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THE PREACHING WE NEED





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Tom Ascol

Introduction

The Preaching We Need

“The pulpit leads the world...Yes, the world’s a ship on its passage out, ... and the pulpit is its prow. The pulpit leads the world.” Herman Melville wrote these words in the middle of the nineteenth century. Were he to make a similar analysis in the early years of the third millennium, Melville could well write, “Preaching’s a ship on its way out, and the world is its prow. The world leads the pulpit.”

Like a stealth bomber the world has invaded the church’s air space and delivered its devastating payload on our Christian understanding and attitudes. Nowhere is the damage more evident than in the current state of preaching. Consumerism, with its inviolable principle that “the customer is king,” is as firmly entrenched in local congregations across our land as it is in local Wal-Marts. Preaching, where it is still regarded at all, is often nothing more than one of many products that the church offers its customers.

Many sectors of society have deemed preaching completely irrelevant, leading churches to downplay its role if not to give up on it altogether. Hardly anyone is surprised anymore when Sunday worship services replace preaching with drama, testimonies, music, puppets, sporting events or movies. Often this kind of change is applauded as a move toward greater effectiveness in reaching people with the gospel.

Even the holdouts who resist the reduction of preaching in the church’s life have not totally escaped the influence of the world. Where preaching continues to be esteemed it has often been transformed from authoritative proclamation into another form of amusement.

The entertainment culture has permeated the church and turned preaching (along with the other elements of worship) into popular performance. Jimmy Fallon and David Letterman are far more influential models than Jeremiah or the Apostle Paul.

The therapeutic culture has also made its mark. For many pastors, preaching has become an exercise in group therapy. Psychology has replaced exegesis. Scripture, when it is used at all, is regarded as a wax nose that can be shaped to fit the face of any felt human need. This often degenerates into a quest to discover what people want to hear and then giving it to them from the pulpit.

The impact of all these influences has left the church today with a crisis of confidence in biblical preaching. Many believers have been duped into thinking that clear, authoritative, expository preaching simply is not capable of meeting the needs of our complex and morally degenerating times. Such preaching is insufficient. It is irrelevant. Though it may have “worked” for earlier generations we live in different days that call for different measures. As suggested, such an attitude betrays a lack of confidence in God’s appointed means for accomplishing God’s ordained purposes. Ultimately, it is a lack of faith in God Himself.

Scripture is quite clear that God is pleased to save people “through the foolishness of preaching” (not, however, through foolish preaching!). It is the proclaimed message of good news that brings people to faith in Jesus Christ. This has always been true and so it will remain until our Lord’s return.

Paul warned Timothy that difficult, complicated times were coming. The descriptions which he gives in 2 Timothy 3 read like this morning’s headlines. He does not suggest to Timothy that the old methods will become obsolete in such days. Neither does he counsel him to “try something new” to meet the incredible demands of the hour. Rather, Paul exhorts his young colleague to continue in the things that he had learned and become assured of (v. 14) with an unshakeable confidence in the authority and sufficiency of Scripture (vv. 15–17).

Then, with judgment-day solemnity, the elderly apostle commands Timothy to “preach the Word!” (vv. 4:1–2). This means far more than merely using a text as a starting point to address a particular topic. It requires more than simply preaching from the Word. Paul charges Timothy to proclaim what God has revealed. This is nothing less than communicating the message of Jesus Christ in any given passage of Scripture ways that may accurately transmit its meaning and its application to life. This, above all else, is every pastor’s great responsibility.

What D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones said nearly thirty years ago remains true today. “The most urgent need in the Christian church is true preaching; and as it is the greatest and most urgent need in the church, it is obviously the greatest need of the world also.” If the pulpit is ever to begin leading the world again, it will be through a renewal of this kind of confidence in and commitment to biblical preaching.



Tom Hicks

What Is a Pastoral Preacher?

There has been a good deal said and written about “expository preaching,” “Christ-centered preaching,” “redemptive-historical preaching,” etc., but very little has been said about “pastoral preaching.” Pastoral preaching is certainly expository, Christ-centered, and it always takes redemptive history into account, but it goes much further. Pastoral preaching is intensely personal and directed to a particular local church. It requires Christlike holiness of the preacher and aims to shepherd a church in the same. Consider some of the following qualities of a pastoral preacher.

