

In the Pulpit, Unstuck

Preparing Preachers for the Inner Experience of Preaching

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Abstract

This paper asserts that while classic preacher-training tends to focus on the mastery of objective understanding and skills, there is a corresponding inner world of subjective experience where beginning preachers are prone to come 'unstuck', and yet which remains largely unaddressed in training. Through a consideration of the published training approaches of Bryan Chapell, Haddon Robinson and John Chapman, we draw some preliminary conclusions about the cause for such an apparent skew in training focus, and suggest reasons and means for correcting it.

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I vividly remember my first 'trainee sermon', delivered in front of a first-year preaching class. I was nervous about preaching. I was also stressed about an unresolved incident some days earlier. But I was completely unready for the way these factors would impact my preaching that day. It came out nothing like I had planned. I raced through the script, overly fast and overly serious, and half-yelling. It was awkwardly intense. Most of the audience could not look up.

My understanding of the Bible passage was not the issue. I was told my message was solid. And as a school teacher I felt fine about the idea of public speaking. But for some unplanned and unforeseen reason, this was not going well at all.

And then suddenly it was over. And so, bewildered and confused, I sat down, unsure of what had just happened.

Which part of preaching class had prepared me for this experience? A classic homiletics course will typically prepare trainee preachers for the *objective aspects* of preaching, focussed on the sermon and its delivery as perceived by an audience. We teach sermon preparation and delivery skills, and we teach about the person of the preacher in terms of objective disciplines.

But the reality is that the preacher experiences the act of preaching *subjectively*. Standing to preach involves managing an unruly world of *internal experience* that is all at once physiological, psychological, emotional and spiritual. Beginning preachers are especially prone to experiencing overwhelming internal struggles, with everything from insecurity to conceit, from sweaty palms to an over-energised voice, from a desire for applause to a desire to run away. Even after faithful sermon preparation, it is here in this internal world that much preaching delivery (and some entire preaching ministries) can become horribly unstuck.

This paper seeks to explore the need to prepare trainee preachers for the subjective sensations and inner experiences involved with the preaching act. Suggestions are made toward framing formal training content in a way that might help attend to these concerns.

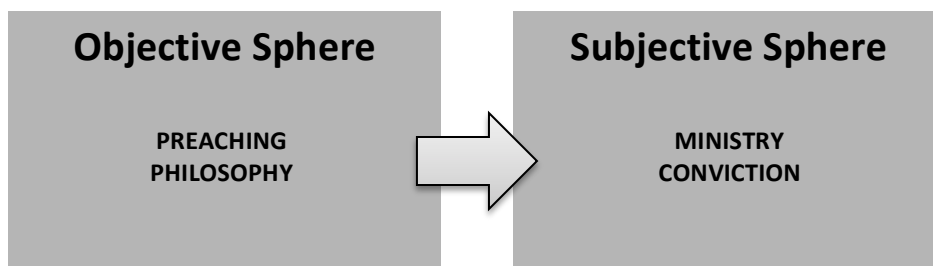
1. Preacher-Formation in Objective and Subjective Spheres

Homileticians may be able to study preaching purely objectively. But seminary students cannot. It is important to see that the training of preachers for preaching ministry is an exercise in *preacher-formation*, and this formation takes place in both objective *and* subjective spheres. Typical students of preaching study the skills and methods of preachers and preaching as they themselves experience *becoming preachers*.

The objective sphere is, of course, critical. Successful preacher-trainees will develop an objective understanding about preaching. They will learn to objectively evaluate ideas about preaching. They will learn how to practice objective preaching skills. They will grow in their understanding of the way audiences perceive their preaching, and learn to manage this, objectively.

But the subjective sphere is just as important. Trainee-preachers experience the act of preaching subjectively, and are learning to *understand and manage that experience*. For every objective preaching skill that must be mastered, there is a corresponding subjective preaching experience that trainee preachers must negotiated.

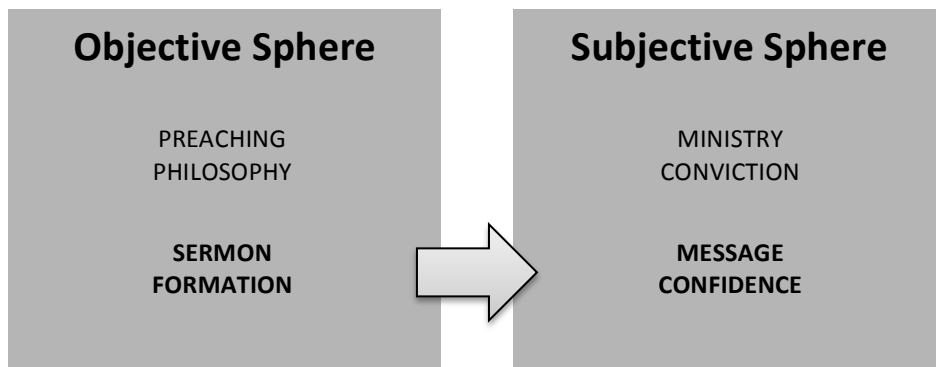
Consider the way this works in classic preacher training. For a start, every preaching school will affirm a certain **Preaching Philosophy**, based on a theological foundation. Such theology and philosophy may be studied and understood objectively. But, in the meantime, trainers of preachers hope that their trainees sense and experience certain **Ministry Convictions** that correspond to this philosophy. It is hoped that these convictions will give order and sense to the student's inner world of thoughts and feelings about the act of preaching.



Thus, for example, classic evangelicalism affirms a theology of preaching centred on a view of Scripture as the Word of God and of the Gospel of Christ Jesus as the true substance of preaching. The result is a philosophy of preaching focussed on 'Exposition' with a 'Gospel Hermeneutic' and a sincere expectation that God will act through the preaching of His word. But if preacher-training is about preacher-formation, then such objective understanding is not enough. Rather, it will be hoped that graduates genuinely *believe* in the significance of the Word of God, and that they *sense the power* of the gospel, and that they *feel both the validity and weightiness* of standing up to preach. Such beliefs, sensations, and feelings may waver and falter, but where they are lacking we are certainly concerned. In fact we hope that a training course in preaching sees such thoughts and feelings cultivated and strengthened.

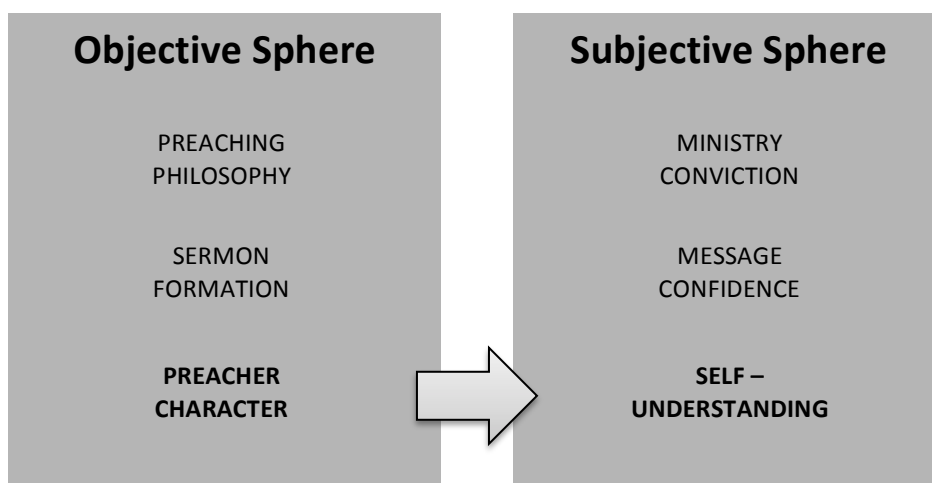
Then, after commending an appropriate Preaching Philosophy, a typical preacher-training course will go on to present a method of **Sermon Formation**. Again, this will be presented as a set of understandings and skills that can be objectively mastered. In the case of classic evangelical preaching schools or texts, this will include skills in Bible exegesis, sermon-writing, and sermon delivery. Students learn a grammatico-historical method of interpretation and gospel-centred hermeneutic. They master an expository sermon-writing pattern. They learn skills in proclaiming, illustrating, and applying the truths of scripture. Delivery skills are enhanced through attention to the voice and tone control and through the use movements and gestures.

