

Edwards, J. Kent. *Deep Preaching: Creating Sermons that Go Beyond the Superficial*. Nashville: B&H Publishing, 2009. 208 pp. \$19.99.

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Deep Preaching is a plea of a pastor/professor of preaching to preachers to rethink the sacred responsibility of preaching. In 2 Timothy 3:16–17, the Apostle Paul reminded Timothy of the incredible power of the Scriptures. The Bible is not simply a collection of nice words; rather, it is the revelation of God that works in people's lives to equip them for God's purposes. In *Deep Preaching*, Edwards seeks to help preachers learn how to preach so that the messages delivered facilitate the transforming work of God's Word in the lives of God's people. He is not trying to write the definitive book on preaching. Rather, Edwards is trying to contribute to an area of preaching where he believes a gap exists.

To help accomplish the goal of *Deep Preaching*, the book begins with a review of a number of challenges pastors face as they approach the preaching task in the twenty-first century. Following this review, Edwards provides two chapters in which he articulates the theological, historical, and practical reasons for preaching.

For preaching to move beyond the status quo, here he reveals the importance of having clear foundations for such ministry.

Prior to moving on to the subject of discerning the big idea of a Scripture passage, Edwards addresses the character of the preacher. In Edwards' mind, preaching is not simply a task to be done; it is a spiritual duty that is reflective of the preacher's relationship with God. Knowing how to grasp the central idea of a passage is important, but that is not the starting point of great preaching. He notes that "Great preaching begins with a great relationship with God" (44), making this chapter very important to the overall message of the book.

The next chapter introduces the reader to the concept of the "closet." This metaphor is the place of solitude where the preacher intentionally invites the Holy Spirit to participate in guiding him to understand the text. Edwards notes, "The secret of 'Deep Preaching' is the Holy Spirit" (87).

In the next chapter, Edwards turns the reader's attention to three spiritual disciplines that should be part of the activity done in the closet. Here he discusses the value and importance of the disciplines of meditation, prayer, and fasting. Edwards is not trying to suggest this approach is a new methodology for preaching (108). Rather, he believes he is calling the preacher back to emulate the very things that contributed to the powerful preaching of the Apostles (106) and the Puritans (108).

In the following chapters, Edwards takes the reader into the closet to explain how to do sermon preparation. The aforementioned disciplines are meant to be tools used to provide a context for this work. While laboring over a passage of Scripture, the preacher is also to be guided by five questions:

1. Why was this exegetical idea necessary for its original recipients?
2. What is God revealing about Himself in this text?
3. What is God saying to me in this text?
4. What does God want to accomplish through this text?
5. What could negate the process I have just made through this text?

(187–192)

The book concludes with descriptions of "deep" sermons and "deep" preachers.

A number of factors help make this book worth reading. The early chapters provide a solid foundation for someone new to the preaching task, and serve as a helpful review for the more seasoned communicator.

A second important element to this book is the value of Edwards' discussion and deployment of metaphors. He writes, "Metaphors transfer what we know to what we don't know" (126). He believes so strongly in this concept that he advocates the exegetical idea of a passage of Scripture needs to be stated as a

metaphor. Metaphors are emphasized as being critical for deep preaching (126). And a passage should not be preached unless the exegetical idea can be stated as a metaphor. He even goes as far to note that a person “cannot learn to be a deep preacher without developing competency in the development and use of metaphors” (130).

There are, however, some limitations within his discussion of the metaphors that should be noted. Throughout the book (87, 160), he describes the Holy Spirit as the secret of deep preaching. While the Spirit and metaphors are both important for deep preaching, it would have been helpful if Edwards had explained the relationship between the two. By not addressing their connection, he unintentionally creates dissonance for the reader, between the guidance of the Spirit and the methodology of using metaphors.

A second limitation of the discussion of metaphors would be the seeming absence of what to do with the metaphors upon leaving the closet. Certainly the reader can discern an implied sense of what to do with the metaphors when Edwards uses examples of metaphors in the preaching of Jesus, Charles Spurgeon, and Jonathan Edwards. However, given the importance placed on metaphors in the closet and the importance of metaphors and closet work to preaching deep sermons, more concrete direction would benefit the reader who is new to preaching.

Another factor that adds value to this book is Edwards’ discussion of the Holy Spirit and the spiritual disciplines in message preparation. Though the closet questions are helpful, the Holy Spirit and the spiritual disciplines are the critical contribution of Edwards’ suggestion for deep preaching. The factor that makes this book unique among other books on preaching is his emphasis on the involvement of the Holy Spirit and the deployment of the spiritual disciplines in preparing messages that move beyond the superficial and status quo.

One final factor that adds strength to this work is Edwards’ significant use of Scripture. He often comments on the importance of the biblical text in preaching.

There are a couple of other limitations that should be mentioned. First, though the book touches on some of the major steps of sermon preparation, the book itself does not address those issues in depth. The author refers readers to consult books by Haddon Robinson and Donald Sunukjian (162) to better grasp all that is involved in the preparation process.

Second, the organization of chapters six through nine are challenging to follow at times. The use of the titles, metaphors, and thought frequently shifts back and forth, potentially resulting in some readers missing part of the author’s argument.

Overall, Edwards’ book would be most beneficial to a seasoned preacher, providing a refreshing stimulation for how to truly deepen the messages. While I

recommend this book to be added to the preacher's bookshelf, for someone new to preaching, Edwards' work would be helpful if read alongside the resources he mentions in his book, and also being under the tutelage of an experienced preacher.

Eddie Gibbs. *ChurchMorph: How Megatrends are Reshaping Christian Communities*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009. 222 pp. \$17.99.

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Whether you consider yourself emerging, missional, mainline, or traditional, you cannot escape the context of cultural change. The western world is leaving yesterday behind at an increasing pace. This new book by Gibbs has widened my understanding of how these changes are affecting the church. Unlike some people, I am not convinced of the superiority of many new expressions of the local church. I am, however, sensitive to Gibbs' clarion call that even if you do not agree with all of these new expressions, you need to understand the transitions that are occurring.

Gibbs is an expert in understanding the intersection of contemporary cultural trends and church history. In *ChurchMorph*, he writes like a prophet-historian, casting the past, present, and future in an easy-to-follow format that explains why the church is where she is today. He clearly articulates his thesis as follows: "The morphing of the church describes the process of transformation of the church as it was, or as it exists today, to the church as it needs to become in order to engage appropriately and significantly in God's mission in the context of the twenty-first century" (18).

The first fifty pages of the book read like a college textbook—long on fact but bereft of practicality. Chapter three, however, delves into examples of "fresh expressions" of the church. This case study approach is a welcomed theme he continues throughout the rest of the book. In this work, Gibbs justifies his position by pointing out that churchgoers shop around more than ever. Denominational ties in childhood have less impact on which churches people attend as adults. People cross over between liturgical and contemporary expressions of worship, sometimes stepping over the same boundary lines several times throughout their lives.