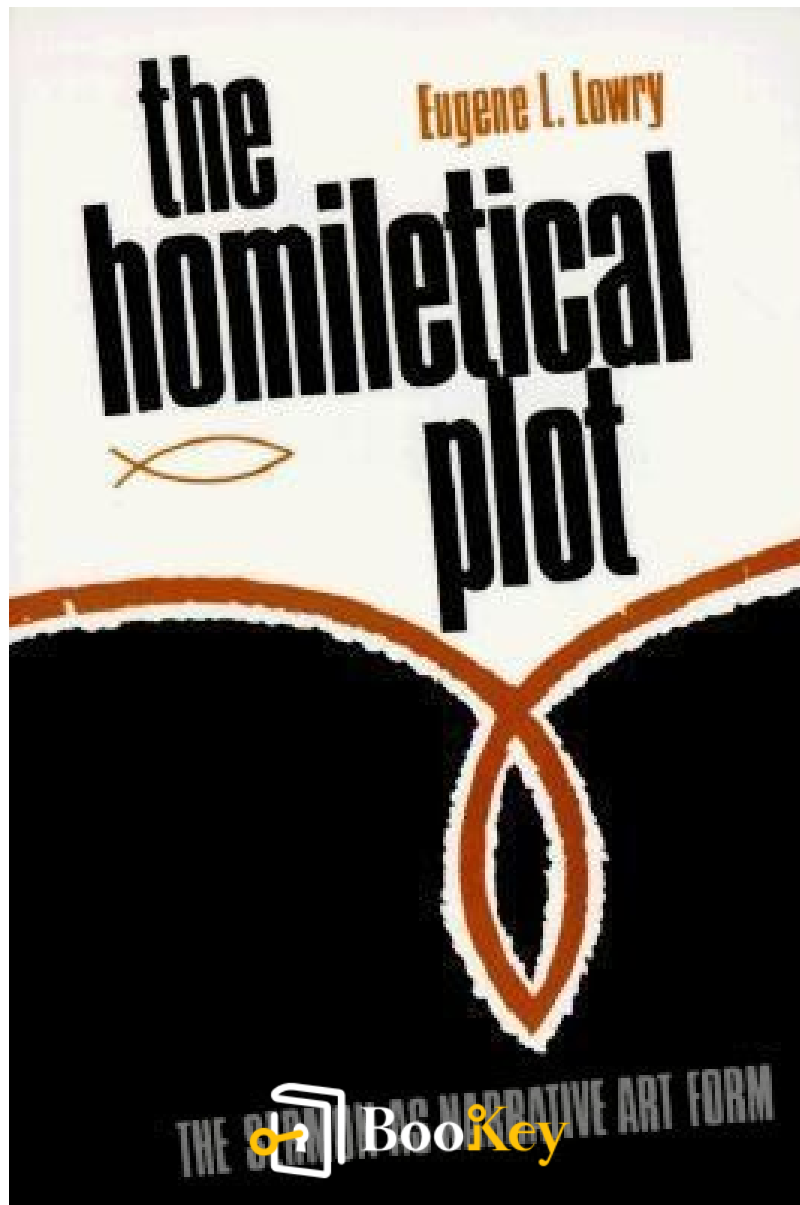


The Homiletical Plot PDF

Eugene L. Lowry



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The Homiletical Plot

Revitalizing Sermon Craft for Engaged Preachers
and Listeners.

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About the book

In "The Homiletical Plot," Eugene L. Lowry offers a dynamic approach to sermon preparation, infusing the process with fresh insights and engaging ideas. This book serves as a valuable resource for preachers, providing essential material to craft compelling messages that resonate with both the congregation and the speaker. With its clear and lively style, Lowry's work meets the pressing desire for renewed perspectives in preaching, making it an indispensable guide for anyone looking to enhance their homiletic skills.

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About the author

Eugene L. Lowry is a distinguished theologian, author, and homiletician known for his innovative contributions to the field of preaching and sermon development. With a robust academic background, including a Doctor of Philosophy degree from the University of Chicago, Lowry has served as a pastor and professor, influencing generations of preachers through his dynamic teaching and insightful writings. His seminal work, "The Homiletical Plot," presents a groundbreaking approach to sermon construction, emphasizing the importance of narrative and plot in effectively communicating the Christian message. Lowry's commitment to nurturing the spiritual life of congregations and enhancing the art of preaching has made him a respected figure in both academic and ecclesiastical circles, reflecting his deep dedication to the craft and its transformative impact on faith communities.

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Chapter 1 Summary : The Image of the Sermon



Section	Summary
The Image of the Sermon	Our mental image of sermons, shaped by past experiences, often leads us to treat them as collections of disjointed notes, neglecting important connections.
The Problem of Construction vs. Development	Preachers frequently view sermons as separate parts, resulting in disjointed sermons rather than a dynamic, cohesive whole, emphasizing static outlines over flow.
Different Approaches to Sermon Preparation	Focusing on the organic growth of ideas leads to more cohesive sermons, contrasting static construction. Development enhances the experience for both preacher and audience.
Reevaluating Sermonic Processes	Preachers should view sermon preparation as an art, facilitating the evolution of gospel ideas rather than mechanical construction.
Storytelling as the Core of Preaching	Sermons should incorporate narrative structures, engaging the congregation through story rather than just propositional statements.
Emphasizing Narrative in Sermon Creation	Adopting a narrative approach allows for exploration of homiletical tension, creating deeper connections with the congregation through resolution.

The Image of the Sermon

In our understanding of sermons, we often possess an

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unconscious mental image shaped by our experiences in life and church. This image dictates how we approach sermon preparation, often treating sermons as mere collections of organized notes, akin to constructing with individual bricks. Such a perspective leads to a fragmented view where the connections and transitions—the "mortar"—are overlooked.

The Problem of Construction vs. Development

Many preachers tend to treat sermons as constructs comprised of distinct parts, primarily focusing on the ideational content instead of the flow and interaction with the congregation. This assembly-line mentality mirrors industrial processes and leads to sermons that seem disjointed, resembling "three sermonettes" rather than a cohesive whole. The results can include an emphasis on static outlines rather than dynamic movement within the sermon.

Different Approaches to Sermon Preparation

The distinction between "construct" and "develop" highlights contrasts between static assembly and the organic growth of ideas. A well-developed sermon emerges from an idea's inherent energy and vitality, often feeling more cohesive and

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naturally flowing than one that is strictly organized. When preachers respect the process of development, the sermon becomes a more fulfilling experience for both the speaker and the audience.

Reevaluating Sermonic Processes

As preachers reconsider their approaches, it is vital to challenge traditional views of sermon preparation. Preaching should be viewed as an art form, where the preacher acts as an artist who facilitates the birth and evolution of an idea grounded in the gospel. This requires a shift away from mechanical constructions toward a more organic understanding of conveying messages.

Storytelling as the Core of Preaching

Borrowing from narrative structures, sermons can be thought of as plots that revolve around resolved tensions and discrepancies, similar to the storytelling found in parables. The success of a sermon often comes from moving beyond propositional statements to engaging with the congregation through narrative. By embracing the fluid nature of storytelling, preachers can effectively capture the audience,



as stories inherently create a captivating experience.

Emphasizing Narrative in Sermon Creation

Ultimately, seeing sermons as narratives allows preachers to cultivate ideas that stem from a felt homiletical tension, engaging in a process that leads to resolution. This narrative approach fosters a dynamic and generative power within the sermon, facilitating a deeper connection with the congregation. As preachers adopt this new conceptual framework, they can explore the intricacies of sermon preparation more effectively.

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Example

Key Point: Emphasizing the narrative structure in sermons enhances engagement and connection with the congregation.