1. The pastoral preacher’s sanctification is his main task in sermon preparation.

Certainly, the preacher needs to study his text and do all of the technical work required to prepare to preach the Word faithfully. But the pastoral preacher understands that his strength and sincerity in the pulpit is tightly tied to his own life of communion with Christ. He prepares to preach Christ, not as a detached academician, but as one who is growing in the grace and knowledge of Christ personally. All week long, he prepares as a “whole man,” loved, taught, and ruled by Christ in his mind, heart, and will in every part of his life. During particularly busy weeks, when he’s had less time to study for his sermon, God will often carry him in the pulpit, if he has been faithful to walk with Christ. His sincerity, love to Christ, and love to the church is basic to pastoral preaching.

2. The pastoral preacher’s first responsibility during sermon delivery is his own personal holiness. While preaching a sermon, the pastoral preacher aims to love God

and love men. That is, he strives to obey both tables of the Ten Commandments by humble faith in Christ. Practically speaking, this means that while he's preaching, he's self-forgetful in the pulpit and that he lovingly thinks about the good of the church and the glory of God. His faith and love issue in sincere conviction and humble boldness. He refuses to make a show of himself, his gifts, his intellect, or his personality; rather, his goal is to love the people and to love Christ, not himself. He's unpretentious. He refuses to put on a "preaching voice;" instead, he preaches as he would talk to ordinary people in ordinary conversation. He doesn't pretend to be something he's not. If he's depressed, he doesn't pretend to be happy. If he's emotionally flat, he doesn't hike up his feelings in pretense. The pastoral preacher doesn't try to change his personality, but seeks to preach Christ in whatever personality the Lord has given him. His goal is to drift into the background, while Christ alone stands in the foreground. He wants people to leave saying, "what a great Savior," not, "what a great preacher." The pastor's holiness in and out of the pulpit, coupled with his faithful Christ-centered exposition, is absolutely necessary to pastoring the church that is before him.

3. The pastoral preacher trusts that the effectiveness of preaching depends on God's sovereign grace alone. The pastoral preacher realizes that he has no power whatsoever to change people. He understands that he is responsible to speak the truth with conviction, clarity, and love. But he also understands that the Spirit must add His blessing if the Word of God is to have any effect on people. That is, he believes that God alone is God, and he abandons any attempt to do what God alone can do. Therefore, the pastoral preacher's highest goal is not to change people, but to love and honor Christ, no matter how people respond. This frees the pastoral preacher from trying to "set those people straight" or "get them in line" in an authoritarian way. It also frees him from trying to play on people's emotions through cheap sentimental appeals, and from trying to entertain people intellectually so that they leave feeling impressed with something other than Jesus. Understanding God's sovereign grace also increases the pastoral preacher's sense of responsibility to pray. Preaching will only change hearts and lives by the work of the Holy Spirit; so, the pastoral preacher prays diligently that the Spirit will work in the hearts of the people. This disposition of trust in God's sovereign grace protects the sheep under his care from authoritarianism, intellectualism, and emotionalism. It leaves them with nothing but Christ, which is the essence of true shepherding.

4. The pastoral preacher preaches to the particular local church in front of him.

Faithful preaching is never disconnected from pastoring. That's because a pastoral preacher is not merely concerned with the meaning and theology of the text, but also with

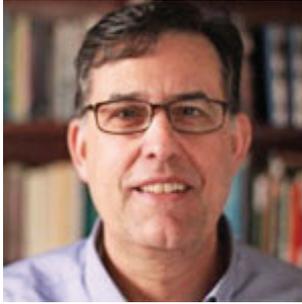
the particular people to whom he's preaching. Faithful preaching brings the whole counsel of God to bear upon the particular lives and circumstances of a particular people. Not a single sermon or letter in the New Testament was directed to the universal church. Rather, every sermon and every letter was directed to an identifiable audience and addressed the providences, temptations, sins, and trials of those people. That means a faithful preacher must know the people of his local church. He must live his life among them, study their souls in light of God's Word, pray for them, identify with them, rejoice and weep with them, labor among them, and preach Christ to them as they really are.

