

sixth chapter, “Sharing the Savior,” encourages the preacher to “reveal Christ in Scripture” (93). Appendix 1 traces the outline of the book across the preacher’s weekly preparation. Appendix 2 provides example sermon outlines, although a greater variety in biblical genres would have provided more help to the beginning preacher. The final appendix displays common sermon structures.

The brevity of the book will serve beginning preachers and help develop their thirst for further training. Nelson’s dependence upon the Bible and the Holy Spirit are a model for new and experienced preachers. As promised in his preface, the book introduces some nuances of African American preaching. For example, “One of the strengths of African American preaching is the art of narration” (72). Nelson introduces a pantheon of African American preachers who have shaped his ministry: E. K. Bailey, H. B. Charles, Lance Watson, Maurice Watson, and Ralph Douglas West. Some of his models are nationally known preachers while others have regional influence and with whom Nelson has personal relationships: Marcus Desmond Davidson, Tony Evans, Sanford Johnson, Fred Luter, Jr., W. Charles Lewis, A. Louis Patterson, Jr., James Bland Smith, Robert Smith, Jr., and John Henry Williams, Jr. A perusal of sermons from Nelson’s list of influential African American preachers will serve preachers in every cultural context. May Nelson’s goal of life-changing sermons sweep across church auditoriums with Spirit-filled power.

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Preaching: A Simple Approach to the Sacred Task, by Daniel Overdorf. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2022. 240 pp. \$20.99.

Daniel Overdorf has delivered the preaching goods again. This book makes the homiletical principles taught in higher academia attainable for beginners without sacrificing the depth and gravity of biblical, God-honoring preaching (14). Trained at Gordon-Conwell (DMin in Preaching) under Haddon Robinson, Overdorf is Professor of Pastoral Ministries and Director of Preaching Programs at Johnson University in Knoxville, TN. He is a prolific author, with such contributions as *One Year to Better Preaching: 52 Exercises to Hone Your Skills* (Kregel, 2013) and *Applying the Sermon: How to Balance Biblical Integrity and Cultural Relevance* (Kregel, 2009).

There are eight chapters in all: *Conviction* (drives preaching), *Research* (the Scripture idea), *Focus* (on a single idea), *Shape* (the flow of thought), *Develop* (each segment), *Bookend* (with an introduction and conclusion), *Polish* (with descriptive language), and *Embody* (the sermon in the preaching event). Three helpful appendices show step-by-step how Overdorf prepared a message (Jas 1:19–27), along with his finished

sermon manuscript and worksheet. He also includes exercises and examples, as well as fifteen *Sidebars* and *Bonus Articles* throughout the book covering *The Art of Storytelling*, *Writing for the Ear*, etc.

Overdorf begins with a preacher's *convictions*—convictions about God, Scripture, preaching, and preachers. Methods and techniques change but our convictions direct our actions and who we become as preachers, “The world must hear; we must preach. Eternity hangs in the balance” (18–19). Our *research* will bring our listeners to mind as we read the text, and research the text honoring biblical literary forms (49–55). The *focus* of the sermon centers on a compelling thesis statement that will ring in the listeners’ ears long after the sermon ends (70), this type of sermon is more like a bullet than buckshot (68). As we *shape* the sermon Overdorf provides several principles, among them “a sermon is not a document; it’s an event.” As each segment is *developed*, the text should be explained, illustrated, applied, and transitions provided. One of Overdorf’s more insightful chapters includes the *bookends* of the introduction and conclusion. Often a sermon fails because “*Why should I listen to you?*” is unanswered in the introduction or “*What do I now do with this truth?*” is unanswered in the conclusion, thereby sabotaging faithful obedience to God’s Word. Overdorf invites us to *polish* the sermon, by using descriptive language and engaging the senses. Remember our sermons’ rough edges “need to be smoothed so that we communicate most effectively, [as] God’s truth shines through. Preaching deserves our best effort” (158).

Two highlights, first, chapter eight *Embody* (the sermon in the preaching event) is the standout section. Overdorf purposefully shies away from terms such as delivery or presentation because “we verbally and nonverbally embody the truth of God that has captured our own lives and that we hope captures our listeners’ lives too” (188). As we embody the sermon Overdorf encourages the preacher to (1) be himself, for God uses our uniqueness; (2) punctuate the sermon with our voice and body—through voice variety, pause, repetition, and body posture, movement, gestures, and eye contact (191–94); and (3) minimize our reliance on notes which leads to better communication. Second, *Preaching with Integrity: Research versus Plagiarism* was a much-needed article. Overdorf offers a potent word, “Preachers who copy sermons from the internet or book chapters rob themselves and their listeners of Spirit-led study and saturation of Scripture” (63). It is a given, whatever we speak, in the pulpit or conversation, listeners believe they are our own words unless we say otherwise (64). He supplies both solution and suggestion, “The solution to plagiarism is simple: if we use a direct quote, personal story, or an original idea from someone else, we need to say so” (64). Then a threefold suggestion: (1) study the text, (2) read widely, and (3) cite briefly (65–66).

There are several qualities worth noting. First, the work is *theocentric*, God is the beginning point of all preaching, “If we believe there is a God, the Bible is his Word, and that he commissions us to proclaim his good news, we preach” (18). If a sermon is lacking in the divine element,

it is not a sermon, it is a speech and a poor one at that (32). God is also the end of all preaching, “Preaching is strategic when it helps move the church toward God’s purposes—when it helps the church be what God called us to be and do what God called us to do” (180). Second, this work is *Christocentric*, Christ is the point of all preaching, according to Overdorf: “Preaching is God’s means of announcing the hope and salvation of Jesus to the world” (23). “When you quit preaching Jesus, you quit preaching” (81). Recognizing Christ in all of Scripture is paramount to the preaching endeavor, for all Scripture either prepares for Christ, proclaims Christ, or equips us for a response to Christ (82, 84–85). Finally, this book is *bibliocentric*, while the story may be ancient, it is alive and relevant (21). For those off-course Overdorf steers them aright: “Sermons that convey God’s eternal truth are grounded not in our creativity, soapboxes, or musings, but in the Bible” (40), for it is neither circumstance nor creativity that drive our preaching strategy—it is Scripture (181). Sadly, too many times “our actions [about reading the text] betray an unspoken assumption: the Scripture text is but a necessary step to reach what we believe is most important—our own thoughts about the text” (195).

When Overdorf writes on preaching, one would do well to listen. Whether you are a Paul or a Timothy, his final prayer for the preacher (208–10) will serve as an encouragement and a pattern to convey. For further homiletic insight try Jesse Nelson, *Preaching Life-Changing Sermons* (Kregel, 2022) or Allan Moseley *From the Study to the Pulpit* (Lexham, 2018). This book is highly recommended. Overdorf puts the glory of preaching on the shelf where anyone can share, for “preaching is the proclamation of God’s story, grounded in his Word, empowered by his Spirit, and embodied in his servant, for the redemption and edification of his people” (26).

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Unto Others: Rediscovering the Golden Rule—the Lost Key to Relationships, by Dave Swavely. Minneapolis, MN: Cruciform Press, 2022, 144 pp. \$13.99.

Pastor Dave Swavely, church planter and mission leader, writes out of concern for relationships that should function in love. Among the author’s other writings, *Life in the Father’s House: A Member’s Guide to the Local Church* (P&R, 1996) illustrates his church relational commitment. In the present study he addresses the unique relationship Jesus calls “unto others,” and invites Christians to rediscover it for the good of the home, church, and society.

In his study, the author chronicles the loss and calls for the recovery of the golden rule (13–19). Chapters include “Why the Golden Rule is