

Preaching through a book of the Bible

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THE PEOPLE TOOK A WHILE TO ADJUST TO THAT KIND OF PREACHING. MY SERMONS WEREN'T AS BOMBASTIC AND EMOTIONAL AS BEFORE. BUT PRETTY SOON THEY REALIZED THEY WERE LEARNING GOD'S WORD.

Jerry Vines

**THOUGH OUR STYLE WOULD BE
CONTEMPORARY, I DIDN'T WANT TO
MAKE THE GOSPEL MORE 'RELEVANT' BY
ADJUSTING ITS MESSAGE.**

Greg Laurie

**What makes a
preacher an expositor?**

- An expository preacher will make two major commitments:
 - A commitment to the expository sermon.
 - A commitment to the expository series.

The expository sermon

- A sermon in which the main idea and the supporting ideas of the preacher's message reflect the main idea and supporting ideas of a passage of Scripture.
- Nehemiah 8:8 presents a model of exposition.

Nehemiah 8:8

- “They read *distinctly* from the book” — “distinctly” carries the idea of making something clear.
- “... they gave the sense” — they explained the insights and principles from God’s Law.
- “... and helped them to understand the reading” — they helped listeners grasp both the meaning and application of the message.

4 characteristics of an expository sermon

- It contains a clear statement of the primary biblical idea that is legitimately derived from a passage.
- The structure of the sermon must be consistent with the structure of the text.
- It must be relevant to the listeners.
- The idea, outline, applications, illustrations, and assertions must fit with each other as well as with the context and intent of the biblical text.

— Walter L. Liefeld, *New Testament Exposition*

The expository series

- A series of expository sermons designed to move sequentially through a Bible book or an extended portion of a Bible book.
- The goal of the expository series is the same as that of Paul in Acts 20:26-27: to teach the church the whole counsel of the Word of God.

The meaning of “exposition”

- Putting something out in public view, uncovering it, and opening it up.
- The purpose of the expository sermon is to uncover and show the listener what is there in one portion of the biblical text.
- The purpose of the expository series is to open up an entire book of the Bible, systematically, to the listener.

- For many expository preachers, preaching through a book of the Bible is the defining characteristic of exposition.

“By expository preaching, I mean that method of pulpit discourse which consists in the consecutive interpretation, and practical enforcement, of a book of the sacred canon.”

–William Taylor, *The Ministry of the Word*, 1876

“Expository preaching is the consecutive treatment of some book or extended portion of Scripture on which the preacher has concentrated head and heart, brain and brawn, over which he has thought and wept and prayed, until it has yielded up its inner secret, and the spirit of it has passed into his spirit.”

–F. B. Meyer, *Expository Preaching Plans and Methods*, 1912

Advantages of preaching through Bible books

- Preaching expository series helps teach the whole counsel of the Word of God.
- The biblical text is determining which subjects will be addressed from the pulpit and how they will be addressed.
- The expository series honors the nature of Scripture itself.
- Both the preacher and the listener gain an understanding of how each text fits in context.

- The expository series puts the highest emphasis on the Word of God.
- The congregation becomes aware that Scripture is guiding the pastor's entire preaching ministry.
- Preaching through books creates a deep knowledge of the Bible as a whole.
- The pastor will grow in his commitment to biblical truth and the congregation will develop a hunger and thirst for Scripture.

- The expository sermon makes the preacher work hard.
- Preaching through a book forces the preacher to dig into the Bible and study the text grammatically, historically, and theologically.
- The expository series requires that the preacher devise interesting ways of communicating biblical truth.

- The expository series ensures balance in the preaching ministry.
- The breadth of material included in a single Bible book is often amazing.
- Preaching through books forces the preacher to address subjects he may have otherwise neglected.

- The expository series meets the basic needs of the congregation.
- The needs addressed in the pages of Scripture are the same issues facing humanity to today.
- Preaching through books removes anxiety about what to preach.

Options for preaching the expository series

- Unit by unit through an entire book
- Unit by unit through a section of a book
- One major passage from each chapter
- Selected passages from a book

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Preparing for the expository series

1. Select the book.

- Each book of the Bible is rich with material that will minister God's grace to your congregation.
- Ensure that you include a variety of types of Bible books in the course of your preaching ministry.
- You might choose a book based on congregational needs, your pastoral vision, or some other way the Holy Spirit might lead.

2. Secure helpful
commentaries and other
resources

- Preaching through books is a helpful and economic means of building the preacher's library.
- Gather basic Bible study tools, such as concordances, lexicons, dictionaries, and Bible software.
- Also buy several trustworthy commentaries on the book you have chosen, considering the commentaries at three levels.

“Levels” of commentaries

- “Heavyweight” commentaries are analytical, critical, or exegetical works that address technical details about the language of the biblical text.
- “Middleweight” commentaries look at a verse at a time, but digest and explain the theological details of the text.
- “Lightweight” commentaries are sermonic and devotional treatments that can help with illustration and application.

3. Read through the book repeatedly.

- Read the book as many times as possible before the expository series begins.
- By reading repeatedly, you will become more familiar with the “flow” of ideas or action in the book and increase your understanding of the context of each passage.

- Read *devotionally* for personal application.
- You are not ready to preach a book to your people until the Holy Spirit has made its message a living reality in your own heart.

- Read *panoramically* to master the content.
- Identity the author and audience.
- Determine the book's overarching theme and purpose.
- Note significant words in the book.
- Try to capsulize the book's theology.

- Read *homiletically* with your audience in mind.
- Begin thinking of the ways you will preach the book's content to your congregation.
- Consider needs in your congregation that correspond to needs addressed by the book.

4. Divide the book into preaching units.

- Begin with the paragraph.
- Follow the course of the narrative.
- Consult other sources for help.

5. Determine the length of the series.

- Some pastors and authors recommend 6 to 24 weeks as a typical series length.
- Others say length of series is immaterial.
- Your particular preaching context will help you determine the best length for a series.
- “Mini-series” can be helpful for promotion and “resetting” when dealing with a longer Bible book.

6. Schedule the series on the preaching calendar.

- Give the series a thematic title.
- Consider an overview sermon at the beginning of the series.
- Enter the series title and book, sermon number, working title, and preaching text for each sermon on your preaching calendar.