Pastoral preaching is not possible if the preacher takes a distant CEO approach to his position in the local church. Rather, pastoral preaching is fed and supported by true pastoral relationships with God's beloved people. The preacher must be among his people in visiting, counseling, in performing funerals and weddings, and in personal conversations. Only in this way can a pastor truly know the condition of the flock and preach the truth according to their true spiritual condition.

If someone wrongly argues that faithful preaching is merely explaining the Bible, or merely showing how each text fits in redemptive history and points to Christ, then pastors of local churches don't need to preach at all. They might just as well broadcast sermons from other skillful preachers who are capable Christ-centered expositors. But if faithful preaching necessarily involves pastoring, as Scripture teaches that it does, then all preaching must be pastoral preaching, and it must be lovingly aimed at a particular people..

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Tom Hicks serves as the Senior Pastor of First Baptist Church, Clinton, LA. You can find him on Twitter at [@tomhicksjr](https://twitter.com/tomhicksjr).



Phil Newton

Four Words That Encompass Gospel Ministry

Are we evangelicals odd and offensive? Perhaps we act oddly at times or do some offensive things. But I'm referring specifically to those things related to the gospel. We sing things like, "In the Cross of Christ I Glory," "The Power of the Cross," and "Lift High the Cross." We quote biblical phrases such as, "But may it never be that I would boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ," "I have been crucified with Christ," and "I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified" (Galatians 6:14; Galatians 2:20; 1 Corinthians 2:2). Apart from evangelical circles and those representing historic Christianity, the idea of glorying in the cross sounds repulsive!

Think of it like this: would any of us sing, "Lift High the Electric Chair"? Or sing, "The Power of the Hangman's Noose"? Or, would we never boast except in the gas chamber? Or pipe out, "In the Firing Squad I Glory"?

Admittedly, we can sing and talk about the cross without it deeply, even viscerally affecting us. But suppose we introduced the cross of Christ to someone in the Islamic or Buddhist or animistic world? Such an idea of boasting about and glorying in the cross—an instrument of torturous death for criminals—would not just be foreign to them but highly offensive, just like talking about glorying in the electric chair. For them, to embrace the

crucified Messiah could mean complete separation from family and culture—and indeed, countless times it has.

Yet our singing and talking about the cross of Christ remains central to our understanding of the teaching of the Bible, the purpose of God, and our eternity. We dare not skip on the cross! Or else we become like those that have abandoned the faith for a generic, powerless Christianity—devoid of the substitutionary, atoning death of Christ in that bloody, wrath-absorbing death on the cross.

Paul certainly faced the same type of issues in Corinth. For Romans, the only people who adorned a cross were those nailed to one as a non-Roman criminal. The noted Roman orator Cicero, while defending a man indicted by Julius Caesar, gives us an idea of what his generation thought of this instrument of the cross: “The very word ‘cross’ should be far removed not only from the person of a Roman citizen but from his thoughts, his eyes and his ears.” For sophisticated Greeks who prized philosophical discussions, talk of the cross would be inadmissible, and considered blatantly stupid. For Jews to hear of preaching Messiah crucified (that’s what “Christ crucified” means) would be blasphemous and appalling.

Yet Paul determined to know nothing among the Corinthians “except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified” (1 Corinthians 2:2). He summarized the whole of his message to the Gentile world in four words: “we preach Christ crucified” (1 Corinthians 1:23). He called the cross of Christ the power and wisdom of God (1 Corinthians 1:18, 24). Preaching “the word of the cross” (1 Corinthians 1:18) implied preaching the whole gospel, as he used the phrase as a synecdoche, where the part represents the whole. It encompassed the eternal plan of God established before the foundation of the world by which God would redeem a fallen people through the only means possible: God the Son entering the human race in the Incarnation, becoming a member of the very people that He came to redeem, fulfilling the Law’s demands, and dying innocently as the sin-bearer on the cross. Triumphant over sin and death, breaking the curse of the fall, and restoring the cosmos affected by the invasion of sin, the resurrected Christ did indeed finish the work of redemption! (Cf. 1 Corinthians 1:26–31; Ephesians 1:3–14; 2:1–3:13; Galatians 4:1–7; Romans 8:18–39). The preaching of the cross ties together the whole of biblical revelation.