Example: Imagine standing before your audience, sharing a story from your own life that resonates with their experiences. As you unfold the narrative, your words create a vivid picture, drawing them into the moment. You speak of a challenge faced and the moment of realization that brought clarity and hope. This isn't merely a sermon; it's a shared journey, where your listeners can see themselves in the story. The seamless flow of your storytelling captivates their attention, allowing the profound message of the gospel to resonate deeply within their hearts, fostering a sense of community and understanding. This narrative approach transforms your sermon from a static lecture into a compelling journey that invites interaction and reflection.



Critical Thinking

Key Point: Narrative as a central element in sermon preparation

Critical Interpretation: Lowry highlights the importance of storytelling in sermons, proposing that viewing them as narratives allows preachers to foster emotional engagement and connection, transforming a traditional, mechanical approach into a more dynamic, interactive experience. However, this narrative-centric view may overlook the potential value of structured, ideational content, as explored in works like "The Craft of Sermon Construction" by Haddon W. Robinson, which advocates for clarity and precision in message delivery. It's crucial for readers to consider that while Lowry's perspective emphasizes creativity and cohesion through narrative, there remains legitimacy in more traditional approaches that prioritize theological and doctrinal clarity.



Chapter 2 Summary : Getting Started



Section	Summary
Getting Started	Introduction to sermon preparation and its stages.
Preliminary Stages of Sermon Preparation	The process begins with "wandering thoughtfulness" which involves gathering ideas and reading scripture. The second stage is decision-making, where a vague homiletical idea starts to emerge.
Understanding the Transition	Transitioning from general thoughts to a clear sermon idea is challenging. Preachers may focus on a central theme or a felt need, but both approaches require balance.
Importance of Relational Thinking	Preachers should categorize notes into problems and solutions, exploring their intersection to inspire dynamic sermon ideas.
Synthesizing Need and Theme	A sermon combines an implicit problem and theme. Understanding this synthesis is crucial for creating a meaningful message and for clarifying vague thoughts.
Plot as a Key Component	Plot is essential in sermon preparation, resembling storytelling with a relatable problem and resolution, fostering audience engagement.
Sustaining Sermonic Tension	Maintaining tension in the sermon is crucial. Outlining too rigidly may undermine this tension; the narrative should unfold naturally to engage the audience.
Conclusion	Successful sermon preparation involves understanding problem and theme interplay, embracing plot structure, and sustaining tension.

Getting Started

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Preliminary Stages of Sermon Preparation

Sermon preparation consists of two initial stages before the actual formation begins. The first stage, “wandering thoughtfulness,” involves gathering ideas, reading scripture, and contemplating various notes, often leading to uncertainty about the upcoming sermon. The second stage is one of decision-making, where a preacher begins to identify a homiletical idea, acknowledging a vague sense that a sermon is emerging but lacking clarity.

Understanding the Transition

The transition between these stages presents a challenge for many preachers. Despite various discussions about what makes a good sermon, the move from generalized thoughts to a clear idea remains elusive. Preachers often express this transition in different ways: some focus on a central theme while others emphasize addressing a felt need or problem. However, both approaches can be limiting if not balanced properly.

Importance of Relational Thinking

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To effectively bridge the gap between sermon thoughts and the idea, preachers should adopt a relational approach. This involves dividing notes into two categories: problems and solutions, and exploring the intersection between them. The sparks of this interaction can lead to a dynamic and lifelike sermon idea.

Synthesizing Need and Theme

Every sermon hinges on an implicit problem and theme; thus, understanding why a text communicates what it does is crucial to creating a meaningful message. The synthesis of thematic and problem-oriented ideas reveals the tension necessary for crafting a sermon, allowing preachers to convert vague thoughts into clear, generative concepts.

Plot as a Key Component

The concept of plot drives both the preparation and presentation of sermons. Like storytelling, effective sermons must involve a relatable problem and a resolution. By recognizing that sermons evolve from human predicaments to gospel solutions, preachers can foster deeper engagement with their audience.



Sustaining Sermonic Tension

Sermons should maintain a sense of tension through the delivery process. The traditional approach of outlining what will be said risks undermining this tension. Instead, preachers must allow the narrative of the sermon to unfold naturally, engaging the audience with unexpected revelations. In conclusion, successful sermon preparation involves recognizing the interplay between problem and theme, embracing the plot structure, and sustaining the tension throughout the presentation.

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Example

Key Point: The importance of transitioning from vague thoughts to a clear sermon idea is critical

Example: Consider yourself standing at the edge of a vast forest with endless paths. You have gathered your thoughts—ideas from scripture, reflections from your spiritual journey—but feel lost in the undergrowth of possibilities. As you take a step forward into the trees, you can see glimpses of light filtering through the branches, hinting at the path ahead. This is the moment of decision-making where you must choose a direction, a key theme that resonates with both your heart and the needs of your congregation. This critical transition isn't merely about picking a topic; it's about discovering the intersection of what the scripture says and the life challenges faced by your audience. As you navigate through this forest of inspiration, seek out that clear idea that will serve as your guiding light, leading you toward a sermon that connects deeply with those who will hear it.



Chapter 3 Summary : Plot Forms

Plot Forms in Narratives

Types of Plot Forms

There are two distinct types of plot forms: the movie plot and the television series plot.

1.

Movie Plot

- Begins with a felt discrepancy leading to an unknown resolution.

- Example: In "High Noon," the town marshal is torn between love for a pacifist woman and his duty to protect the town from three vengeful criminals. His dilemma creates suspense as viewers await the resolution.

2.

Television Series Plot

- Also starts with a felt discrepancy, but moves toward a known conclusion where the hero's survival is expected.



- Viewers know the hero will survive, but how he escapes the situation creates suspense. Shows like "Barnaby Jones" and "Columbo" present scenarios where viewers know the crime but must watch the detective solve it.

Sermons as Narrative

Sermons typically parallel the television series plot structure, starting with a congregational bind and moving towards a resolution centered on the gospel. The essential query is how the gospel will be addressed and its implications.

The Importance of Suspense

Attention in both narratives and sermons arises from the ambiguity and tension surrounding the unknown resolution, not merely from the historical or doctrinal content.

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Chapter 4 Summary : Upsetting the Equilibrium

OOPS! Upsetting the Equilibrium

Engaging the Listeners

The initial step in delivering a sermon is to disrupt the listeners' mental state to draw them into the theme.

Individuals arrive at church with varying moods and levels of readiness, and it is the preacher's responsibility to engage them. Unlike artists who synthesize a narrative to captivate their audience, preachers must often work harder to capture the attention of congregants who may be indifferent or distracted.

The Nature of Ambiguity

Ambiguity is a crucial psychological driver of interest and engagement. The resolution of ambiguity fulfills a fundamental human need, generating interest that can lead to



action. Thus, introducing a sense of conflict or tension is vital, akin to storytelling techniques in plays or novels.

Creating Suspense

The importance of using ambiguous language or questions in a sermon captures the congregation's attention and compels them to seek resolution. A sermon should aim to introduce and explore a central ambiguity or issue, guiding listeners through tension while eventually leading to a resolution that revitalizes their understanding of the gospel.

Effective Sermon Structures

Sermonic introductions should ideally present an initial ambiguity that stimulates interest, allowing the main theme to unfold naturally. Great openings often leave listeners with unresolved queries that lead to deeper engagement. However, pastors must ensure that any initial ambiguity does not overshadow the main message of the sermon.

Balance Between Ambiguity and Resolution

While ensuring that the audience remains engaged with

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unresolved issues, it is essential not to diminish the eventual delivery of the sermon's core message. The preacher should maintain the tension introduced and provide clues to guide the congregation without revealing the solution too early.

Conclusion: The Journey of Probing

The journey of a sermon begins by upsetting the equilibrium and continues through probing the central problem. Engaging the audience with compelling ambiguities and guiding them toward a meaningful resolution creates a profound experience that extends beyond mere intellectual understanding, making the message of the gospel a deeply felt reality.

