebrew (5)	Hebrews 2:1-4	<i>The Danger of Drifting from the Word</i>

<sup>1</sup> This figure depends on the following sources: John Piper, "1996 Sermons," Desiring God, <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/by-date/1996> (accessed September 19, 2011).

May 05, 1996	A Series on Hebrew (6)	Hebrews 2:1-4	<i>Spoken, Confirmed, Witnessed: a Great Salvation</i>
May 19, 1996	A Series on Hebrew (7)	Hebrews 2:1-9	<i>Who Rules the World to Come?</i>
May 26, 1996	A Series on Hebrew (8)	Hebrews 2:9	<i>For Whom Did Jesus Taste Death?</i>
June 02, 1996	A Series on Hebrew (9)	Hebrews 2:9-13	<i>Our Captain Made Perfect Through Sufferings</i>
June 16, 1996	125 <sup>th</sup> Anniversaries of the Church	Jeremiah 32:36-42	<i>Sustained by Sovereign Grace—Forever</i>
June 23, 1996	A Series on Hebrew (10)	Hebrews 2:14-18	<i>Jesus Is Able to Help Those Who Are Tempted</i>
August 04, 1996	A Series on Hebrew (11)	Hebrews 3:1-6	<i>Jesus: Worthy of More Glory than Moses</i>
August 11, 1996	A Series on Hebrew (12)	Hebrews 3:7-19	<i>Do Not Harden Your Heart in the Day of Trouble</i>
August 18, 1996	A Series on Hebrew (13)	Hebrews 3:12-19	<i>Eternal Security Is a Community Project</i>
September 01, 1996	A Series on Hebrew (14)	Hebrews 4:1-11	<i>Be Diligent to Enter God's Rest!</i>
September 08, 1996	A Series on Hebrew (15)	Hebrews 4:12-13	<i>The Word of God: Living, Active, Sharp</i>
September 15, 1996	A Series on Hebrew (16)	Hebrews 4:14-5:3	<i>Draw Near to the Throne of Grace with Confidence</i>
September 22, 1996	A Series on Hebrew (17)	Hebrews 5:4-10	<i>He Is the Source of Eternal Salvation for All Who Obey Him</i>
September 29, 1996	A Series on Hebrew (18)	Hebrews 5:11-14	<i>By This Time You Ought to Be Teachers</i>
October 06, 1996	A Series on Hebrew (19)	Hebrews 6:1-3	<i>Let Us Press On to Maturity</i>
October 13, 1996	A Series on Hebrew (20)	Hebrews 6:4-8	<i>When Is Saving Repentance Impossible?</i>
October 20, 1996	A Series on Hebrew (21)	Hebrews 6:9-12	<i>The Full Assurance of Hope to the End</i>
November 03, 1996	A Series on Hebrew (22)	Romans 15:20	<i>A Passion for the Supremacy of Christ—Where He Is Not Named</i>
November 10, 1996	A Series on Hebrew (23)	Hebrews 6:13-18	<i>When Does God Swear?</i>
November 17, 1996	A Series on Hebrew (24)	Hebrews 6:19-20	<i>Hope Anchored in Heaven</i>
November 24, 1996	Celebration of Freeing the Future: Being Debt Free as a Church	1 Chronicles 29:6-20	<i>From Thy Hand We Have Given Thee</i>
December 01, 1996	Advent/A Series on Hebrew (25)	Hebrews 7:1-25	<i>Jesus: From Melchizedek to Eternal Savior</i>
December 08, 1996	Advent/A Series on Hebrew (26)	Hebrews 7:26-8:5	<i>Our High Priest is the Son of God Perfect Forever</i>
December 15, 1996	Advent/A Series on Hebrew (27)	Hebrews 8:6-13	<i>Jesus: Mediator of a Better Covenant, Part 1</i>
December 22, 1996	Christmas/A Series on Hebrew (28)	Hebrews 8:6-13	<i>Jesus: Mediator of a Better Covenant, Part 2</i>
December 29, 1996	End of Year	John 15:1-8	<i>Praying From The Fullness of The Word</i>