But corresponding to this body of objective skills and understandings, surely teachers of preaching look for outcomes in the experiential inner-world of their students. Amidst an inner experience of confused thoughts, conflicting emotions and spiritual tensions, sermon writing involves an inner process of arriving at a subjective sense of **Message Confidence** – knowing the particular message at hand to be valuable to the audience and connected to God’s work in them. Such confidence may waver. But, again, where it is lacking we are concerned.



And finally, in addition to a treatment of Preaching Philosophy and instruction in Sermon Formation, typical preacher-training will address the question of **Preacher Character**. This will usually include exhortations to habits of prayer and godliness befitting the preacher’s role and message. There will also be a consideration of questions of individual style, with an emphasis on the need for authenticity.

But again, we note that just as preacher-trainees learn to objectively consider the significance of the preacher’s character in general, these trainee preachers are learning to understand the particular experiential dynamics of their own character in particular. The very act of preaching brings trainee-preachers face to face with an inner world of desires, fears and pressures. Every preacher’s preaching is affected in some way by this inner world. For some beginning preachers, the experience is disconcerting, for others it is debilitating. Thus, as much as trainee-preachers learn about the significance of the



preacher's character in the objective sphere, they will also be thrust into a process of **Self-Understanding** in the subjective sphere. Where self-understanding is lacking, preacher-formation is lacking.

So, the training of preachers can be seen as a process of preacher-formation, involving developments in both objective and subjective spheres. In the objective sphere, preaching trainees learn *about preaching*, and there they master objective skills. But in the subjective sphere, they experience and sense the process of *becoming the preacher*, and it is in this inner world they also need to develop.

If this is so, then do we see this reflected in the structure of formal training courses? To answer this question, we review two favoured preaching text books, noting the degree to which these texts attend to the objective and subjective spheres.

2. A Tendency to Exclude the Subjective Sphere

Let's consider two key beginner-level preaching texts that have significantly shaped the training of preachers in conservative evangelical circles.

(a) The Training Approach of Bryan Chapell

Bryan Chapell's, *Christ-Centred Preaching* may perhaps be taken as a representative 'text-book' for classic evangelical preacher training. In the objective sphere, Chapell places a major emphasis on securing a robust **Preaching Philosophy**. He offers a strong polemic in favour of a gospel-centred expository approach to preaching. In fact, of the three 'Parts' to his book, two are devoted to this concern. Part 1 ('Principles for Expository Preaching', pages 25-102), presents a well-developed theological foundation for preaching and a strong case for an expository philosophy. Part 3 ('A Theology of Christ-Centered Messages', pages 269-328), develops his philosophical framework yet further, with a focus on practical implications.

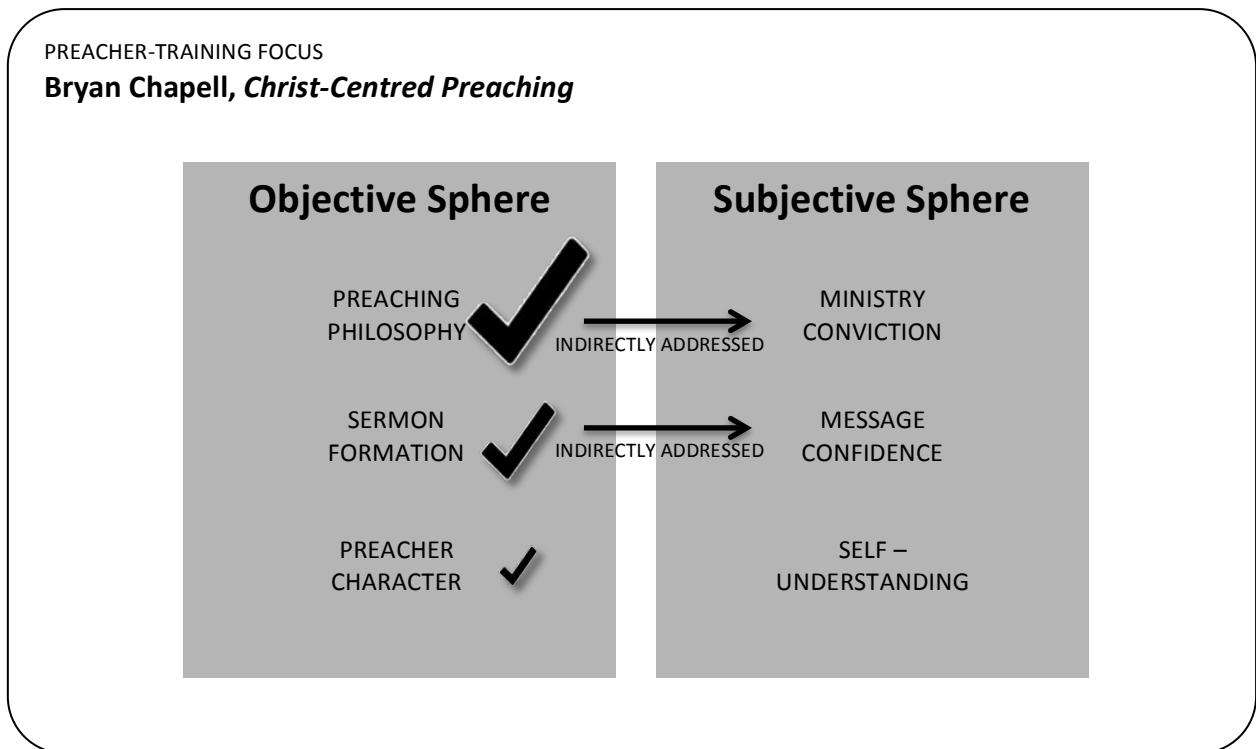
It is left to the remaining 'Part 2' of the book to present a practical method of **Sermon Formation**, but at every point this is very strongly tied back to the Word-confident philosophy of Part 1. Such concerns as 'Delivery' and 'Style' are featured only as an appendix to the book.

Chapell does recognise that the preaching act demands more than faithful Word-delivery. He sees in 2 Corinthians 6:3 a basis for commending the deliberate employment of *Ethos* (a commendable godliness of life) and *Pathos* (appropriate expressions of conviction) as apt accompaniments to the persuasive power of *Logos* (the presentation of the message itself).¹ This results in the necessity for **Preacher Character** to be marked by a 'humble boldness', which can only come from deep and abiding Word-confidence.²

¹ B Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), p34-39.

² *Ibid.*, p97.

The result is a preacher-training text that powerfully advocates a Word-confident expository philosophy that looks to recognize the power of God ‘inherent in the Word’.



We must agree that in the training and preparation of preachers, it is essential to secure and cultivate a strong confidence in the ‘power of the Word’. This goes a long way to addressing some questions of **Ministry Conviction**, and will certainly help preachers find grounds for **Message Confidence**. But Chapell does not directly address these at the level of subjective experience. When it comes to preachers managing any contrary thoughts or emotions, Chapel offers no serious treatment. Where the problem of pride is acknowledged in passing, Word-confidence offered is the simple solution:

“When preachers perceive the power that the Word holds, confidence in their calling grows, even as pride in their performance withers”.³

Again, Word-confidence is certainly essential, and will go a long way to helping preachers negotiate the subjective experience and equip beginning preachers for the overwhelming flood of inner emotions and thoughts associated with the preaching moment. But is ‘Word-confidence’ all there is to it? Is this all preaching trainees need?