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Chapter 5 Summary : Analyzing the Discrepancy

Analyzing the Discrepancy

Introduction to the Analysis Stage

The second stage of the sermonic process is the analysis, or diagnosis, considered the most critical phase of preparing a sermon. This stage often takes more time than the other stages combined, as it significantly shapes the presentation of the gospel message. The focus here is on identifying and understanding the fundamental discrepancies within the human condition.

The Reverse Approach to Theology

While systematic theology typically begins with doctrines of God and Christ, practical ministry and preaching start with the human condition. A preacher's understanding of sin and estrangement allows them to project their views on salvation



accordingly. The preacher's perception of humanity influences the form of Christology emphasized in their message.

The Central Question of Discrepancy

Preachers must recognize the discrepancy between what is and what ought to be, as this gap is essential to the ministry. Effective diagnosis determines the shape of the sermon and the type of good news delivered. The process of diagnosis is critical, as it is similar to how physicians assess maladies to prescribe appropriate treatments.

The Importance of Depth in Diagnosis

A significant flaw in many sermons is inadequate analysis, which tends to be superficial or merely descriptive. True analysis requires digging deeper to uncover underlying motivations behind behaviors, rather than simply describing them. This allows for a more insightful exploration of human issues, moving from surface-level description to deeper causative factors.

Avoiding Superficiality through Analysis

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Illustrations are often used in sermons, but they should supplement, not replace, analysis. The goal of discussing behaviors such as apathy should involve probing the deeper motives and fears driving these actions. Sermons must explore the complexities of human behavior to have a meaningful impact.

Exploring Complex Motivations

The analysis process involves asking "why" repeatedly to peel back layers of motivation. This method reveals deeper causes of behavior and prompts a more profound understanding of human conditions. For example, apathy may stem from fear or insecurity rather than laziness.

Personal Reflection in Diagnosis

Preachers should consider their own experiences and motivations to enhance their understanding of discrepancies in others. This holistic approach helps avoid a “we versus them” mindset and fosters empathy within the sermon.

The Process of Analysis

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True analysis involves continuous questioning until a point of clarity emerges, leading to meaningful insights. This discovery, referred to as the "Aha" moment, illuminates and propels the sermonic narrative forward.

Importance of Engaging the Congregation

The analytical process should not be kept private; it's essential to engage the congregation in this exploration. Asking questions and facilitating an interactive process makes the sermon more relatable and meaningful, maintaining interest through ambiguity and discovery.

Helmut Thielicke's Preaching Example

Thielicke demonstrates an effective analysis in his sermon on the Pharisee and Publican. He challenges assumptions and provokes thought, increasing tension around the questions posed, ultimately leading to a resolution that resonates powerfully with the audience.

Conclusion

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The analysis stage is vital for preaching as it shapes the understanding of the human condition and prepares congregants for the resolution of the sermon. By deepening the inquiry into human discrepancies, preachers enhance the effectiveness and credibility of their message.

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Critical Thinking

Key Point: The depth of analysis is essential in sermon preparation.

Critical Interpretation: Lowry emphasizes that the analysis phase in sermon preparation is crucial not just for presenting theological doctrines, but for understanding the intricate discrepancies within the human condition. This approach suggests that the gap between reality and ideals is foundational to impactful preaching. However, one might argue that an overemphasis on human conditions might risk downplaying the transcendental aspect of theology. Critics like Karl Barth have posited that starting with the divine rather than the human ensures a more robust theological framework. Hence, while Lowry's method could lead to meaningful sermons, it's vital for readers to weigh the implications of such an analysis against traditional theological frameworks that prioritize divine revelation.



Chapter 6 Summary : Disclosing the Clue to Resolution

AHA! Disclosing the Clue to Resolution

Purpose of Analysis in Preaching

The goal of analysis is to uncover a significant "why" that helps both the preacher and the congregation understand the problematic issue at hand. All forms of problem-solving seek a missing link that explains the cause-and-effect relationship of events.

The Revelation of the Missing Link

The discovery of the missing link is pivotal for resolving issues and offers a new perspective. This revelation is often accompanied by an "aha" moment, providing clarity that transforms the understanding of the problem.

Principle of Reversal

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The unexpected nature of the missing clue often leads to a radical change in perspective, termed the "principle of reversal." This principle can yield surprising insights that alter the initial assumptions about a situation.

Reversal in Various Domains

Reversals are prevalent in various forms of narrative, including literature (e.g., Plato's "Allegory of the Cave," Shakespeare's "King Lear"), humor, and puzzles. Even in familiar stories or jokes, the unexpected twist often leads to deeper understanding or laughter.

Homiletical Examples of Reversal

1.

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Chapter 7 Summary : Experiencing the Gospel

Experiencing the Gospel

Diagnosis and Resolution

The text asserts that once the clue to resolution is identified, the context for experiencing the gospel is ready. Just as medical diagnosis is crucial, understanding the underlying issues in preaching is vital before delivering gospel messages. Impatience for immediate answers can lead to ineffective sermons that bypass necessary introspection and miss probing deeper questions.

Common Pitfalls in Homiletics

A common error is the "homiletical short circuit," where preachers jump ahead from analysis to application without adequately addressing the issue at hand, resulting in superficial solutions that do not help the congregation. For



example, addressing poverty without exploring the nuances behind it can yield misguided advice that does not alleviate suffering.

The Importance of Context

Proper timing and context are imperative in sermon delivery. Using the analogy of a phone call from a spouse, the same words can have vastly different impacts depending on the emotional backdrop of the relationship. This principle underscores that the gospel must be effectively proclaimed within the right context to resonate and bring forth genuine understanding and transformation.

The Proclamation of the Gospel

The act of preaching should not only convey words but also enact a transformative deed. The gospel must align with the diagnosis made in earlier stages of the sermon preparation. Recognizing the complexity of human nature allows for a deeper understanding of sin and grace, grounding the sermon in a reality that acknowledges both goodness and evil.

The Challenge of Preaching

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Preachers often find that the real challenge lies not in experiencing the gospel itself (stage four), but in conducting a thorough diagnosis (stages two and three). Understanding and probing deeply into the issues at hand often illuminate the gospel message, making it evident and magnetic.

Continuity with Human Experience

The preached gospel is depicted as continuous with human experiences, but this continuity arises after reevaluating those experiences in light of the gospel. This inversion of perspective enables a deeper engagement with the gospel's transformative power, preparing the congregation to anticipate the consequences of such an intersection between gospel truth and human condition.

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Chapter 8 Summary : Anticipating the Consequences

YEAH! Anticipating the Consequences

Introduction to Closure in Sermons

In this stage of the sermon, the analysis of discrepancies and the revelation of resolutions have occurred, leading to the experience of good news and a release from ambiguity. The focus now shifts to the future, transformed by the gospel. This anticipatory stage is significant for its effect on closure.

Transition to Future Expectation

Using Paul's rhetorical questions from Romans as a guide, preachers inquire about the implications of the gospel on human conditions. Similar techniques appear in various literary plots, such as iconic television series, where characters' interactions hint at future developments. In sermons, the revelation does not fully solve issues but opens



pathways to possibilities delineated by the gospel.

Difference Between Traditional and Narrative Sermon Structures

Traditional sermon structures focus on announcing issues and solutions leading to a climactic “call to commitment.” In contrast, narrative sermons diverge where the resolution is recognized as a new perspective informed by the gospel. The tension culminates around three-quarters through the sermon, while resolution—and thus the anticipation of consequences—follows shortly after.

Theological Implications of the Climax

The focus of sermons should be on God's activity rather than human response, asserting that human action is a result of experiencing the gospel. The climax is not a human “call to commitment” but the experience of God's grace, showcasing a shift from human-centered righteousness to divine grace.

Challenging the Concept of Change

Referencing Kurt Lewin’s theories on behavioral change, the



text highlights the inadequacy of pressure for achieving meaningful change. Genuine transformation emerges not from external pushes but from the gospel's ability to liberate individuals from constraints, fostering a newfound capacity for love and action.