## APPENDIX B

## Series Sermons of John Piper (1980–2011)

	A Series of Book by Date	Topical Series by Date
1980 -1981	<i>Psalms</i> July 20 - September 24 (8)	
	<i>The Gospel of Luke</i> November 09, 1980 – February 15, 1981 (10)	
1982	<i>2 Peter: Precious &amp; Magnificent Promises</i> April 25 - June 20 (9)	<i>The Truth &amp; Beauty of Jesus Christ</i> February 7 - March 28 (7)
	<i>The Minor Prophets</i> September 19 - December 26 (11)	
1983	<i>Galatians: Broken by His Cross, Healed by His Spirit</i> January 23 - August 28 (21)	<i>Desiring God</i> September 11 – November 13 (9)
		<i>The Biblical Covenants</i> November 27 – December 18 (4)
1984	<i>Ruth: Sweet &amp; Bitter Providence</i> July 01- July 22 (4)	<i>The Person &amp; Work of the Holy Spirit</i> February 5- June 10 (20)
	<i>Jude: Contend for the Faith</i> November 25, 1984 (1)	<i>Hallowed be Thy Name: Eight Sermons on the Names of God</i> September 16 – November 4 (8)
		<i>The Works of the Devil: Overcome by Christ</i> December 2 – 23 (4)
1985	<i>1 John: Let Us Walk in the Light</i> January 27 - June 23 (19)	<i>Why We Need a Savior</i> December 3 – 22 (3)
	<i>Job: Five Sermons on Suffering</i> July 07 - August 04 (5)	
	<i>Romans 8:28-30: All Things Work for Good</i> October 13, 1985 – November 03, 1985 (7)	
1986	<i>The Beatitudes</i> January 26 – March 16 (8)	<i>Hope in God!</i> April 6 – July 27 (17)
	<i>Faith And Everyday Life: Ephesians 4:17-5:20</i> September 07 – November 23 (8)	<i>Preparing to Receive Christ</i> November 30 – December 21 (4)
1987	<i>2 Thessalonians: Lo! He Comes With Clouds Descending</i> August 23 – September 06 (5)	<i>The Pleasures of God</i> January 25 – April 12 (12)
	<i>Malachi: The Sun of Righteousness Will Rise</i> October 04 – December 27 (11)	<i>Risk and the Cause of God</i> April 26 – May 10 (3)
		<i>Barnabas: A Maker of Leaders</i> July 5 – 19 (3)
1988	<i>1 Corinthians: The Present Power of Christ Crucified</i> January 17 – March 13 (9)	<i>The Doctrine of the Perseverance of the Saints</i> April 10 – April 24 (3)
	<i>The Great Invitation: A Sermon Series on Isaiah 55</i> July 31 – August 28 (5)	<i>Battling Unbelief</i> September 11 - December 18 (12)
1989	<i>Psalm 50</i> October 08 - 15 (2)	<i>Quest for Joy</i> January 8- March 26 (6)
	<i>John 1: The Word Became Flesh and Dwelt Among Us</i> December 03 – 24 (4)	<i>Biblical Manhood and Womanhood</i> May 14 – June 25 (7)

	<i>Eldership: Serving the Lord with Humility, Tears, and Trials</i> April 2 – May 7 (6)	<i>Why We Exist as a Church: The Three Sacrifices</i> September 17 – October 1 (3)
1990-1991	<i>Acts: What Jesus Did After the Beginning</i> September 16, 1990 – December 15, 1991 (36)	<i>Are Signs and Wonders for Today?</i> January 07, 1990 – April 08, 1990 (13)
1993-1994	<i>Jesus Christ in Isaiah 53</i> March 14, 1993 – April 4, 1993(3)	<i>The Church: A Covenant Community</i> January 31 – March 7 (6)
	<i>1 Peter: Grow in the Grace &amp; Knowledge of Christ</i> September 13, 1993 – November 27, 1994 (32)	<i>The Righteous are As Bold as a Lion</i> April 25 – June 20 (9)
	<i>John 3:16</i> December 04 – 25, 1994 (4)	<i>What Happens When You Die?</i> July 18 – August 08 (4)
1995-1997	<i>Luke 15: This Man Receives Sinners</i> August 13, 1995 – September 03, 1995 (4)	<i>A Hunger for God</i> January 01, 1995 – February 19, 1995 (8)
	<i>Hebrews</i> March 31, 1996 – October 19, 1997 (52)	<i>The Greatest of These is Love</i> March 12, 1995 – June 25, 1995 (15)
		<i>The Mission and Vision of Bethlehem Baptist Church</i> September 24, 1995 – January 21, 1996 (12)
		<i>What is Baptism?</i> May 04, 1997 – May 25, 1997 (4)
		<i>Worship God</i> November 09, 1997 – February 22, 1998 (14)
1998-2006	<i>Romans: The Greatest Letter Ever Written</i> April 26, 1998 – December 13, 1998. January 31, 1999 – December 19, 1999. June 11, 2000 – August 31, 2003. November 02, 2003 – December 14, 2003. February 01, 2004 – March 23, 2004. June 06, 2004 – December 18, 2005. August 20, 2006 - December 24, 2006 (225)	<i>Education for Exultation</i> January 30, 2000 – April 16, 2000 (11)
		<i>Why We Eat the Lord's Supper</i> August 03, 2003 – August 24, 2003 (3)
		<i>Treasuring Christ Together, 2003</i> September 07, 2003 – October 05, 2003 (5)
2007	<i>Psalms 8: The Peculiar Mark of Majesty, Part 1, 2</i> April 01, 2007 – April 08, 2007 (2)	<i>Marriage, Christ, and Covenant: One Flesh for the Glory of God</i> January 28 – July 01 (14)
		<i>Spectacular Sins and Their Global Purpose in the Glory of Christ</i> August 12 – October 07 (7)
		<i>Treasuring Christ Together, 2007</i> October 28 – November 11 (3)
		<i>You Must Be Born Again</i> (14) November 18, 2007 – April 13, 2008
2008-	<i>Psalms: Thinking and Feeling with God</i>	<i>Baptism and Church</i>

2011	May 25, 2008 – June 29, 2008 (6)	<i>Membership</i> July 13 – 23, 2008 (3)
	<i>The Gospel of John</i> September 21, 2008 – December 21, 2008. April 05, 2009 – December 20, 2009. <i>(Eight Month Leave: May 1, 2010 – December, 26 2010)</i> January 30, 2011 -	

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### MINISTERIAL

License: October 2001, Chongshin Theological Seminary.

Ordination: October 2002, Daegu Gachang Presbyterian Church.

### PROFESSIONAL

Associate Pastor, Daegu Dongbu Presbyterian Church, 2002-2006.

### MILITARIAL

Enlisted and discharged from the service (Korean Army), 1992-1994