Significantly, in Appendix 1 (‘A Philosophy of Delivery and Dress’), Chapell admits the problem of ‘intimidation’. It is noted that feelings of intimidation can tend to ‘flatten out’ the natural expressiveness of

³ Ibid., p30.

the preacher.⁴ Importantly, Chapell's solution at this point is to look to something *other* than mere Word-confidence. The preacher is to learn to 'plug in' to the 'power of natural expression',⁵ where this is achieved through the learned control of voice and gestures. A similar admission is made about the need to actively cultivate conviction, such that preachers need to actively harness 'the power of caring deeply about what you say'.⁶

So, while exhortations to Word-confidence do go a long way to helping preachers rightly order their thoughts and emotions, in the end, even for Chapell, this paradigm is not comprehensive. Admissions are made concerning the physiological effects of intimidation and the need to cultivate a sense of gravity in the preaching moment. These are small but important steps toward helping trainee preachers recognize and manage the internal and subjective dimensions of preaching.

(b) The Training Approach of Haddon Robinson

Like Chapell, Haddon Robinson's *Biblical Preaching* is a standard text for beginning preachers in evangelical seminaries. He too begins with a presentation of **Preaching Philosophy**, but for Robinson, it is not the main training focus. Delivered in the space of one chapter, his presentation of preaching philosophy lacks the robustness, vigor and conviction-building quality of Chapell's rousing polemic. Rather, Robinson's training focus is framed around presenting his method of **Sermon Formation**, and this is highly-developed. For Robinson, such practical matters as grooming, movement gesture and voice, are not assigned to an appendix. Rather, they are part of his formula for 'How to Preach so that People Will Listen'.⁷ He does not offer any sustained treatment of the question of **Preacher Character**.⁸ Only in the last four pages ('A Final Word') is this addressed, with a call to be humbly dependent on God.

Thus in the Objective sphere, his training focuses almost exclusively on a sermon writing method, centred on the need for absolute clarity of meaning. Robinson makes a compelling case for the learning of skills in the handling and managing of ideas⁹ as a means to harness *the power of purpose*.¹⁰ For Robinson, absolute clear-headedness in preaching is a profoundly 'moral matter', since the consequence for hearers will come down to 'life and death'.¹¹ Consequently, trainee preachers must work hard to learn the disciplines of internalizing and mastering their preaching ideas so as to do them greatest justice.

⁴ Ibid., p330.

⁵ Ibid., p331.

⁶ Ibid., p338.

⁷ Ibid., pp201-220.

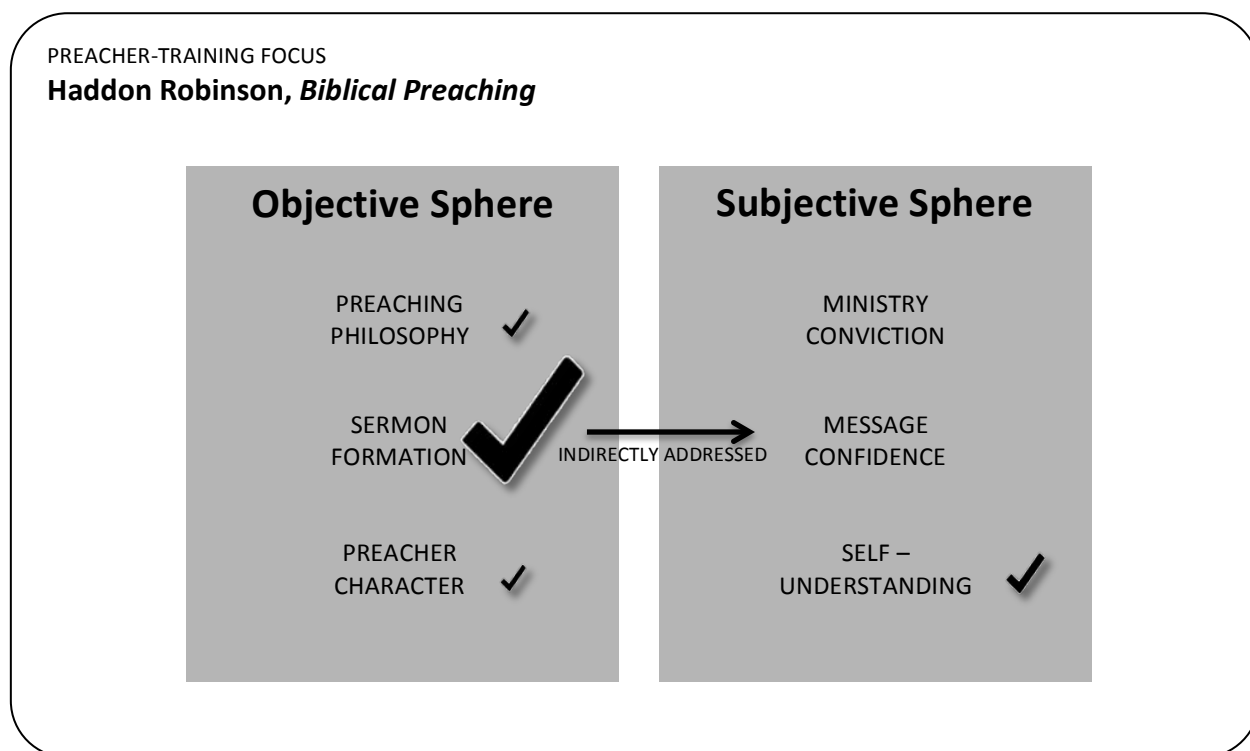
⁸ H. Robinson, *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), p221-224.

⁹ Ibid., p33-41.

¹⁰ Ibid., p106.

¹¹ Ibid., p188.

It is in this way that Robinson’s approach to preacher training offers considerable help toward addressing the subjective experience of preaching. His strong focus on the ‘ordering of the mind’ and the significance of preaching-purpose will indirectly impact the subjective experience of seeking **Message Conviction**. But Robinson is prepared to go further in his prescriptions for the thought-lives of preachers. The preacher is to learn to actively cultivate an ‘emotional set’ conducive to ‘strong delivery’.¹² Trainee preachers are to learn to adopt attitudes of ‘sincerity, enthusiasm and deep earnestness’ so as to overcome communication



barriers.¹³ And so Robinson does provide some measures toward equipping the trainee preacher to understand, manage cultivate their internal world, at level of thoughts and emotions. Significantly, his treatment of the voice includes an experiential in focus, helping preachers understand the physiology and sensation of respiration and voice generation.¹⁴ Robinson is attending to the subjective experience, albeit in small ways.

Now, it is for good reasons that classic preacher-training majors on the objective sphere, at least at the level of formal publications. Both theologically and practically, this is where the main focus should be. As beginning preachers grappling with the subjective experience of preaching, most of the help they need will come from rightly understanding such objective notions as a robust Preaching Philosophy, a well-thought out process of Sermon Formation, and a clear sense of Preacher Character that preaching ministry calls for.

¹² Ibid., p204.

¹³ Ibid., p205.

¹⁴ Ibid., p214.

We have no argument with this emphasis. Our concern in this paper is question the adequacy of an equipping paradigm that largely ignores the subjective sphere.

3. Preachers Coming Unstuck in the Subjective Sphere

My own early experiences of preaching were fraught with internal struggles, and, 15 years later I note that I have continuous need to grow in understanding and regulation of this interior world. Meanwhile, I witness young preaching trainees travelling the same pathway.

Most students experience nerves, but will push on in preaching nonetheless, in the hope that experience will solve this. But meanwhile, the sensations of anxiety are not inconsequential. The preacher's performance is impacted by physiological effects that need explanation. Are there not strategies that can be taught to manage this internal world?