Anticipating the Call from New Freedom

Post-experience of transformation through the gospel, the sermon may draw forth various calls to action, illustrating the potential future based on a new freedom in Christ, and extending an invitation for involvement within the community and broader societal issues.

Exploring Further Questions

With the examination of the sermon structure complete, three questions arise regarding the variability of the five-stage sequence, sermon preparation, and the role of biblical narrative preaching. These questions will inform further discussions in the subsequent section.



Chapter 9 Summary : Variations

Variations in Preaching

Introduction to Variety in Sermonic Structure

The narrative plot line serves as a normative structure for preaching, yet the consistent use of this approach can lead to monotony if not varied. Unlike the traditional three-point sermon, which risks becoming dull, the narrative plot retains the potential for engagement through ambiguity.

The Role of Ambiguity

Ambiguity is essential to maintain listener interest, acting as the "glue" that binds the audience to the sermon's ideational movement. Preachers must explore how to preserve this element while varying their sermons' form.

Narrative Sermons and Their Own Structure

Biblical narratives possess their own inherent plots and



ambiguities, which means they shouldn't be forced into an externally imposed structure. The five-step process of the narrative structure can be adapted according to the nature of the biblical message without compromising its integrity.

Community Engagement in Sermons

Listeners should be encouraged to participate actively, avoiding too much closure at the sermon's end. This allows the message to resonate beyond the service, prompting action and reflection.

Adjusting the Sermon Structure

Recognizing that certain occasions (such as funerals or major traumatic events) inherently disrupt listeners' equilibrium can lead to adjustments in the sermon structure. Preachers can often bypass the need to re-establish equilibrium as these

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Chapter 10 Summary : Preparation

Preparation for Sermon Development

Beginning the Sermon Preparation

Sermon preparation begins by identifying the source of the sermonic idea, which may arise from Scripture, congregational needs, or ethical dilemmas. This idea emerges where the problem meets the gospel. The preacher must determine whether to start with the problem or the solution, engaging in thought until the tension is felt.

Exploring Textual Examples

Using Paul's text from Romans 7:24 as a problem text, the preacher moves towards a solution in a different text, acknowledging the tension rather than merely juxtaposing two contrasting ideas. Concrete questions must be posed to clarify the issue, leading to a deeper understanding and potential solution.



Analyzing the Text

The relation between problem and solution must be explored via biblical exegesis and personal reflection. Identifying the bind is crucial; only then can the preacher work towards articulating the sermonic idea, incorporating both the initial problem and its possible resolution.

Discovering the Clue to Resolution

In the preparation process, the preacher should analyze discrepancies and seek clarity through various techniques, including listing potential reasons for the issue and examining their opposites. This process leads to the uncovering of insights crucial for sermon development.

The Role of Conventional Wisdom

Often, conventional wisdom hinders the discovery of fresh ideas. This is especially poignant when searching for a sermonic concept. Engaging with Scripture for personal enrichment, rather than solely for sermon crafting, fosters a conducive environment for serendipitous insights.



Techniques to Expand Perspective

Adopting different perspectives when reading familiar texts can yield new insights. By considering other characters' viewpoints, the preacher may break free from conventional understanding and discover deeper meanings within biblical narratives.

The Essence of Sermonic Preparation

Sermonic preparation aims not to produce clever conclusions but to be open to the gospel's transformative power. As "midwives" of the kerygmatic moment, preachers must first prepare themselves spiritually and intellectually, setting the stage for others to encounter the Word meaningfully.

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Chapter 11 Summary : Biblical Narrative Preaching

Biblical Narrative Preaching

Biblical narrative preaching is a simpler task compared to other sermon types (topical, doctrinal, etc.) as it utilizes stories that already possess a plot structure. Unlike topics that require transformation into narrative form, biblical narratives come ready-made, although they still carry ambiguities that need exploration. Not all Scripture is narrative; only passages that describe events with a sense of time qualify as such.

Trend in Narrative Preaching

There is a growing trend towards biblical narrative preaching, influenced by mass media and a shift towards "theology as autobiography." Some argue that this trend stems from the exhaustion of topical preaching. Despite trepidations among some homilists about storytelling, it is a skill that can be learned and unlearned; many preachers can excel at it through proper guidance.



Pointers for Telling a Story

1.

Attend to Every “Insignificant” Line

: Focus on overlooked details in familiar narratives to provide fresh interpretations.

2.

Look Between the Lines

: Consider cultural contexts and implied meanings beyond the explicit narrative to uncover deeper insights.

3.

Catch Every Encounter

: Take time to imagine the dynamics within the narrative, considering characters’ thoughts and feelings during interactions.

4.

Bring Data from Your Own Experience

: Relate personal experiences to characters, allowing for deeper empathy and understanding.

5.

Move Behind Behavior to Motive

: Understand the motivations behind characters’ actions to create relatable and credible narratives.



6.

Move Behind Facts to Prior Dynamics

: Contextualize actions within the broader dynamics of relationships and social settings.

7.

Utilize the Senses

: Engage listeners through vivid sensory descriptions that immerse them in the narrative.

8.

Switch Identification

: Encourage listeners to identify with different characters in the story to evoke empathy and a deeper understanding of judgments.

9.

Utilize Active Grammar

: Employ lively and direct language to bring narrative moments to life.

10.

Break into First and Second Person Singular Form

: Use personal and emotive language to make experiences felt rather than just described.

11.

Move from the Subjective to the Objective, from Particular to General—and Back Again

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: Balance detailed storytelling with overarching themes to enrich listener engagement.

12.

Set the Stage (Foreshadowing)

: Use early narrative elements to hint at important later events, enhancing the storytelling experience.

