

almost argue that the whole storyline of the bible is set up in a way that describes, critiques, and replaces the self-made self (60–61).

Where do we look for our notion of identity formation? At creation, God gave man and woman an identity by creating them in his image. For this reason, “Human beings are afflicted, or perhaps blessed, with a nostalgia for the garden, a painful yearning for our perfect past” (75). This notion often comes out in our popular music. It should not surprise us that the theme song of the Woodstock festival in 1969 expresses this quest as, “We’ve got to get ourselves back to the garden” (Joni Mitchell). While it might be easy for us to dismiss this strange urge to figure out who we really are so that we can decide what we should do, we should not be surprised for this is the stuff of worldview.

The author repeatedly and rightly asks throughout the book, “Does it lead to a good life?” (three times on p. 17). He points out in response: “happiness, by any measure, is actually in decline” (16). He concludes that, although looking inward can be helpful to us in identity formation, left alone and in the version being critiqued, it does not lead to a good life.

Where does this conversation leave Christians who see some of the problems with expressive individualism but are not sure what to replace it with? Rosner contends:

Whereas wanting to make the most of your talents and opportunities as well as taking some pleasure in your achievements is only natural, pride can easily lead to a consuming desire to stand out from the crowd and to a neglect of or indifference to the needs of others.... And the recognition that God has marked you out means that you should feel less concerned about making your own mark (106).

In fact, “those who are known by God intimately and personally are well-equipped to deal with the questions of existence, ego, ethics, enemies, and enjoyment and have deep resources from which to draw in responding in positive ways to life’s challenges” (110).

We should be grateful for Brian Rosner’s clear thinking and bold applications driven by Scripture in response to the God who loves us and owns us. This reviewer highly recommends the book for every Christian trying to sort through who they are and what they should do with their lives.

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Preaching Life-Changing Sermons: Six Steps to Developing and Delivering Biblical Messages, by Jesse L. Nelson. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2022. 144 pp. \$16.99.

Jesse Nelson aims “to deliver life-changing sermons” that help

listeners “conform to the image of Christ” (17). *Preaching Life-Changing Sermons* offers a simple introduction for expository preachers. Nelson’s practical insights bring “the seminary classroom” into the pastor’s study (19). Nelson saturates his brief manual with Scripture and maintains a strong emphasis on prayer in the life of the preacher. The book accomplishes his goal of providing a training manual for those without formal theological training. Nelson invites readers to learn from the strengths of African American expository preaching. Readers join Nelson’s lament that African American preaching is “a subject missing in most biblical or expository preaching books” (11). Even a reader steeped in homiletical literature will gain insight as Nelson corrects the sorrowful oversight of previous preaching texts.

Life-changing sermons begin with the preacher’s humble reliance upon the Holy Spirit and dependence upon the biblical text. Nelson shares how to preach life-changing sermons: “The secret is simple. I preach the text!” (18). The six chapters of the book provide a simple guide. First, the preacher must seek the Spirit. Prayer and personal Bible study are the foundational components of the preacher’s spiritual discipline. Nelson offers the childhood insight of his grandmother in using the Lord’s Prayer as a model to PRAY: “Praise, Repent, Ask, and Yield” (25). Second, in “Selecting a Text,” Nelson encourages a biblical diet of preaching through books of the Bible rather than preaching solo sermons. The preacher helps his listeners understand who God wants them to be, what they should do, and what they must know.

The longest chapter, by necessity of the breadth of material Nelson covers, is chapter 3, “Studying the Scriptures.” He follows the basic format of observation, interpretation, and application. Nelson provides helpful clues to observe the details of the text such as the need to identify the emphasis of the passage or repeated phrases. Interpretation uncovers the plain meaning of the text for the original audience before making connections to the commonalities shared with today’s listeners. His keys for interpretation—content, context, comparison, culture, and consultation—effectively summarize the hermeneutical principles of the seminary classroom. Nelson’s acronym FAITH shapes the questions that guide application: Forgiveness, Attitudes and Actions, Insight and Instruction, Thanksgiving, and Helping Others. Chapter four provides structural tools built around the expository frame of explanation, illustration, and application. Nelson simplifies the training he received at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary and identifies “the main point of the text (MPT), the life-changing principle (LCP), and the purpose of the Sermon (POS)” (66). His LCP “is the bridge from the biblical world to the preacher’s modern context” (69). Nelson offers common sermon structures of a multi-point rhetorical sermon, question-answer outline, then-now format, key word sermon, and devotional structure. Each of these variations receives an expanded example in appendix 3.

The fire of Nelson’s ministry, his dependence upon the Spirit for boldness and power, is the focus of chapter 5. He helps preachers pursue a holy, prayerful, and humble life in reliance upon the Spirit. Nelson’s

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