Others report such feelings of profound inadequacy or struggle so acutely with doubts and insecurities that they cannot see a way to continue very far in preaching. For many, the idea of public speaking itself carries powerful negative associations, quite apart from any spiritual overlay. Such thoughts and feelings are not benign, but rather effect the whole process of sermon formation from exegesis to delivery, and beyond into the hours and days following. Yet others know too well the accusations of Satan in these moments.

For some, the internal battles are so overwhelming that the vision of becoming a preacher is very hard to maintain at all. And so this email came from a preaching trainee:

I am struggling with preaching. I have spoken to my counsellor about it and continue to. I don't feel adequate enough to preach. I feel too broken. Attached to that, I feel like no one wants to hear what I have to say. I have grown up being told that I have nothing of worth to contribute. I have grown up believing that no one hears me. When I have spoken out, this was emphasised as I was reprimanded, 'put back in my place' and/or ignored. I logically recognise that this is not God's truth for me. My heart believes otherwise.¹⁵

Long before this student preaches a sermon, the chances of 'successfully preaching' are crippled by a devastating mix of subjective judgments, powerful emotions, mysterious and painful associations. This student's 'problem' is not a lack of theological conviction, or of preaching skill. Objectively, the student understands and believes in preaching. The student handles Scripture responsibly and has demonstrable gifts in teaching others. But in grappling with the internal and subjective world of emotions and thoughts, there are psychological and spiritual dimensions at play that mere Word-confidence will only go so far in addressing. While the intensity of this student's experience is not typical of every trainee preacher, it is true that each component of this experience is not uncommon. How does preacher training account for this?

Other students confess struggling with overwhelming pride and conceit, as unworthy desires arise

¹⁵ Email received from preaching trainee. Identifying details withheld.

‘uninvited’ in the preaching moment, or immediately following. The hunger for approval is real. But again, how are trainee preachers being urged and equipped to recognize such desires for what they are?

A single preaching class group¹⁶ will include people with various character dispositions, from introverts to extroverts. Some will be over-confident, others under-confident; some overly emotional, others completely insensitive. Some will be mature in their faith, others immature. Some will be carrying painful past experiences, others are operating out of complete naivety. Some will be facing pressures peculiar to their particular place in life or a connected to a ministry setting. Someone may be grappling with a significant psychological disorder. Certainly all will be experiencing the normal human tangle of desires, fears and emotions: but some will have reflected carefully on these, others will have not even begun.

Accusations of Satan, over-excitedness, fuzzy-headedness, profound doubts - it is not uncommon to see a very fine Bible student, with a very fine sermon, come completely unstuck in the pulpit¹⁷.

Certainly a preaching class is not going to be the right place to sort through the detailed inner world of each student. But can preacher training afford to leave the subjective sphere unaddressed? Might there not be a helpful degree of acknowledgment, orientation and equipping offered to trainee preachers in this regard?

4. Intuitively Attending to the Subjective

The reality is that although formal instruction may not attend seriously to the inner experience of preaching, successful trainers of preachers invariably do provide their students such help. In practice, preacher-formation demands direct attention to the subjective sphere, as trainers ‘coach’ their trainees in how to deal with the mix of thoughts and sensations involved in preaching.

Trainees are routinely and deliberately encouraged and reassured, challenged and inspired. Helpful attitudes are actively cultivated, unhelpful attitudes are actively rebuked. Sometimes a student will need very specific prayer for some internal battle. Sometimes a student will be referred for more serious attention. Successful preacher-training will invariably attend to the inner world of the preacher, even if at a completely informal level.

And then outside the class-room, successful trainee preachers will no doubt seek and receive ‘moral support’ from others. And this does not change as preachers go on into established preaching ministries. Invariably, there will be networks of trusted friends and loving spouses playing the critical role of helping the preacher to understand and manage their internal world. Whether in the form of a timely ‘pep talk’, or an apt word in season, or in a moment of tough love, every preacher’s development is served by the efforts of others to help them address the subjective experience of preaching.

¹⁶ The following paragraph of generalized descriptions reflects the diversity found in an actual preaching class.

¹⁷ Without fail, I have seen this happen in every year of my involvement in preacher training.

So what might it look like to include such attention in the formalised preacher-training? As it happens, John Chapman has taken an approach to preacher-training that offers a surprising degree of overt attention to the subjective.

The Training Approach of John Chapman

John Chapman's *Setting Hearts on Fire*, represents a neat preaching manual for beginning preachers. The text offers a brief but compelling **Preaching Philosophy**, before going on to present his (famous) formulation for **Sermon Formation**. But significantly, Chapman's approach bears an overt concern to shape the training lessons around the developing self-identity of the preacher. Unlike Chapell and Robinson, Chapman makes the developing **Preacher Character** his *primary category of training*. This concern becomes the frame for the two parts of the book, entitled 'Servant of the Word' and 'Servant of the People'.¹⁸

The result is striking. From the earliest chapters, Chapman is attending to the thoughts, emotions and spiritual state of the training preacher. Like Chapell, he sees a strong Word-confidence as the antidote to both pride and despair,¹⁹ But Chapman seems equally concerned to take note of the way the preacher is to sense and experience this confidence. An entire chapter explores the role the preacher can expect to play in God's work, encouraging healthy thinking and warding off unhelpful thinking.²⁰ Then, through the central chapters of the book, Chapman's step-by-step exposition of his method is cast with a strikingly 'experiential' feel as the trainee preacher is offered a sense of what it actually feels like to successfully implement the espoused methodology. For a beginning preacher, uncertain and disoriented by the strange context of sermon preparation and sermon delivery, it is surprisingly reassuring to hear John Chapman admit where he struggles and how he deals with it.

Along the way, Chapman is constantly alerting the trainee to unworthy motives and unhelpful sensations²¹, and offers practical remedies that address the mind, heart and spirit of the preacher. Two pages of practical advice directly address the 'Temptations of Speakers', including Pride, Doubt, and Inattention.²² These become powerful teaching moments for trainee preachers. The 'coaching tone' of the text is remarkably reassuring as Chapman takes seriously the beginning preacher's internal battles, and knowingly helps them through. In addition to warning preachers, Chapman is equally concerned to encourage a positive cultivation of such sensations as passion, emotion and love.²³

A most telling inclusion, is Chapman's brief but very helpful section on 'Post-Talk Syndrome'. Here he specifically addresses an aspect of preaching that deals directly out of the subjective sphere. He acknowledges the reality of a very common and perplexing set of internal and subjective sensations experienced by many beginning preachers in association with the moments immediately following a

¹⁸ J. Chapman, *Setting Hearts on Fire: A Guide to Giving Evangelistic Talks* (Kingsford, NSW: Matthias Media, 1999), pp9-10.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p24.