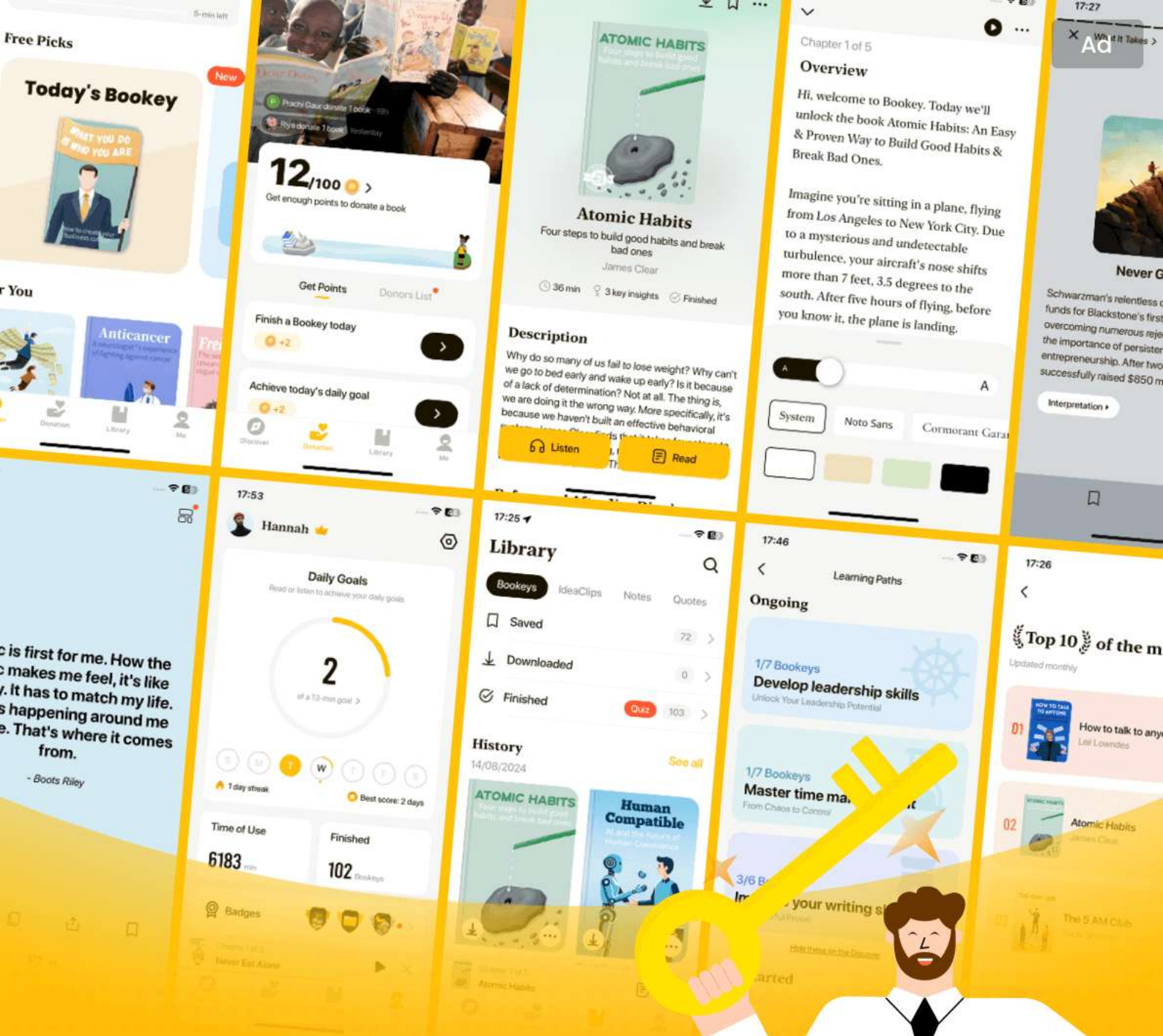
Conclusion

In biblical narrative preaching, capturing and maintaining the ambiguity of human experience is vital. By identifying with the characters and using the diverse storytelling techniques outlined, preachers can create an engaging and transformative connection with their audience. The ultimate goal is to tell the story effectively, allowing the proclaimed Word to resonate both personally and collectively.

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Chapter 1 | Quotes From Pages 41-56

1. ‘Our task is the same as that of any artist whose act of discovery, as Eliseo Vivas describes it, is to “extricate the import and order of his experience and body it forth in language.”’
2. ‘Rather than perceiving ourselves as engineers or architects, we view preaching as an art form and see ourselves as artists.’
3. ‘A sermon is a narrative art form.’
4. ‘What is needed badly is a different image of the sermon—one which can do justice to the developmental nature of the homiletical process.’
5. ‘The working through of a sensed discrepancy is what gives a sermonic idea its expansive or generative power.’

Chapter 2 | Quotes From Pages 57-66

1. There is an incredible gulf between the 'wandering

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thoughtfulness' stage and the 'I have it' stage which is difficult to bridge.

2. Most of us can identify the successful completion of this second stage as the moment when the question of one's spouse about how things are going can be answered 'I think I have one!' More appropriately the response could be 'I think one has me!'
3. The difficult issue is to identify what it is that happens in that transition so easily felt and so hard to articulate.
4. When a theme of a proposed sermon is thrown against a problem, a sermonic idea may be born.
5. The felt bond between need and theme is central to sermonic form; discovering it is the chief work we do in transforming vague Sunday morning thoughts into a generative sermon idea.
6. One might say that any sermon involves both an 'itch' and a 'scratch' and sermons are born when at least implicitly in the preacher's mind the problematic itch intersects a solutional scratch—between the particulars of the human



predicament and the particularity of the gospel.

7. In presentation the sermon always begins with the itch and moves to the scratch—from the human predicament to the solution born of the gospel.
8. Nothing could be more fatal for a sermon! Can you imagine a playwright telling in advance how the story will end, or a novelist revealing 'who did it?' in the first few pages?
9. The term plot is key both to sermon preparation and to sermon presentation.

Chapter 3 | Quotes From Pages 67-74

1. The entire plot is hinged on his dilemma and the painful choice he now must make.
2. It is the homiletical bind being moved from problem to solution, from itch to scratch, that shapes the form of the sermon, not the biblical, historical, doctrinal, or ethical content.
3. The marshal's problem was in fact that he had to choose between his love for his bride and his duty toward his



town.

4.Sometimes it appears that perhaps there is no redemptive answer to the human predicament.

5.Because a sermon is an event-in-time—existing in time, not space—a process and not a collection of parts, it is helpful to think of sequence rather than structure.

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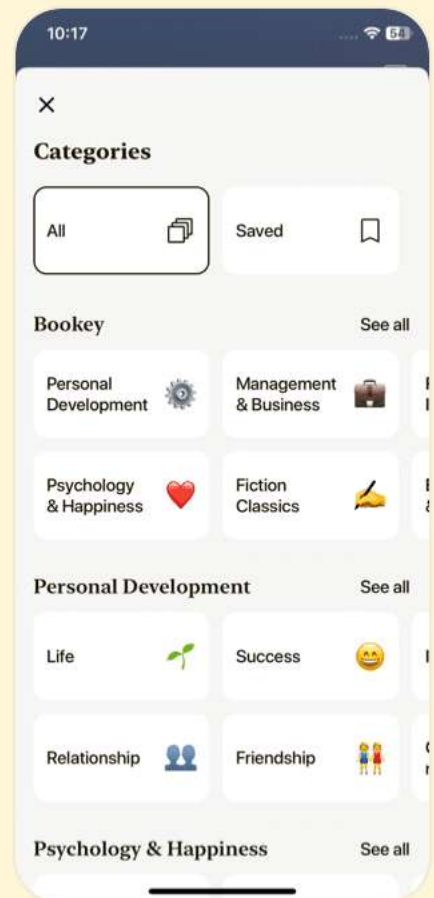
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Chapter 4 | Quotes From Pages 77-92

1. The first step in the sermon as preached is to upset the equilibrium of the listeners in such a way as to engage them in the sermon theme.
2. The need to resolve ambiguity is theological in nature—that's why it can be used as a literary device.
3. One cannot breathe easily until some solution occurs. And when resolution comes, the result is both a knowing and a feeling.
4. The primary purpose of sermon introductions is to produce imbalance for the sake of engagement.
5. The purpose of the opening stage of the presented sermon is to trigger ambiguity in the listeners' minds.

Chapter 5 | Quotes From Pages 93-113

1. The question of the human condition is, I believe, the most fundamental and consequential question of all.
2. The diagnosis of that gap is central to the task of ministry.
3. The analysis of that discrepancy determines the entire



shape of the sermon, including the form of the good news proclaimed.

4. But the process of analysis not only provides the occasion for the content of the preached Word to happen, but also the ambiguity necessary to sustain the listeners' attention.
5. The purpose, then, for stage two is not simply for a resolution to be reached but also for a readiness for resolution to be developed.

Chapter 6 | Quotes From Pages 114-142

1. The overarching purpose of the process of analysis (step two) is finally to arrive at an explanatory why, first for the preacher in the study and then for the congregation in the sermonic event itself.
2. When found, the missing link is the bridge from problem to solution, from itch to scratch.
3. This decisive turning-point is reflected visually in the plot line diagram above.
4. It is often the case that the clue making understandable the issue at stake comes as a surprise. It is not quite what one



had expected, and 'arrives' from where you were not looking.

5. In short, we may seek self-identity and hope to find ourselves, but the hoped-for result never occurs through our own efforts. We seek ourselves, but are finally found!
6. The clue served to reverse the underlying assumption. Before the critical clue is given the matter seems irresolute; after successful completion it all seems so self-evident.
7. Good advice, perhaps, but hardly the good news!
8. The fundamental mistake of the liberal Protestant pulpit of the last forty years is that it presumes that the gospel is continuous with human experience. It would be closer to the truth to say that the gospel is continuous with human experience after the gospel has turned human experience upside down.
9. Resolution comes only by reversing the assumption of 'common sense.'
10. By disclosing the clue to resolution, which typically involves some kind of reversal, it opens a new door, and



prepares the context in which the Word of God can be proclaimed—deductively ordered in good Barthian fashion.

