

ORDINARY PREACHER

A Short Book on Preaching Well,
Even If You're Average



DARRYL DASH

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PREACHING WELL, EVEN IF
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Introduction

We need more ordinary, faithful preachers.

I'm grateful for extraordinary preachers. When I hear them preach at conferences or listen to their podcasts, I'm challenged and encouraged.

But most of us are ordinary, and that's okay. The central thesis of this book is that God uses ordinary, faithful preachers. That's good news for me. Maybe it will be good news for you too.

My Preaching Journey

I've been preaching for 25 years now. Actually, I've been preaching for longer than that if you count the times I preached as a little kid. I still have a recording of an early sermon, but it's locked away because that's the humane thing to do.

I preached my first real sermon when I was 19. I picked my text: Philippians 1:27. I spent weeks studying the passage. I wanted to preach with insight, clarity, and wit. I pictured people asking, "Where has this guy been all this time?"

I don't remember much about that sermon, except that it was short, and it was awful. I wanted to quit and never preach again.

I've preached many times since then. Many of my later sermons were awful too.

After 13 years of preaching, I studied preaching under Haddon Robinson, author of *Biblical Preaching*. I expected to learn more about sermon delivery. I did, but I primarily learned about how to study the text and craft a sermon around its central idea. I unlearned bad habits, and began to rebuild my skills.

Slowly, I improved as a preacher. I still count myself an average preacher, but I'm a *better* average preacher.

Today, I'm learning to preach as a church planter in an unchurched community. I also preach in dozens of churches as I share about the ministry of Liberty Grace Church. I've also taught preaching at Heritage Theological Seminary in Cambridge, Ontario.

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After years of preaching, and years of listening to preaching, I'm more convinced that ordinary, faithful preachers make a difference. My job isn't to be exceptional. My job is to preach biblical, accurate, Christ-saturated messages as well as I can. That's your job too.

About This Book

I've been blogging at DashHouse.com for 15 years. In that time I've written many posts about preaching. I've based this book on some of those posts. I've organized them, edited them, added some chapters, and (I hope) created something cogent and useful

I've also written a thesis-project on God-centered preaching, which will be the subject of a future book. This book is more general. I want to share what I've learned about preaching over the years. Mostly, I want to encourage you that your preaching matters, even if you're an ordinary preacher like me.

Ordinary Preacher, Extraordinary Gospel

Skill is important. If you are a preacher, then you have a responsibility to become the best preacher you can possibly be. Read books. Learn from other preachers. Get feedback. Study well. Become a preacher who handles the Word faithfully.

On the other hand, be encouraged even when you hit your limits. God hasn't called you to be someone else. He's called you to be faithful with what he's given you.

Our confidence isn't in our abilities. Our confidence is in the gospel. Others may preach better than you, but nobody can preach a greater gospel.

Become the best preacher that you can be. Preach the good news about Jesus Christ. Rejoice in preachers who are more talented than you. Thank God that he uses faithful, ordinary preachers like us.

Get preaching.

PART I

Fundamentals

The Fundamentals of Preaching

Thirteen years after I started preaching, I was sick of hearing myself preach. I knew something was wrong, but I couldn't put my finger on it. My instinct was to focus on delivery, but I was wrong. I needed to refocus on the fundamentals.

Here's my belief: Get the fundamentals of preaching right, and everything else will take care of itself. If the fundamentals aren't sound, it doesn't matter what else you do. You won't have a solid sermon.

When I taught preaching, I didn't worry too much about delivery. Delivery will improve over time if a preacher is teachable. I care about the fundamentals. Get the fundamentals right, and you have a framework for an effective preaching ministry that can last a lifetime.

I don't know anyone who's done a better job of expressing the fundamentals than Chris Brauns in his book *When the Word Leads Your Pastoral Search*. According to Chris, "A sermon should be a biblical bullet fired at the life of the listener."¹ If you unpack this sentence you have four keys to good preaching:

- **Preach biblically.** Preach the text. Let it shape the content of your sermon and its purpose.
- **Preach a bullet.** Find the main idea or burden of the text and preach that.
- **Preach with fire.** Seek God until you have unction, boldness, and urgency.
- **Preach to the listeners.** Preach to the people in front of you. Apply the message to their lives.

1. Chris Brauns, *When the Word Leads Your Pastoral Search: Biblical Principles and Practices to Guide Your Search* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2001), 121.

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That's it. The only thing I'd add (and I think it's implicit) is that the sermon should bring us to Christ and show us the truth of the passage in relation to him.

We can learn a lot of things about preaching, but there are only a few fundamentals. If the fundamentals are sound, delivery and everything else will develop over time. If the fundamentals aren't in place, nothing else matters.

The Elements of Preaching

When I was young, and wondered if I ever could preach, I came across *The Elements of Preaching* by Warren Wiersbe and David Wiersbe. There are only a few books that have changed my life, and this is one of them.