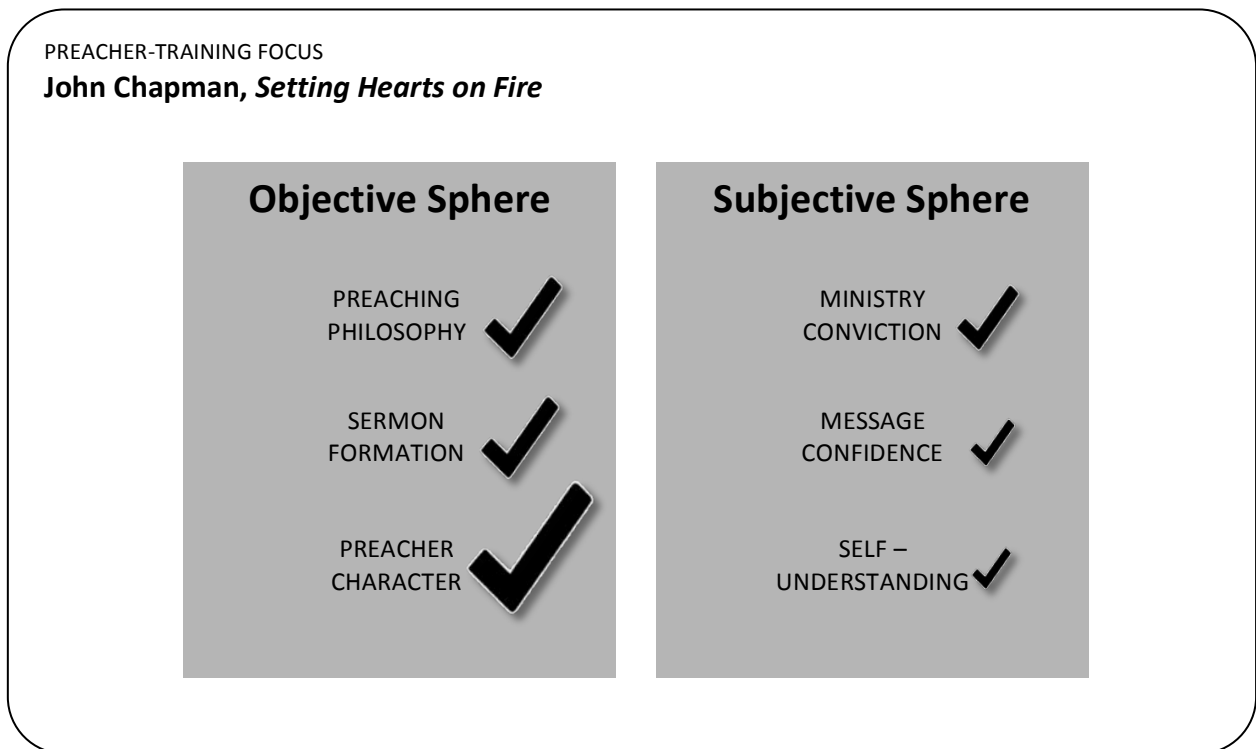
²⁰ *Ibid.*, Chapter 5, pp71-80.

²¹ For example, *ibid.*, pp143-145.

²² *Ibid.*, pp166-167.

²³ *Ibid.*, pp169-180.

preaching event. The preacher’s perceptions of themselves, of others, and of the preaching event, become distorted by a post-adrenaline ‘low’.²⁴ Simply by explaining his own efforts to identify and manage this experience, Chapman is equipping trainee preachers to recognize and handle an aspect of preaching that can be very disconcerting and confusing for the beginner.



In this way, Chapman’s formal training materials can be seen to address both the objective skills and the subjective experience involved in preacher formation. In paying due attention to the subjective, we suggest that Chapman is merely formalizing an aspect of preacher-training that tends to ‘happen’ to some degree in informal ways in the seminary and ministry setting.

5. The Promise of Equipping in the Subjective Sphere

We suggest that there are significant training gains to be made from an approach to preacher training that pays due attention to both the objective and subjective aspects of preacher-formation, both in general, and in the case of meeting some specific training scenarios.

(a) Equipping Preachers in General

First consider the benefits to preacher training in general. Anecdotal evidence suggests that students very much appreciate John Chapman’s efforts to account for the subjective experience. Perhaps it is not hard to

²⁴ Ibid., pp167-168.

see that at least some level of formal and intentional equipping for the subjective sphere is likely to benefit most trainee preachers. It is significant to note that in recent decades other fields of ministry training have taken this kind of training focus seriously.

For example, for some time now, trainers in the field of pastoral studies have heeded those writers and thinkers who have urged a more active cultivation of self-awareness and relational awareness among trainee pastors.²⁵ Before attending to the pastoral needs of others, trainee ministers are taught to attend to their own thoughts and feelings. They are taught to reflect deeply on their relationship to God and others, learning habits of awareness and reflection so as to be better placed to reflect on the experience of others.

Similarly, in the field of pastoral counseling, ministry training focuses much on self-understanding. Would-be counselors are taught how to attend to their emotional responses and consider the degree to which these are shaping perceptions and forming self-identity. Some will be naturally overly-aware of these responses, and need strategies for processing this. Others will be under-aware of their emotional responses and need strategies for becoming more attentive. It is not hard to imagine that some specific self-awareness training might be successfully brought across into preacher-training.

Where a preacher-trainee struggles with feeling judged by her audience, this student can be taught how to healthily question or suspend these convictions about the judgments others are supposedly making. As a preacher-trainee struggles with being authentic, he can be taught how to cultivate a self-identity that is neither defined by, nor detached from, the emotional setting at hand. Lessons from the field of counseling studies offer real promise for enabling preachers to deal with the inner world of preaching experience.²⁶

But in addition to such general equipping and enabling, we suggest that there are a number of specific training needs that would be served well by a more deliberate focus on the subjective experience of preaching.

(b) Equipping Different People-Types

Perhaps classic preacher training tends to attract those who 'know they are good up front'. Certainly, where a training paradigm fails to help trainees with fears and insecurities, a certain 'screening' process has been inadvertently introduced whereby those with greater 'confidence' are more likely to progress. Offering training attention to the subjective experience of preaching might well be part of the way

²⁵ Notions of Soul Care (David Benner), I-Thou awareness (Martin Buber), Relational sensitivity (Henri Nouwen), etc.

²⁶ Perhaps the most promising connection between psychological studies and preacher training might come through the work of Leslie Greenberg and Sandra Clare Pavio in *Working with Emotions in Psychotherapy* (New York: Guildford Press, 2003). Principles of Emotion-Focused Therapy (EFT) offer mechanisms for learning awareness, regulation and transformation of emotional responses.

preacher trainers equip and enable an increasingly-broad range of personality types to enter and continue in preaching ministry.²⁷

On this front, we note the work of John Sweetman in exploring the way that different personality types (as suggested by the Myers-Briggs scheme) might produce different preacher types. If the conclusions are valid, then these different personality types not only exhibit particular stylistic tendencies in preaching, but they also exhibit predictable patterns of thoughts and feeling at a subjective level.²⁸ Perhaps some fruitful further research might be made into the notion that different personality types might benefit from some tailored training content that enables them to understand and manage their *particular* internal world.

We consider too the possibility that generational and societal changes may make subjective analysis more necessary. It may be that previous generations of young people (and possibly more likely young men of higher class) grew up with some expectation of needing to offer public address. In a day where a capacity for ‘speech-making’ and oration were a more obvious part of a well-groomed up-bringing, preacher training may have had more of a pre-text to draw on. It may be true that today’s young adults entering preacher training are far less accustomed to basic notions of public speaking, and may need more sensitive coaching as a result.

(c) Equipping Female Trainees

A particularly important training case for our time relates to the training of women as preachers. When women train for preaching they are typically dealing with an extra cluster of doubts and insecurities associated with uncertain and changing expectations in church culture relating to the role of women in teaching ministry. Some women in preaching classes will be wrestling through their own position on the issue, and this most certainly impacts their preaching experience, from beginning to end²⁹. Other women will have settled their own mind on the issue, but will be wrestling still with the question of how to respond to the opinions of others, and how to deal with potentially negative comments or a ‘walk out’ scenario. These are not small issues, and they all pertain to the subjective sphere. Such women are greatly served by preaching trainers who acknowledge these experiences and help equip a response.