11. To claim that the preached Word is a 'stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles' surely is to suggest that there is something about the gospel which is upside down to the world's way of viewing truth.

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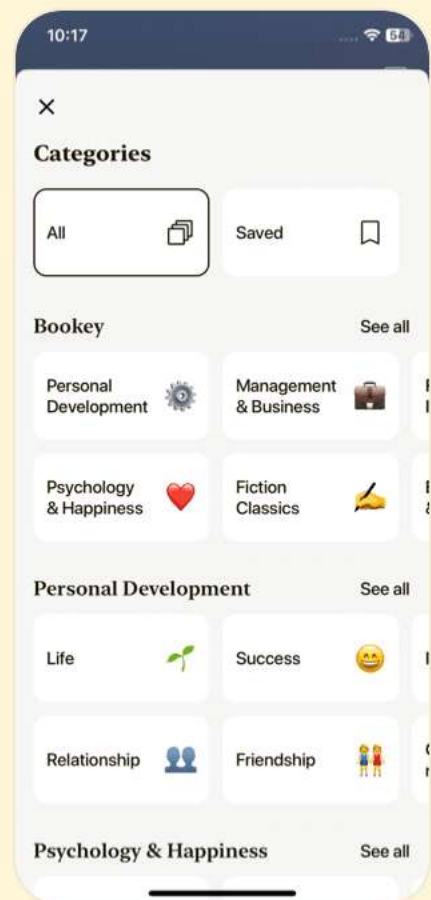
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Chapter 7 | Quotes From Pages 143-152

1. The good news is not that we should stop rejecting ourselves, but rather that we no longer have to reject ourselves because we no longer need to justify our existence.
2. To preach the gospel, then, is not merely to say words but to effect a deed.
3. The cure must always match the disease.
4. We are in truth complicated creatures whose goodness is never pure and whose evil is never complete.
5. Once the clue to resolution has been found and matters are turned around in anticipation of the answer.

Chapter 8 | Quotes From Pages 153-164

1. What then shall we say to this?
2. "If God is for us, who is against us?" (Rom. 8:31)
3. "Behold, I make all things new" (Rev. 21:5)
4. The focus of our preaching is upon the decisive activity of God, not upon us
5. Freedom is a consequence of the grace of God



6. The proclamation of the gospel must be other than a weekly 'guilt trip'... The awfulness of human guilt needs redemption, not a lecture

7. This last phase of the sermon articulates the possible consequences which now—thanks be to God—can be anticipated

8. The central issue is the proclamation of that good news

Chapter 9 | Quotes From Pages 167-176

1. Ambiguity is the glue that holds listeners and ideational movement together.

2. The sermon, not finished yet, lingers beyond the benediction, with conclusions to be reached, decisions made, actions taken...

3. The principle of reversal... generally can be found within the narrative itself.

4. The problematic nature of dialogue sermons helps identify the cruciality of ambiguity in any sermon... too much ambiguity which blows the circuits of comprehension.

5. What this means specifically in the five-step process is to



leave unstated or only hinted what might be the anticipation of the consequences to the narrative plot.

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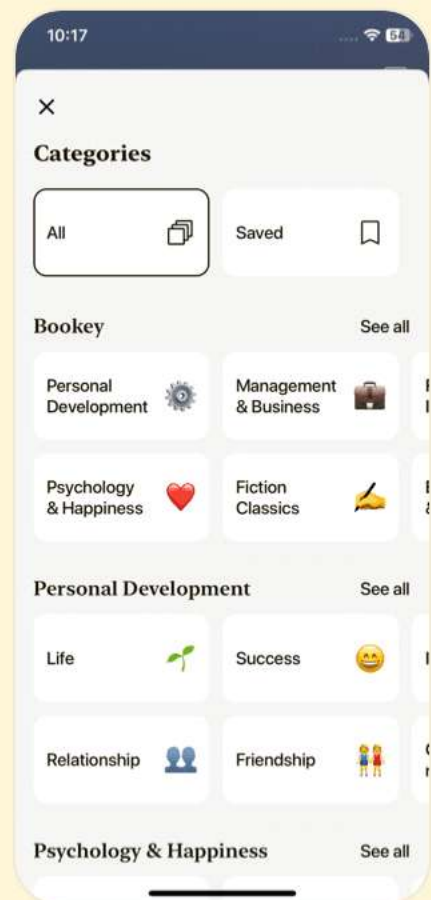
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Chapter 10 | Quotes From Pages 177-189

1. The intersection point is felt more intuitively than conceptually and more implicitly than explicitly.
2. Not only are people unimpressed with and disinterested in others' conclusions per se, it is an insult to their personhood not to be involved in the process itself.
3. My best sermons began when I was not looking for one.
4. If we expect our hearers to be changed by the Word, and if we presume that preaching may occasion such change, then we need to be ready for change ourselves.
5. Sermonic preparation is difficult principally because of this 'provisional character of preaching.'

Chapter 11 | Quotes From Pages 190-204

1. Attend to every 'insignificant' line.
2. Look between the lines.
3. Catch every encounter.
4. Move behind behavior to motive.
5. Utilize the senses.





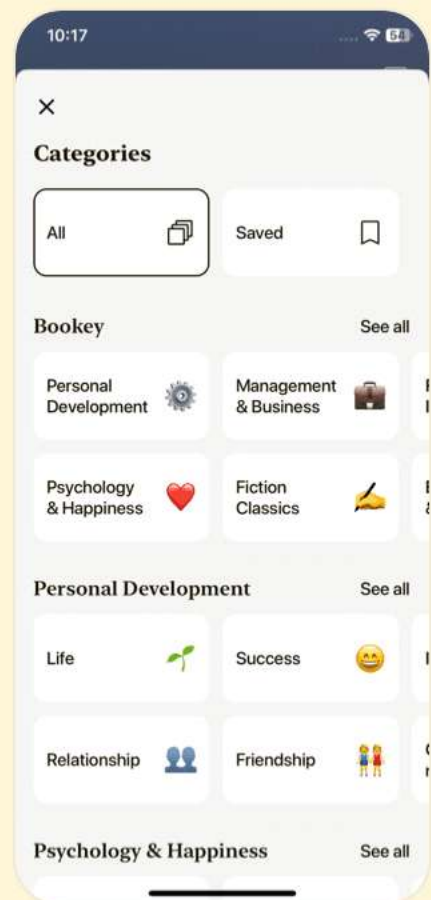
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The Homiletical Plot Questions

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Chapter 1 | The Image of the Sermon| Q&A

1.Question

What is the significance of the way we perceive a sermon according to the author?

Answer: The author argues that our perception of a sermon is often shaped unconsciously by how we understand language and reality; we tend to see a sermon as a collection of parts that need to be organized logically, similar to assembling a physical object. This limited view leads preachers to focus too much on the substance of the sermon rather than its movement and flow.

2.Question

How does the author distinguish between 'construct' and 'develop' in sermon preparation?

Answer: 'Construct' implies building something static from separate parts with an engineering mindset, whereas 'develop'

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suggests an organic growth process, akin to nurturing a living thing. This means that a sermon should evolve naturally, focusing on themes and movements instead of merely assembling points.

3.Question

What does the author mean by saying that a sermon is a narrative plot rather than just a logical assembly?

Answer:The author views a sermon as a narrative—a story that unfolds with a beginning, middle, and end, driven by tension or a 'sensed discrepancy.' This perspective emphasizes the journey taken during the sermon rather than merely presenting information, allowing for a more engaging and dynamic preaching experience.

4.Question

How does the author suggest we change our approach to sermon preparation?

Answer:The author suggests that instead of adhering strictly to traditional outlines and structural rules, preachers should embrace the narrative nature of sermons. They should focus



on developing their ideas organically, reflecting the dynamic interaction between the preacher and the congregation, thus creating a more effective and relatable preaching experience.

