

5 Essentials of Noticeably Better Preaching & Teaching

Like preachers, expository sermons come in a variety of shapes and sizes. However, for all their uniqueness, there are ways in which they are similar. Here are five essential areas where excellent expository sermons tend to excel. In Heritage homiletics courses, the “Big Five” provide the basis for how we develop and evaluate sermons.

1. **Content**—The sermon is richly biblical.

The content of the passage is accurately and adequately explained.

Summary: Expository sermons are intentionally, integrally and indelibly biblical. They don't just glance at Scripture; they are grounded in a passage and grow out of that passage. The biblical content is the entrée and not the side dish of the message. In an excellent expository message, the passage preached is accurately and adequately explained so that listeners learn biblical truth.

The preacher's hermeneutical moves are legitimate.

Summary: Excellent expository sermons teach theological truth, originating from the passage being preached. This requires the preacher to “correctly handle the word of truth” (2 Tim 2:15). Legitimate hermeneutics are essential for faithful homiletics.

2. **Clarity**—The sermon is crystal clear to those who hear.

The sermon has a clear “Big Idea” that is based on the main message of the text.

Summary: The Big Idea of an expository sermon is determined by the main message of the passage being preached. The Big Idea gives the sermon a sense of unity (it's about one main thing). At its best, the Big Idea is a single, succinct, stylized sentence that summarizes the main message of the passage in a pastoral way.

The sermon has a clear structure that flows from the text.

Summary: The body of a sermon needs a skeleton to support it. Otherwise, the sermon slumps into a pile of loosely related thoughts. The thought expressed in our sermons must be clearly and logically sequenced in an outline. The main points of the outline are “applied theological lessons”.

3. Interest—The sermon gains and sustains interest from start to finish.

The sermon introduction engages listeners from the beginning

Summary: Effective sermons are engaging. They draw listeners in from the very start through an introduction that does four things: 1) connects with hearers, 2) introduces the topic/passage, 3) touches a genuine need in the lives of the listeners, and 4) points to the pastoral purpose of the message.

The sermon maintains listener's interest until the very end through the effective use of tension, illustrations and applications.

Summary: A good sermon is not simply edifying; it's engaging from start to finish. The preacher sustains interest throughout the message through the wise use of 1) backstory, 2) tension (keeping the "itch"), 3) illustrations (windows that let in light, air or warmth) and 4) applications (highlighting the life-shaping implications of the passage).

4. Gospel—The sermon organically and authentically points to Christ and His gospel.

The gospel is preached to both the lost and the saved.

Summary: The gospel message is the most important message in the world, and not just for those who are outside of Christ. It's the most important message for those who are "in Christ." Expository sermons will proclaim the gospel to both the lost and the saved.

The gospel presentation originates in the passage being preached.

Summary: Building on the Jesus' words that the Scriptures testify about Him (John 5:39), biblical sermons will gravitate to the gospel of Christ—starting from the very passage being preached. In this way, gospel presentations will seem organically grown from the soil of the sermon, rather than artificially grafted on to it.

5. Delivery—The sermon feels personal, prophetic and pastoral.

The preacher's God-given personality range is utilized to present the message with believable passion.

Summary: For the sake of the message and the listeners, the preacher chooses to use the full range of the personality God provided. As a result, the sermon is delivered with "believable passion"—passion that is both authentic and appropriate for the sermon.

The preacher communicates with both pastoral earnestness and a prophetic edge.

*Summary: The preacher seeks to faithfully communicate the message of the text and the **mood** of the text. This involves becoming a bi-lingual preacher—fluent in both the language of grace (pastoral earnestness) and truth (prophetic edge).*