(d) Equipping those in High-Pressure Scenarios

A final category worth considering, is that of ministry trainees learning to preach in high-pressure conditions. A common example might be the young ministry trainee tied to a church culture that places enormous workloads and performance expectations on their trainees³⁰. This may be associated with a setting where the trainee is under the orders of a body of senior elders and ministers in a cultural setting of

²⁷ My present preaching class includes an extraordinarily gifted preacher with an aversion to being ‘up front’ and yet possessing obvious pastoral and leadership gifts. His pathway into preaching has included an in-depth process of working through his inhibitions. Through such enabling his pastoral gifts are seeing a much fuller expression as his ministry is now adjoined with regular and able preaching.

²⁸ John Sweetman, *Introductory Preaching* (Distance Unit Course Notes, Malyon College, 2009), pp12-9 to 12-12.

²⁹ In my context I am routinely helping female trainees process the impact of this issue on their own training experience.

³⁰ In my experience, Korean church settings can typically be characterised this way.

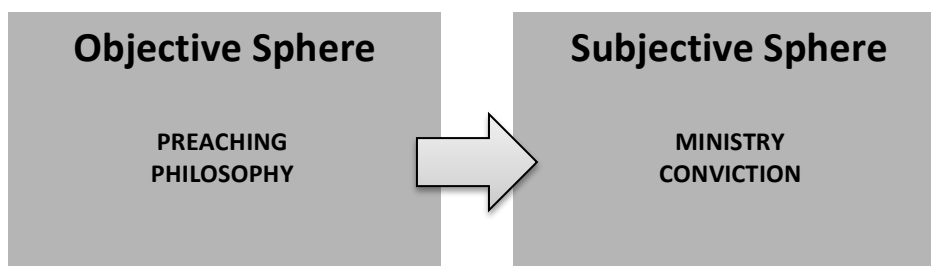
unquestionable authority. These pressure scenarios are often explicitly laden with spiritual freight as the young trainee is expected to demonstrate the worthiness of their spirituality by dealing with the heavy burden of expectations and coming up with acceptable results time and time again, and thus ‘proving themselves’. The situation may be made worse when the young trainee is pressured to preach in such a way that they are not convinced is honouring of scripture. Successful training of such students will necessarily include some help in enabling them to acknowledge and process the pressures they feel, and to manage the impact of these on their development as a preacher.

And so finally, we offer some preliminary suggestions on the way that classic preacher-training might be readily augmented so as to more adequately equip trainees for the subjective experience of preaching. In particular we address the three experiential elements of Ministry Conviction, Message Validity, and Self-Understanding.³¹

6. Shaping Preacher-Training Toward Ministry Conviction

As noted above, successful preacher training will necessarily equip trainees with understanding and skills in the objective sphere, as well as corresponding understanding of the subjective sphere. They will not only learn about preaching, but will experience becoming a preacher.

And so, just as we might structure a course to ensure that a theologically informed and Bible-honouring **Preaching Philosophy** is objective learned and understood, so too can we intentionally structure the same course to encourage a corresponding **Ministry Conviction** in the mind and heart of the trainee preacher.



A healthy sense of Ministry Conviction will include genuine *belief* about the significance of the Word of God in God’s world and a *sense* of the power of the gospel. The trainee will *feel both the validity and the weightiness* of standing up to preach. We consider now some ideas on how this subjective aspect may be actively addressed in a formal preach-training context.

(a) Robust Word-confident philosophy, focussed on the development of genuine conviction

³¹ The suggestions below are based mainly on my own efforts to apply these concerns to my preacher-training role at Morling College.

Bryan Chapell's heavy accent on Word-confidence is wonderfully empowering. Where it is truly believed, it really can serve the right-ordering of the heart and mind. Beginning preachers are well-served by preacher training that does not lightly skip over this step but rather takes the time to carefully construct a robust Philosophy of Preaching grounded in a solid Biblical case, and accounting for theologies of Scripture, Revelation and Salvation, focusing hearts on the glorious achievements of God in the gospel of Christ, and on the determination of the Holy Spirit to work through gospel proclamation. Components of the course should help students to seriously feel the weight of philosophical and sociological objections to preaching, and learn to answer these. It is worth noting that for a significant number of students this will be their first opportunity to think through such ideas in a sustained way.

But the focus must be on the students forming their own convictions, and learning to articulate and own these for themselves. One way to help ensure this is to base a major assessment item, perhaps an essay, on this question. But the main way trainers will seek this is by praying for their students, asking that God himself teaches genuine Ministry Conviction.³²

(b) Coaching sessions in preacher-formation

Another measure might be to offer individual coaching sessions to each student to talk and pray with them about their developing sense of calling and enabling for Word-ministry. Such coaching sessions would focus on the trainee's sense of Ministry Conviction, always related back to the Philosophy of Preaching. In addition, the students would be explicitly taught about their ongoing responsibility as preachers to cultivate godly convictions about preaching, seeing this as the primary task of the preacher and exhorting them to it.

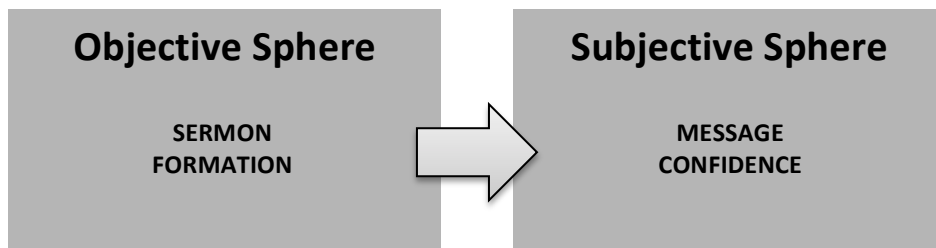
(c) Conscious modeling

Above all, the students should be inspired and moved by their instructor's sense of conviction. The students need to 'see' what healthy ministry conviction looks like. The students need to 'hear' their instructor preach and teach with such a love for God and his gospel, with such confidence in the promise of Word-ministry, and with such awe at the privilege of serving God's church in preaching. The students need to experience their instructor in prayer for them, fervently commending them and their preacher-development to God.

7. Shaping Preacher-Training Toward Message-Confidence

Similarly, just as a preacher-training course will be structured to provide skills in the objective act of **Sermon Formation**, so too can the same course attend to corresponding skills that cultivate **Message Confidence** in the mind and heart of the trainee preacher.

³² See Appendix 1 – Overview of Introductory Preaching Course



Instruction in Sermon Formation will address Bible exegesis, sermon-writing, and sermon delivery. But corresponding instruction in Message Confidence equips people to handle the actual experience of exegesis, sermon-writing and delivery by helping them negotiate the thoughts, emotions, sensations, and spiritual dimensions that accompany these tasks *every time* they go through the process. The writing of a specific sermon not only demands the mastery of objective skills, but also involves an inner process of negotiating internal confusion and doubt to arrive at a subjective certainty about the purpose and value of the particular message at hand.

(a) Much reassurance

Students of preaching will need endless general reassurance about the validity of preaching, the relevance of the Bible, and the power of the gospel. Students find it very helpful to hear their instructors admit and describe the ways they have had to deal with doubts and uncertainties and the steps they took to get back on track. And when it comes to their work on preparing particular messages, students need much affirmation and encouragement. Classes should be marked by times of prayer for students and their particular preaching assignments.

(b) Orientation to the sensation of exegesis

One of the most important ways trainers of preaching help their students to prepare of the subjective experience of preaching, is by walking with them through the whole process of sermon formation and helping them to orient themselves to the sensation.

Thus, for example, when it comes to the practice of Bible exegesis, many students will have had little experience. Students not only need to know a method, and see it demonstrated, they need help to stop and notice what it is going to feel like to commit to nutting out a sermon from a Bible passage. The work of exegesis involves analysis, comprehension, interpretation, imagination, and contemplation. It takes a particular kind of 'headspace' to grapple with ideas. It requires mental concentration, clear thinking, and careful attention, as well as emotional connection and spiritual sensitivity. It can be very draining. Preaching instructors can help students learn how to cultivate and maintain such a headspace, and sense

the privilege of the work even when it is laborious. In this way, trainers can do much to encourage *appropriate expectations* in their students about the experience.³³

(c) Orientation to the experience of delivery

Perhaps one of the most important contributions that an experience-sensitive preaching course can make will be in preparing trainee preachers for the subjective experience of sermon delivery.