5.Question

What example does the author use to illustrate the difference between Hebrew and Greek approaches to language and storytelling?

Answer:The author contrasts the Hebrew language, which is more action-oriented and descriptive, with the Greek focus on definitions. An example contrasted is Jesus' parable of the Prodigal Son, which uses narrative to express ideas through actions, versus 1 Corinthians 13, which defines love with adjectives, highlighting that stories resonate more deeply due to their intrinsic movement and emotional engagement.

6.Question

Why is resolution important in a sermon according to the author?

Answer:Resolution is essential in a sermon because it serves to address the 'sensed discrepancy' introduced at the start, guiding the congregation from tension to resolution. This



journey not only keeps the audience engaged but also allows the preacher to connect the message to the gospel, leading to a meaningful conclusion that resonates with the listeners.

7.Question

What should preachers focus on to improve their sermon delivery?

Answer:Preachers should focus on the continuity and movement of their sermons rather than merely the structure, ensuring that they tell a compelling story that engages the congregation. They should aim for a natural flow that captures attention and involves the audience in the message, reminiscent of how stories work.

8.Question

What transformative image does the author propose for preachers to adopt regarding sermon preparation?

Answer:The author proposes that preachers adopt the image of being artists rather than engineers, emphasizing creativity and organic development in homiletics. This shift encourages preachers to view the sermon as a living narrative that



requires cultivation and care to fully develop, much like an artist bringing forth their work.

9.Question

How does the author suggest recognizing success in preaching?

Answer:The author suggests that preachers can recognize success in preaching through the warmth of audience engagement during the sermon, noting that when they shift from propositional statements to narrative or conversational engagement, the audience tends to be more attentive and involved.

10.Question

What can preachers learn from the differences in expression between story and abstract propositional statements?

Answer:Preachers can learn that storytelling inherently draws in audiences better than abstract statements, as narratives evoke emotional responses and keep listeners engaged. The challenge lies in blending theological insights with compelling narratives that resonate with real-life experiences.



Chapter 2 | Getting Started| Q&A

1.Question

What are the two preliminary stages of sermon preparation and why are they significant?

Answer:The first stage is 'wandering thoughtfulness,' where preachers jot down ideas, read lectionary passages, and sort through previous notes without a clear direction yet. It's a stage filled with imagination, but can also lead to anxiety. The second stage is 'decision,' where preachers settle on an idea to develop. These stages are significant as they represent crucial transitions that shape the eventual sermon, highlighting the difficulty of moving from vague thoughts to a concrete sermon idea.

2.Question

How can a sermon be defined in terms of its essential ingredients according to the author?

Answer:A sermon can be defined as a premeditated plot that



inherently includes a sensed discrepancy or bind—a problem coupled with its solution. This dynamic interaction between the 'itch' (human predicament) and the 'scratch' (gospel solution) is crucial for forming a generative sermon idea.

3.Question

What is the importance of identifying the 'itch' and 'scratch' in sermon preparation?

Answer:Identifying the 'itch' represents assessing the human need or problem, while the 'scratch' signifies the solution or thematic response from the gospel. This interplay is fundamental as it creates the tension necessary for the sermon to resonate with the congregation, creating both relevance and depth.

4.Question

Why is thinking relationally important in Sermon Development?

Answer:Thinking relationally fosters connections between various sermon ideas and themes, enabling a preacher to see how the problem and theme intersect. This relational



approach allows for the development of a living sermon idea rather than static content, ensuring that the sermon engages and communicates effectively with the audience.

5.Question

How should a preacher approach the transition from the wandering thoughtfulness stage to forming a sermon idea?

Answer:A preacher should begin by sorting preliminary thoughts into two categories: one representing the sensed problem and the other representing potential themes or solutions. The goal is to find intersections between these two stacks, allowing for a generative sermon idea to emerge that encapsulates the tension between human need and divine answer.

6.Question

What does the author suggest is often overlooked in preaching texts regarding sermon preparation?

Answer:The dynamics of transitioning from generalized sermon thoughts to a specific sermon idea are often overlooked. While many resources focus on where to find



ideas or emphasize personal attributes, they often neglect the intricacies involved in synthesizing those ideas into a coherent and engaging sermon.

7.Question

How does the notion of plot relate to both sermon preparation and presentation?

Answer:Plot is integral to sermon preparation and presentation, as it frames the sermon as a narrative that progresses from the problem to the solution. Just like a compelling story, a sermon should establish dramatic tension and lead the audience through an experience rather than simply conveying information upfront.

8.Question

What did the author learn from conversations with experienced preachers?

Answer:The author learned that many accomplished preachers struggle to articulate the intuitive process of moving from vague ideas to a cohesive sermon concept. Their ability often lies in an innate understanding of the



relationship between needs and themes, which allows them to effectively engage their congregations.

Chapter 3 | Plot Forms| Q&A

1.Question

What does the plot of 'High Noon' illustrate in terms of human dilemmas?

Answer: The plot of 'High Noon' illustrates the complexity of human dilemmas, where the protagonist, the town marshal, must choose between two significant goods: his love for his bride, who desires a peaceful life, and his duty to protect his town from impending danger. This situation exemplifies the painful choices individuals often face, highlighting that true conflicts do not arise from choosing between good and evil but rather between competing goods.

2.Question

How does Lowry differentiate between movie plot and television series plot?

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Answer:Lowry differentiates by stating that a typical movie plot, like 'High Noon,' starts with a felt discrepancy leading to an unknown resolution, whereas a television series plot begins similarly but moves towards a known conclusion, knowing the protagonist will likely survive. The tension revolves around how they will achieve that outcome, engaging the viewer's curiosity.

3.Question

What is the significance of the 'homiletical bind' in sermons?

Answer:The 'homiletical bind' refers to the central dilemma or discrepancy addressed in sermons that ties into the human experience of ambiguity or tension. It challenges the preacher to articulate how the gospel intersects with the complexities of life, engaging the audience and leading them through the journey of understanding to what the resolution might look like through faith.

4.Question

Why is the sequence of the sermonic plot important?



Answer: The sequence of the sermonic plot is important because it represents a dynamic process rather than a static structure. It allows the sermon to exist as a narrative progression through five stages: upsetting the equilibrium, analyzing the discrepancy, disclosing the clue to resolution, experiencing the gospel, and anticipating the consequences. This approach reflects the real-time experience of the listeners and keeps them engaged through each phase of emotional and spiritual realization.

5. Question

What does the term 'ambiguity' refer to in the context of sermons?

Answer: In the context of sermons, 'ambiguity' refers to the uncertainty and complexity of human situations that are often not straightforward. The sermon seeks to address these ambiguous situations by exploring how the gospel can provide insights, comfort, or resolutions, allowing the audience to reflect on their own lives and decisions in light of faith.



6.Question

How can the structure of a sermon impact its effectiveness?

Answer:The structure of a sermon can significantly impact its effectiveness by determining how well it engages the audience through the narrative arc of the homiletical plot. A well-structured sermon that follows the five sequential stages can lead listeners from confusion to clarity, helping them to process their own life ambiguities and find meaning in the gospel message.

7.Question

What are the implications of preaching choices framed simply between God and Baal?

Answer:Framing preaching choices simply between God and Baal can oversimplify the complexities of real-life decisions that congregants face. Most individuals grapple with nuanced choices involving specific goods or evils rather than stark dichotomies of right versus wrong, thereby making the sermon less relatable and impactful in addressing their actual



struggles.

8.Question

Why is the 'mortar' important in sermon composition?

Answer:The 'mortar,' which represents the narrative process and connection between parts of the sermon, is crucial for coherent delivery and audience engagement. It ensures that the diverse elements of the sermon come together to form a cohesive message that resonates emotionally and spiritually with listeners, preventing the sermon from becoming just a collection of unrelated facts or outlines.

