

# Four Kinds of Expository Preaching

There are many different kinds of expositional preaching. The four most common are: verse-by-verse, thematic, narrative, and topical.

## **Verse-by-verse preaching**

Verse-by-verse preaching is the systematic reading and explanation of a biblical text. It involves a unified book of Scripture and its piece-by-piece analysis.

## **Thematic expository (or doctrinal) preaching**

Thematic preaching is an excellent form for preaching Bible doctrine. The speaker can focus on everyday topics by expounding a specific biblical text. The pastor can focus on Bible sayings on any relevant subject by a careful study and exposition of relevant biblical passages.

Thematic expository preaching generally appears in a sermon series over several weeks and introduces many Scriptures focused on the same theme. Thematic messages may include as many as 10 or 12 Scripture passages in each sermon. Since the Bible tends to provide teachings on themes dispersed through different books, this form of preaching is a good way to preach the "whole counsel of God." This method also introduces new believers or unschooled unbelievers to general themes and patterns that appear throughout the Bible.

## **Narrative expository preaching**

Narrative preaching presents the biblical text in the form of a story and follows that story to completion. A narrative sermon functions as a lengthy illustration that uses a biblical text as its beginning and end.

When using this form, the speaker shares a story from the gospel such as that found in the account of Jesus and the Samaritan woman (John 4). In telling the story, the preacher asks the listener to join in the narrative. As a result, the listener sees the fullness of Jesus' words and teachings. This type of expository preaching can be highly effective in postmodern North American culture, which has rejected most of our traditional approaches.

Some time ago, I discovered the value of narrative preaching during a church-starting crusade in West Africa. Although I believed I had preached a great message on the first night of a crusade, I found that the nationals had not connected with my verse-by-verse exposition of Luke 14.

On the second night, I adapted my style to use a narrative exposition of the Nicodemus story from John 3. Those in attendance responded to the unfolding story with enthusiastic applause at key points. Their excitement grew. When I told of Nicodemus's presence at the foot of Jesus' cross, the crowd exploded with joy. Many responded to the gospel invitation that night. Over one hundred attended the first service of the new church.

Narrative preaching will grow more popular in the coming years. This is good news as long as the narratives remain consistent with biblical texts. Jesus demonstrated the value of narrative preaching by his use of parables.

### **Topical expository preaching**

Of the four forms of exposition, I recommend this form the least. Its weakness grows out of the limits of time and the speaker's inability to include enough biblical text about the topic in one sermon. Although I discourage this form, it is helpful at times.

Topical exposition generally revolves around one passage, centering on one theme. It is topical because it is usually a single message on a single subject. It is expository because it uses the biblical text as its source.

Most preachers use this form on special occasions such as Mother's Day, Father's Day, and Easter, but topical preaching does not provide adequate time to address the whole counsel of God as other methods do. Topical preaching limits opportunities for presenting proper understandings of the context as opposed to verse-by-verse preaching. In addition, the topical approach does not offer the opportunity to use the graphic and powerful images of narrative preaching. The church planter will probably use topical exposition, but it should be used sparingly.