Do we grasp how strange those four words—“we preach Christ crucified”—would have been to Paul’s audience in Corinth or Ephesus or later in Rome? More than strange—do we realize how utterly ridiculous such proclamation appeared? Yet Paul, and his apostolic

colleagues, and faithful believers—including many reading this post—through the centuries have joined together to glory in and proclaim the cross of Christ.

At one and the same time, the cross is the most despised and the most cherished of all objects in human history. Families have divided over it; countless men and women have been, and continue to be martyred because of it; co-workers, fellow students, and relatives have avoided it; and multitudes in diverse cultures and settings have experienced its power. And so “we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness, but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God” (1 Corinthians 1:23–24). Whenever we find ourselves tempted to slip into moralistic, therapeutic, or legalistic preaching and teaching, then meditate once again upon four words that embody the whole of our ministries as followers of Jesus Christ: “we preach Christ crucified.”.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Phil Newton serves as the Senior Pastor of Southwoods Baptist Church, Memphis, TN.



Jeff Robinson

“Heal Thyself Physician”

The Difficult Duty of Sitting Under Your Own Preaching

I have been a pastor for little more than two years now, which means I am still a rookie, and one reality I still cannot reconcile is the notion of preaching to other people the myriad texts (all of them, so far) that I find exceedingly difficult to obey myself. I preach about slaying the deadly viper of pride, but I am proud of the way I expounded and communicated the text. I tell my people that they should pray without ceasing and yet my prayer life is too often as inconsistent as summer rainfall in Central Alabama. I preach about seeking God’s grace to lower the thermostat on our tempers and then bawl out my children in the car on the way home. You get my drift.

This past Sunday presented a prime example of the tension that grips me when preaching God’s Word, a tension that always morphs into a full-blown fear that each week behind the sacred desk I am a trafficker of un-lived truth. The text was Matthew 5:9 from the Sermon on the Mount: “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God.” Great verse. Great opportunity to talk about selflessness in relating to others, displaying both love to God and love to neighbor and the like.

One of my application points was as follows: “When we are in conflict with others, we must talk less and listen more. We must learn to turn the other cheek in the way we respond verbally to others.” Ouch. I get paid to talk. And in conflict with others, I struggle mightily to be like my Lord and turn the other cheek. I recently watched the Jackie Robinson

movie, 42, and prayed that God would make me like that great man in the area of self-control. On the way home Sunday I kept thinking, “I just preached on peacemaking and my own pastor (that would be me) falls miserably short of God’s glory in this area. How are God’s undershepherds to come to grips with this daunting reality? How do we reconcile the all-too obvious truth that we are sinners preaching to sinners? How do we get our congregations over the notion that we are not popes, we are not monastics who descend from the cloister each week where we’ve been holed up, busy dodging the world, the flesh and the devil? Sin even dwells in monasteries because sinners live there. But many of the people to whom we are called to minister don’t really believe this about us, and when we sin, and we will, some of them write us off as phonies or Pharisees. In the early months of ministry in which I presently serve, a man told me I wasn’t qualified to be a pastor because I sinned. He seemed a bit stunned when I admitted that, though I believed his case for ministerial perfectionism unbiblical, I acutely felt the tension of my standing as a saved-by-grace-sinner calling other sinners to walk God’s inspired line.