Students find it remarkably helpful to be able to share and identify with each other over their experience of sermon delivery. Much good work can be done in helping students to name and describe the various sensations. Simply talking openly about these, and sharing a laugh, is therapeutic in itself. Key to this will be discussions of pride, doubt and anxiety, including remedies and tips. John Chapman's concept of Post Talk Syndrome is well worth discussion, along with a suggested action plan that students can implement so as to recover quickly. Preaching students should also be taught about the physiology of fear, learning to recognize and counter the impact that anxiety will have on their preaching, from posture, to voice, to mood.³⁴

Above all, instructors can coach their students in the experience of being reliant on the Spirit, teaching them ways to cultivate prayerfulness, thankfulness, positive expectation, openness, and rejoicing. These are wonderful opportunities for the preaching instructor to warmly exhort and encourage the trainees. These are also important times to encourage the students in their prayers and loving support of each other.

(f) Specific exercises that cultivate God-honouring composure in preaching

We further suggest the teaching of mental and physical exercises that students can use to cultivate a sense of calm composure and focused intentionality in the lead up to preaching. Such exercises may be readily adapted from general resources designed to equip public speaking, and can easily be given a God-honouring theological shape and preaching-focus.³⁵

8. Shaping Preacher-Training Toward Self-Understanding

And lastly, just as a preacher-training attends to the objective question of **Preacher Character**, so too can the same course orient students toward the corresponding subjective experience of developing **Self-Understanding**.

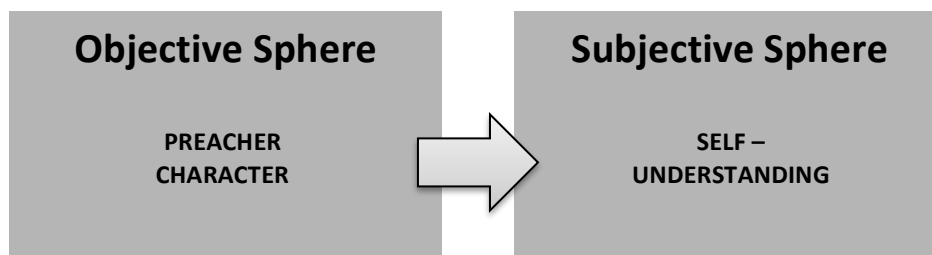
In the objective sphere, students of preaching will be presented with some picture of Preacher Character that rightly accompanies the preaching act: prayerfulness and humility, integrity and authenticity. But at the same time, trainee preachers are also becoming preachers themselves, and learning to understand themselves as preachers who walk with God and presume to speak God's word into the lives of others. A

³³ See Appendix 2 – What Exegesis Feels Like

³⁴ See Appendix 3 – Satan and Psychology

³⁵ See Appendix 4 – Exercising Composure

process of Self-Understanding demands that the trainee preacher experiences and negotiates an inner world of Desires, Fears and Pressures connected to the act of preaching.



(a) Help students understand their Desires, Fears and Pressures in preaching

Students appreciate help in noticing the Desires that are associated with their preaching, and considering which desires are valid and God-honouring and which desires are not. A similarly-helpful analysis can be made concerning the preacher’s Fears. Of course, many of these will be common to all, although different individuals will be susceptible in different ways. And so it is helpful, then, to give students an opportunity to explore a third category, which we call ‘Pressures’. These are particular aspects of each person’s life-circumstance or ministry-setting that bring some kind of pressure to their preaching.

A useful exercise involves having the students physically standing at a pulpit, handling it, and talking about the Desires, Fears and Pressures that are evoked at the thought of preaching. This then leads on to reflection time with a number of suitable Bible passages, looking for ways that these texts inform our Desires and Fears, and also shape the way we respond to these experiences. This can be a wonderful setting for the forming of ‘preaching resolutions’ and for encouraging students in prayer and confession.³⁶

(b) Help students develop cultivate the sense of self-identity in Christ

Above all the preaching instructor will be looking for ways to exhort the preaching trainees to personally respond to God himself in the gospel. Various points of class instruction offer apt opportunities, from the Biblical and theological reflections that accompany the presentation of preaching philosophy, to the opportunity for exhortation attached with every preaching demonstration offered in class.

Likewise, teaching about application is an opportunity to teach a theology of application, and to exhort the students in it. Teaching about sermon feedback is an opportunity to teach a theology of openness, and to urge the students through it. Teaching about correct Bible exegesis provides many opportunities for demonstrations of exhortations that bring out the wonder of the gospel of grace from all corners of the Bible.

³⁶ Appendix 5 – Exercise in Desires, Fears, Pressures.

(c) Giving the whole course a 'How To' feel

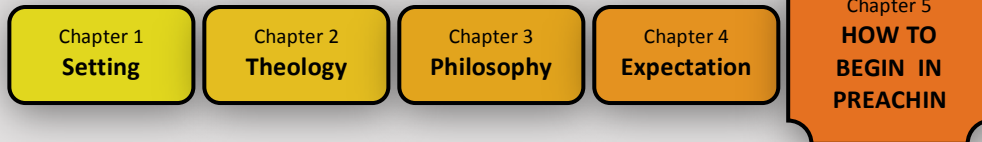
Finally, framing the whole preaching course in the mode of a 'How-to', encourages a focus on the experience of preaching, with the instructor adopting a posture of 'coach'. If the teacher of preaching is not primarily 'telling' but 'showing', then this will help to ensure a 'ground level' perspective, where class discussion leads naturally on to questions of how it looks and feels to become a preacher.

9. Conclusions

We have sought to show that if preacher-training is an activity in preacher-formation, then this formation must happen in both an objective sphere and a subjective sphere. In the objective sphere, trainees learn about preaching. But in the subjective sphere, trainees grapple with the experience of becoming preachers. Even though successful trainers intuitively attend to this subjective sphere, the formulations of formal preaching courses largely do not. We have sought to show that there are great training gains to be made in redressing this lack, giving formal training courses a shape that ensures the subjective sphere is actively addressed, and students are equipped to understand and manage the inner experience of preaching.

Weeks 1 to 2

PART 1 - CONVICTION



Weeks 3 to 4

PART 2 - PREPARATION

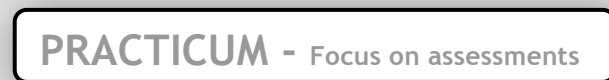


Weeks 5 to 6

PART 3 - MESSAGE

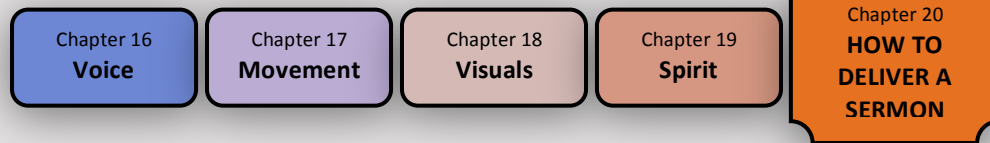


Week 7



Weeks 8 to 9

PART 4 - DELIVERY

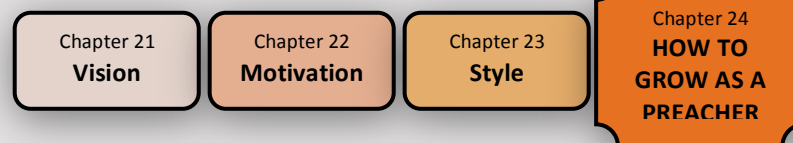


Week 10



Weeks 11 to 12

PART 5 - MINISTRY



6.5 What Exegesis Feels Like

The work of exegesis involves analysis, comprehension, interpretation, imagination, and contemplation. It requires a particular kind of ‘headspace’.