The Elements of Preaching presents 26 simple lessons and 14 simple prohibitions. As the title suggests, it aims to cover the elements of the subject, “the simplest principles of a subject of study.” It is not a book on how to prepare sermons. Instead, it is a book of basics that “that the preacher must grasp before he can adequately begin to use what the other books teach.” It’s like *The Elements of Style*, except for preaching.

Here’s a sample of the simple lessons:

- Preaching is the communicating of God’s truth by God’s servant to meet the needs of people.
- Keep your preaching within the bounds of what the text says and what the people can receive.
- Preach to express, not to impress.
- Never be satisfied with your preaching.

Here’s a sample of the prohibitions, “some of the sins preachers commit that we ought not commit:”

- Wasting time on long introductions to our sermons
- Basing our sermons on suppositions instead of Scripture
- Concluding sermons with vague generalities

The book concludes with a ten-point inventory for the sermon:

1. Is the message solidly based on Scripture?

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2. Does it exalt the Person and work of Jesus Christ?
3. Will it meet the needs of people?
4. Is the theme a timeless truth worth talking about?
5. Is the message organized so that I can preach it clearly and the people understand it easily? Is there a concise and clear statement of purpose? Is there a clear plan of development? Is there practical application that makes the message personal?
6. Are all Scripture references and historical facts accurate?
7. Is the message real to me personally so that I may make it real to others?
8. Does this message fit into the total “preaching plan” for this church and into the context of the church’s ministry at this time?
9. Does the message fit into the ministry of the Church at large and Christ’s concern to save a lost world?
10. Is the message worth preaching again?¹

I wish every sermon I’ve preached met these standards.

The entire book is less than 12,000 words, and you can read it in half an hour or so. Even though I’ve been preaching for a quarter of a century, and have taught preaching, I need the reminders outlined in this book.

The Elements of Preaching is still in print. Get it. Read it. You will enjoy it, and your congregation will thank you.

1. Warren Wiersbe and David Wiersbe, *The Elements of Preaching: The Art of Biblical Preaching — Clearly and Simply Presented* (Carol Stream: Tyndale House, 1986), 105-106.

Six Keys to Poor Preaching

I'm no expert in bad preaching, but I've done my share. I've observed that there are countless ways to preach well, but there are only a few key steps you need to master if you want to preach poorly. Anyone can do them.

1. **Skip exegesis.** Preaching preparation is half exegesis and half homiletics. If you want to save time, skip the exegesis and spend all your time on the homiletical side. Your schedule will thank you. (Nobody else will.)
2. **Forget the big idea.** We've been taught that sermons should be bullets, not buckshots. It takes a lot of time and work to come up with the main burden of the text. If you want to preach poorly, forget about the big idea of the text or sermon.
3. **Come up with your own purpose for the sermon.** Sure, there is such a thing as authorial intent. And yes, in theory, our sermon's purpose should match the text's purpose as much as possible. But if you stick to the purpose of the text, you're robbing yourself of the ability to come up with all kinds of clever messages that may not be strictly biblical – but do they ever preach! (They sell books too.)
4. **Prepare at the last minute.** We've all tasted food that's simmered. And we've all tasted microwaved food. If you want to preach poorly, then don't allow yourself the luxury of simmering. All it takes is a few good sermons for your people to lose their taste for microwaved sermons. We can't let that happen.
5. **Preach moralism.** Spurgeon said, "Whenever I get hold of a text, I say to myself, 'There is a road from here to Jesus

Christ, and I mean to keep on His track till I get to Him.”

But really, have you seen some of these roads? If you want to preach poorly, it's far easier just to tell people they should be better and let them figure it out.

6. **Preach to everyone in general.** Don't preach to the people in front of you. Preach to some generic audience. That way your sermons will be just as bad in your next church too.

This is the best advice I can give you on how to preach poorly.

Dedication

Ordinary Preacher is dedicated to Haddon Robinson, who is anything but an ordinary preacher.

About the Author

Darryl Dash is pastor of Liberty Grace Church, a church plant in downtown Toronto. He's also cofounder of Gospel for Life (GospelforLife.com), which provides online coaching for discipleship in all of life. He also serves as director of Advance Church Planting Institute.

He's married to Charlene, and has two children: Christy and Josiah.

Darryl is a graduate of the University of Waterloo, Heritage Theological Seminary, and Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. He has a Doctor of Ministry in preaching.

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For More Information

Sign up for a free membership at DashHouse.com, and you'll have access to valuable resources published exclusively for members.

You'll get immediate access to Darryl's thesis on Theocentric Preaching and other downloads, with more ebooks and resources to come.

Visit DashHouse.com to find out more.

Ordinary Preacher is published by Gospel for Life Inc. Gospel for Life provides online coaching for discipleship in all of life. Find out more at GospelforLife.com.