Veteran pastor and counselor Paul Tripp, in his excellent new book *Dangerous Calling: Confronting the Unique Challenges of Pastoral Ministry*, has ridden to my rescue by reminding me once again that I am, in the words of the great Puritan Richard Baxter, a dying man who is called to preach to dying men. I must sit under my own preaching and teaching. My weekly preparation must always be devotional and, if I am to survive this sanctifying meat-grinder known as the pastoral ministry, it must never become clinical. Tripp writes:

“Pastors, we’re all still a bit of a mess. We’re all at times very poor examples of the truths we teach. We all have the dark ability to expound a passage that lauds God’s grace and yet be a husband or father of ungrace in the car on the way home...You and I can define biblical humility but be proud of what we know and what we’ve accomplished...We are all capable of being self-righteous, proud, judgmental, controlling, easily angered, bitter, and demanding. We sometimes act as if we’re entitled to our blessings. We often forget how much we need everything we teach...We give evidence every day that we are people in the middle of our own sanctification, that we still need the moment-by-moment rescue of grace.”

As pastors, we differ from garden-variety pew-sitters only in this fact: we have the unique privilege—and profound advantage—of being called to study in significant depth God’s chosen sin-killing, heart-renewing, image-restoring agent: the Bible. Yes, we are our own pastors and we must listen to our preaching each week, which is to say, we must do far more than “handle” God’s Word—it must handle us as well. Thus, we must ask difficult questions about canceled sin that still clings to our hearts like barnacles on an old

shrimp boat. We must ask God to use His Word to expose our besetting sins and hidden weaknesses so that we become more and more like Christ.

And we must remind our people that, despite popular misconceptions about the perfections inherent in God's ministers, we are mere clay pots, Wal-Mart crockery, weak men who are in the midst of their own sanctification—just like the hearers of the very sermons we preach. We stand in desperate need of wave upon wave of grace to wash upon the shores of our lives every moment and we must not hide that from our people. But best of all, I do not have to be paralyzed by the expectation of perfection—whether it arises from my mind or the congregation's— because Jesus was perfect for me. I am not worthy to be a minister, but Christ was worthy for me. I do not and will not measure up, but Jesus perfectly measured up for me. The gospel is true for God's people in the pew and it is true for me, His minister, as well. Tripp writes:

“We must ask ourselves what the particular passage we've been studying reveals about our own hearts. Where does this portion of God's Word call us to confession and repentance? What does it reveal about God's character and plan that should reignite our way of living? How should we apply its perspectives, principles, and commands to our daily lives? As we prepare, we need to give our hearts time to grieve our condition and celebrate the gospel. We need to take the time to pray words of confession and commit to concrete steps of repentance. We all need to take advantage of the huge blessing it is to be called by God to spend so much time in his freeing and transforming Word.”

May God grant His ministers grace to hear and heed their own preaching.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Jeff Robinson is is pastor of New City Church in Louisville, KY and a senior editor for The Gospel Coalition.



Phil Newton

Why I Preach Through Books of the Bible

I had a conversation with a minister friend who had been involved in discussing what pastors were preaching in their churches. While most seemed to agree that exposition of the biblical text must have priority in the church, few thought it wise to preach consecutively through books of the Bible—particularly with series that extended beyond twelve weeks. I understand the challenge of longer series but also see the value in the long run. The forty-four sermons that I preached through Ephesians in 1990–91, literally transformed my life, theology, and congregation. Eight or ten sermons would not have sufficed to uproot faulty theology and set us on a right course. The fifty-two sermons in Hebrews in 2000–01, sharpened our understanding of the gospel and its application to the whole of life.

What would you say had you been involved in the discussion? Here are a few thoughts that I’ve ruminated on since that conversation:

(1) Pastors have the responsibility to preach the whole range of biblical revelation.

Paul told the Ephesian elders, “For I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God” (Acts 20:27). He could not simply address his favorite issues but intentionally sought to address the issues of God’s will for sinners and for the redeemed. Do we address the range of God’s will for the Galatians or to those who first received First and Second Samuel, by picking one or two texts to expound to the neglect of the others?