1. Grappling with ideas

Exegetes have to get good at handling ideas and the relationships between ideas. It requires mental concentration, clear thinking, and careful attention. It also requires emotional connection and spiritual sensitivity.

Most preachers find that the process of exegesis involves solid hours of desk-work, with pen and paper, computer and books. It can be hard work, but it can also be very enjoyable, seeing the scriptures open up with meaning and relevance, and sensing the will of the Spirit to reveal the character and purposes of God.

It can also be very draining. When it does, it helps to keep in mind the value of faithful Bible teaching for God’s church and the privilege of serving in the cause of Christ.



2. Moving between big picture and small details

It is important to be able to move between the big picture (seeing the overall effect), and the small picture (grappling with details). A first reading of a text will usually give some idea of its meaning. But a careful study of the details will perhaps sharpen, or even change that first take on the meaning. There will be a continuous movement from the whole, to the parts, and back to the whole again.

To put it in technical language, we first form a *thesis* (an idea of the overall meaning), then perform *analysis* (a careful study of the component parts), and finally, through a process of *synthesis* (bringing our analysis to bear on our original thesis) we arrive at a *new thesis* (a clearer idea of the meaning).

Repeating this cycle sharpens an understanding of the text.



3. Being part of something bigger

The process of exegesis need not be an isolated, solo effort. Through dialoguing our findings with friends and consulting the published works of others, we place the task of exegesis into the context of community, which is where it should be. Consulting the commentaries of past scholars and dialoguing ideas with contemporaries can offer a great sense of connection with the astounding work of God all around the world and all through the ages. The wonderful truths of the Bible are a precious legacy.

19.1 Satan and the Psychological

Christian preachers are susceptible to a particular bunch of internal struggles. These can easily become the context for wrestling with deeply held conceits and fears, or battling with the lies of Satan. These battle-grounds are very real and will inevitably impact the capacity of the preacher. Preachers need to take these seriously and learn to manage their experience of them.



1. PRIDE

Preachers can easily find themselves looking for accolades, fishing for compliments, or generally enjoying the praise of men. Pride is never far away. John Chapman (1999, pp 165-168) provides a wonderful antidote to this, by likening the preacher to an old horse, bumbling through an orchard and happening to bump up against a tree so that perfectly ripe apples happen to fall the ground. The point of the story is that the fruit was ripe and ready, so that ‘any old horse’ might have done the job of bumping it off the tree. If any good comes of our preaching, the credit will certainly not be ours. God gives the fruit.

Tip: The antidote to pride, of course, is to confess this, and replace it with thanks and praise God, the giver of all good things.



2. DOUBT

Preachers can doubt the legitimacy of their preaching, or doubt the effectiveness of their preaching, or perhaps even doubt the truth of the message altogether. Such doubts will certainly carry into the pulpit. We suggest that the very fact and act of preaching is a prompt for the doubting preacher to find time for serious confession and soul-searching before God.

Tip: Rather than inflict your doubts on the congregation, talk them through with a trusted Christian friend or mentor, away from the preaching moment.



3. HELPFUL ANXIETY

Sometimes the anxiety associated with the act of preaching will be entirely appropriate. Like a person about to make marriage vows or a witness about to give testimony, the sensation of ‘butterflies in the stomach’ can be a helpful reminder of the gravity of the task at hand and the weight of responsibility. Some level of anxiety is entirely appropriate for the preacher. Preachers can treat such appropriate anxiety with positive expectation, looking to harnessing the ‘adrenalin effect’ - especially heightened energy and alertness.

Tip: Practice compensating for the inevitable ways a heightened sense of energy can impact preaching, such as the problem of talking ‘too fast and high’, or yelling.



4. UNHELPFUL ANXIETY

Some anxiety is not at all appropriate, because it is tied up with the preacher's fear of failing the expectation of others, and a concern to 'perform'. The preacher is called to perform for the 'audience of One' and for the favour of the One.

Tip: The best way to deal with your fears is to make sure the =entire sermon preparation process is marked by prayer - expressing humble dependence, and delight in the approval that Jesus has won for us. Right at the start of the sermon preparation process, acknowledge and confess to God your fears, rehearsing the truths of the gospel over your own identity and ministry.



5. POST-TALK SYNDROME

Many beginning preachers experience an overwhelming cluster of sensations immediately after preaching. Typically they will have an overwhelming urge to flee the scene, avoiding eye contact and dreading conversation. The high adrenalin of the preaching moment fades, and the preacher is susceptible to a pronounced 'low' in mood. They will be completely unready for criticism, and yet unable to focus on any subject of conversation other than the talk. The remedy to "PTS" is to recognise these responses as distorted and largely 'unreal', and to decide in advance not to be commandeered by the sensations.

Tip: The preacher can very quickly recover from PST by resolving to:

1. **Stay**, rather than run away
2. **Engage** in conversation rather than avoiding people or eye contact
3. **Forget the sermon**, determining not to go fishing for appraisals
4. **Be interested** in the person in front of you, closing your won mouth to listen well



6. TIREDNESS

This can often accompany the day pf preaching, especially if it was the sermon preparation itself that led to a lack of sleep. Tiredness makes the preacher all the more susceptible to the five experiences described above. And tiredness seems to be a favoured setting under which Satan prefers to operate, sowing seeds of doubt and insecurity, and contradicting the assurances of God himself.

Tip: Good rest is usually much more helpful than late-night tweaking.

20.3 Exercising Composure

It is *the preacher's responsibility* to be composed. It is the preacher's responsibility not to 'freak out' but rather breathe, take charge of their thoughts and settle on godly convictions. This section offers specific exercises designed to help preachers develop an enhanced sense of self-awareness and control over their approach into sermon delivery. The exercises are designed to cultivate a calm yet proactive and deliberate mood in the preacher. The exercises can be used in two ways:

5. **WARMING UP ON THE DAY** - in the lead up to preaching.
6. **PRACTICING MOOD CONTROL** - in connection with sermon preparation time.

The exercises follow a particular flow:

1. DELIBERATE EXPECTATION

The preacher who is rightly motivated and properly prepared is entitled to carry positive expectation about preaching. But this expectation can require cultivation, especially in the face of anxiety and insecurity.

EXERCISE 1 - DEEP BREATHING - *Encouraging a calm demeanour and deep diaphragm breathing for projection.*

EXERCISE 2 - THREE CONVICTIONS - *Answering the battle for composure with assurance that God is sovereign.*

2. DELIBERATE PRESENCE

Appearance and demeanour is an unavoidable part of live communication. Part of the preacher's delivery will involve some attention to their 'presence'. Researchers suggest that the first 3 or 4 minutes are crucial.

EXERCISE 3 - STAND TALL - *Assuming a physical posture and presence that reflects our spiritual position in Christ.*

EXERCISE 4 - THREE LOCATIONS - *Taking charge of the surrounding space as a communication space.*

3. DELIBERATE ENGAGEMENT

For whatever reason, preachers can easily feel intimidated by their audience. Invariably this makes the preacher avoid eye contact with that person, or with the entire audience altogether.

EXERCISE 5 - THREE FINGERS - *Encouraging an expectation of positive person-to-person engagement.*

4. DELIBERATE VOICE

After cultivating deliberate expectation, with deliberate presence and engagement, the preacher now looks to adopt a 'deliberate voice', especially looking to eliminate distracting "um's" and "ah's".

EXERCISE 6 - THINK SAY - *Letting no words come forward that have not first been thought through.*

Pulpit Experience