(2) Preaching consecutively through a book allows the pastor and congregation the opportunity to better absorb the purpose of God and the impact upon the original audience. I recently completed preaching fifty sermons through Genesis (Jim Boice did 180!). What amazed me as I studied and preached was how the biblical narrative presented several points of crescendo that we would have missed had I only picked selected texts. For instance, Abraham offering Isaac at God's command is certainly one of the most magnificent Old Testament scenes that gave assurance to God's purpose for His people, as well as pointing to Christ as our substitute. But if we simply preach Genesis 22 without having walked through that long journey from Genesis 12, where God called Abraham out of paganism and then faithfully preserved him through many ups and downs as he waited for the unfolding of God's promise of a son, then we miss something of the pathos intended for the original audience. Can you imagine those first hearers of Genesis listening to the build up of the story—hearing the promises of God that depended upon the solitary heir of the patriarch—gasping at the seemingly out-of-the-blue command of God to sacrifice his “only son”? The knife raised above the very one that held the key to all that God had promised in the previous ten chapters. Then God provided a substitute—and in so doing preserved the line of Abraham that eventually came to the grand fruition of blessing to the nations in the person of Jesus Christ. Yes, we can just preach Genesis 22, and it will be powerful, but I suggest that it loses something of its effect when we skip over living together each week in the previous ten chapters.

(3) Preaching consecutively through books of the Bible gives the pastor and congregation a better understanding of a particular book, and if properly expounded, a fuller grasp of biblical theology. I can preach Ephesians 2:8–10, and exhort my hearers to depend upon the grace of God in Christ alone. But if I've taken my congregation to the mountain top in chapter one, descended to the darkest depths in the opening of chapter two, and then listened to Paul's declaration, “But God,” in Ephesians 2:4, then I find the familiar 2:8–10 to come with greater weight to my hearers. As Martyn Lloyd-Jones pointed out, until we've dealt with the doctrines of the text we've not really dealt with the text. Short series that skip over the broader doctrinal context may shorten the preaching but also weakens the doctrinal impact.

(4) Preaching consecutively through books of the Bible focuses the pastor onto the biblical storyline lest he skip those uncomfortable texts he otherwise would never preach. In my Genesis expositions, I wrestled through Noah's drunkenness, Lot's incestuous acts, and Judah's adultery with his daughter-in-law. I would not voluntarily pick those texts for topical expositions! But they are part of the storyline of Scripture that helps

us to understand the fallen condition and the necessity of God's grace to redeem sinners. Those texts helped my congregation to better grasp the message of Genesis hammering home that the living God preserves His people despite their messy lives.

(5) Preaching consecutively through books of the Bible gives congregations a chance to meditate more deeply upon a particular book, mining its riches, soaking up its doctrines, and making pointed applications to daily life. For instance, if you work through a book, you are regularly considering the context of that book until it begins to stick into the minds of the congregation (not to mention your own mind!). That way, as they read and think upon passages in that book, the understanding of context informs their interpretation. As a bonus, they are actually learning hermeneutics as the pastor works through the book! Their meditation upon the text, consequently, will be done contextually, by which richer understanding of doctrine and application will be developed. One can microwave a beef roast and serve it to guests (short series through books), but the slow roasting in the oven (full book exposition) will soak up the flavors, tenderize the meat, and make for a more satisfying meal.

So, am I suggesting that we all preach thirteen years through Romans, as did Martyn Lloyd-Jones (without finishing it)? Or preach 40+ years through Job, as did the Puritan Joseph Caryl? Not at all! Rather let's think of a measured way to work adequately through a book of the Bible, giving us time as preachers to absorb it, and giving our congregations a chance to grapple with its message. The preacher has to decide what he can handle and what the congregation can listen to—that will vary from one congregation to another. Admittedly, many congregations are not ready to spend a year or two in Genesis or Romans or John. The pastor may not quite be ready either. That takes training for pastor and congregation through starting with smaller books and working toward longer ones, all the while teaching the congregation how to read, listen to, meditate upon, and interpret the Word. But in the end, as pastor and congregation grow together in expounding and hearing God's Word, a depth and satisfaction with God's Word will certainly take place. I cannot imagine any pastor preaching through books of the Bible, and then looking back and saying, "I wished that I had not spent so much time preaching through books of the Bible to the people for whom I will give an account to God."

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Phil Newton serves as the Senior Pastor of Southwoods Baptist Church, Memphis, TN.



Jeff Robinson

Five Reasons a Pastor Should Read Through the Entire Bible Every Year

I vividly recall two pivotal conversations that I had with pastors shortly after I surrendered to the gospel ministry in the late 1990s. The conversations were pivotal because in them I was exposed to two vastly different approaches to ministry and the Lord used them to convince me that I must saturate my mind with Scripture.

In one conversation, I asked a longtime pastor how many times he had read the Bible in its entirety from Genesis to Revelation. His reply: “Never, but I hope to someday.” I was stunned. I thought, but did not express verbally, “Then how do you know what you believe about the Bible and other important doctrines?” Being a very green rookie minister, I thought that perhaps my question was invalid. I thought that until I had the second conversation a few weeks later.

In the second conversation with another longtime pastor, a godly man who retired a few years ago as pastor of my home church in Georgia, I posed the same question and got an answer that remains instructive to me many years later: “I try to read through the Bible every year. After all, I have given my life to teaching and preaching God’s Word and so I had better know it.” That day, I became convinced that I should read through the Bible regularly and, since it was the end of the year, I began my first read through the Bible in

a year venture. I was happy that I did. During my lengthy career as a seminary student, I practiced the same thing and after a few years, I had read through the Bible several times. This year begins my 15th straight year of this practice and the results have been massively helpful for both my personal walk with the Lord and the teaching ministry He has given me.

I have become convinced that every pastor or teacher of the Bible (or seminary professor) ought to consider this same practice. There are many, many benefits of reading through the Bible every year and here are five:

- 1. Reading through the Bible every year will help you learn the overarching metanarrative of Scripture.** After reading through the Bible a few times, the historic/redemptive storyline will become second nature to you. For example, in the OT, it will help you greatly to know that the Kingdom of Israel was divided around 930 B.C., after which time the Northern and Southern kingdoms had different kings and began to spin off into serious idolatry. With some good study helps (such as an ESV Study Bible or Reformation Study Bible), you will soon learn where everything in the OT belongs on the timeline of ancient history. Pretty soon, you will see that the Bible is all about Christ and will become keenly aware why it is important to read Leviticus alongside the NT epistle to the Hebrews.
- 2. Reading through the Bible every year will improve your ability to interpret and exegete Scripture.** This is a natural consequence of reason number one. The better you know the Bible's storyline, the more aware you will be of both the near and far contexts, the less prone you will be to engage in eisegesis. With the whole of redemptive history as your framework, you will find it no longer compelling to preach "slaying the giants in your life" from David's encounter with Goliath.
- 3. Reading through the Bible annually will keep you habitually in the Bible. You cannot read through the Bible quickly.** It will force you to spend many hours in God's Word and that is always a fruitful endeavor. If you commit to read through the Bible every year, there will be precious few days, if any, when you find yourself out of Scripture.
- 4. Reading through the Bible every year will ensure that you are engaging God's Word at least as frequently as you are engaging other solid Christian books.** I love the Puritans and the Reformers. I have to resist buying every

piece of excellent Christian literature published today by leading Reformed and evangelical publishers, but I should not be reading three non-inspired books, no matter how solid and instructive they are, for every book of the Bible I read.

- 5. Reading through the Bible annually will force you to navigate those less traveled roads of Scripture.** Reading through the Bible annually will force you to read books and passages that might not normally attract your gaze: Leviticus, Numbers, the Song of Solomon, Amos, Philemon, and yes, for those of us who suffer from acute allergies to all things end times and exhibit tendencies toward Pan-Millennialism, chapters 6–22 of Revelation.

Walking through the Bible in a year should not replace daily meditation upon and memorization of shorter passages of Scripture. Ultimately, you are reading God's Word in order to be transformed in heart and mind and it should never be a merely academic exercise. But, shouldn't reading God's Word, even in an academic setting, edify us? For the follower of Christ, should there ever be a cold, detached, clinical reading of God's Word?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Jeff Robinson is is pastor of New City Church in Louisville, KY and a senior editor for The Gospel Coalition.