9.Question

How can fiction writers influence the effectiveness of sermons?

Answer:Fiction writers influence the effectiveness of sermons by crafting narratives that deeply resonate with human experiences and dilemmas. Their understanding of ambiguity and character development creates relatable scenarios, which preachers can emulate to connect their messages with the realities faced by the congregation, thus



making the gospel more applicable and meaningful.

10.Question

What role does the anticipation of consequences play in sermons?

Answer: The anticipation of consequences in sermons encourages congregants to consider the implications of their choices and the gospel message in their lives. By exploring potential outcomes based on the teachings of Christ, preachers can inspire accountability and reflection, motivating individuals to act in faith and align their lives with the message they hear.

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Chapter 4 | Upsetting the Equilibrium| Q&A

1.Question

Why is it necessary to upset the equilibrium of listeners at the beginning of a sermon?

Answer:Upsetting the equilibrium engages the listeners and draws them into the sermon theme.

Like playwrights, who capture the audience's attention by creating tension, a sermon must also create a sense of ambiguity or conflict that makes listeners eager to know more.

2.Question

What are some reasons listeners may have different levels of readiness when they arrive at a sermon?

Answer:Listeners may come with varying emotions and experiences—some may be eager and engaged, while others might be bored or having had a bad day. This diversity in mood means the preacher has to draw in the congregation regardless of their emotional state.

3.Question

What role does ambiguity play in a sermon?



Answer: Ambiguity acts as a motivator for attention and action. It reflects a felt problem that needs resolution, which keeps the audience engaged. By introducing ambiguity, preachers create a dynamic environment where the central issues can unfold and be addressed.

4. Question

How can minor ambiguities in the introduction of a sermon be effective?

Answer: Minor ambiguities can pique interest and draw listeners into the sermon's trajectory. However, it's crucial they don't distract from the main theme—listeners should return to the central plot after the minor teaser, ensuring they remain focused on the core message.

5. Question

What is the relationship between creating tension in a sermon and maintaining audience interest?

Answer: Creating tension through ambiguity captivates the audience, holding their interest until resolution is provided. If the tension dissipates too quickly or isn't compelling,



listeners may become disengaged and miss key messages.

6.Question

What is the danger of revealing too much too early in a sermon?

Answer:Revealing too much early on can lead to a loss of interest from the congregation. Like a storyteller who gives away the plot too soon, the preacher risks making the sermon unengaging, as the listeners have no reason to stay invested.

7.Question

How do good sermon titles contribute to upsetting listeners' equilibrium?

Answer:Effective sermon titles should evoke curiosity and ambiguity, prompting listeners to wonder about the subject matter. This creates an initial tension that encourages engagement and sets the stage for the themes explored during the sermon.

8.Question

What can happen if a preacher introduces an ambiguity but fails to resolve it?

Answer:If an ambiguity isn't resolved, it can distract the



listeners from the central message of the sermon. They may fixate on the unresolved issue and miss the main points, leading to confusion and disengagement.

9.Question

How can the opening lines of a sermon serve to engage listeners?

Answer:Opening lines can introduce a striking or thought-provoking statement that presents a felt problem or tension, fostering a sense of urgency and drawing the congregation into the discussion, preparing them for the deeper exploration to come.

10.Question

What is the significance of the 'felt need' aspect in preaching?

Answer:Addressing felt needs creates a connection between the sermon and the listeners' experiences. When the sermon resonates with the congregation's struggles or questions, the message becomes more impactful and relevant.

Chapter 5 | Analyzing the Discrepancy| Q&A

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1.Question

What is the significance of analyzing the fundamental discrepancy in preaching?

Answer:The analysis of the fundamental discrepancy is crucial as it shapes the entire sermon.

It involves understanding the gap between how things are and how they ought to be, which is central to effectively presenting the gospel. Without this understanding, the sermon may lack depth and fail to resonate with the congregation's experiences.

2.Question

How does the process of asking 'Why?' contribute to deeper understanding in sermons?

Answer:Asking 'Why?' repeatedly uncovers underlying causes and motivations behind behaviors rather than settling for surface-level descriptions. This depth of analysis leads to more meaningful insights that can engage the congregation and illuminate the gospel's message in a profound way.

3.Question

In what way can poor analysis lead to sermons being



ineffective?

Answer: Poor analysis results in sermons that remain at a behavioral level and rely on generalized moral exhortations. Such sermons may feel shallow and provide 'pat answers' that lack credibility, failing to connect deeply with the complexities of human situations.

4.Question

How can personal experiences aid in the diagnostic process of sermon preparation?

Answer: Personal experiences allow the preacher to relate empathetically to the issues being analyzed. By reflecting on one's motives and struggles, a preacher can provide a more relatable and insightful diagnosis that resonates with the congregation's own struggles.

5.Question

Why is depth of analysis crucial for establishing credibility in preaching?

Answer: Depth of analysis helps preachers avoid superficial conclusions and empowers them to link the gospel message



directly to the complexities of human experience. This credibility is essential for the congregation to trust and engage with the preacher's insights.

6.Question

What can preachers learn from detective stories in terms of constructing a sermon?

Answer:Preachers can learn that maintaining ambiguity and suspense keeps the audience engaged. Just as a detective story builds anticipation through twists and turns before revealing the resolution, sermons should explore discrepancies and deepen questions before delivering the gospel's answer.

7.Question

How does the analogy of a doctor's diagnosis relate to the analysis in preaching?

Answer:Just as a doctor needs to accurately diagnose an ailment to prescribe the right treatment, preachers must analyze the fundamental discrepancies in the human condition to provide effective biblical solutions. Without a



proper diagnosis, the subsequent 'cure' may not address the real issues.

8.Question

What pitfalls should preachers avoid when doing analysis in their sermons?

Answer:Preachers should avoid oversimplifying complex human behaviors into broad labels or assumptions. Instead, they should seek to dig deeper to uncover the intricate motives and emotions behind actions, as superficiality can lead to misunderstanding and ultimately render the sermon ineffective.

Chapter 6 | Disclosing the Clue to Resolution| Q&A

1.Question

What is the overarching purpose of the process of analysis in sermon preparation?

Answer:The primary goal of the analysis process is to uncover an explanatory 'why' for both the preacher during study and the congregation during the sermon, ultimately revealing the missing link



that leads from problem to solution.

2.Question

How does the author describe dead-end answers in the problem-solving process?

Answer:Dead-end answers are solutions that initially seem plausible but upon further examination fail to explain the issue at hand, much like the frustration in a detective story when the wrong suspects are pinned for a crime.

3.Question

What is the significance of the 'Aha' moment in preaching?

Answer:The 'Aha' moment represents a revelatory clue that provides new understanding, allowing the entire situation to come into focus and often surprising the audience with its insight.

4.Question

Can you explain the principle of reversal and give an example from literature or preaching?

Answer:The principle of reversal involves a surprising twist in understanding that alters perceptions. An example is



Plato's allegory of the cave, where prisoners believe shadows on a wall are reality until they are exposed to the light of truth outside the cave, radically changing their understanding.

5.Question

How does a reversal in thinking occur, as illustrated by the movies and jokes mentioned?

Answer:Reversal in thinking occurs when the expected outcome deviates dramatically from reality, such as in the joke about Sir Oliver where the punchline reveals a shockingly humorous or unexpected twist, creating a moment of surprise that redefines the situation.

6.Question

What role does context play in experiencing a revelation in a sermon?

Answer:The context establishes the expectations and assumptions of the audience, which the preacher then disrupts through the revelation, allowing the message to resonate and transform their understanding.



7.Question

What was a critical oversight in the sermon about 'Finding Yourself'?

Answer: The sermon failed to follow through on the analysis process and shifted from asking 'why' people struggle with identity to 'how' to find it, neglecting deeper truths and leading to a flat conclusion.

8.Question

What is meant by 'the clue to resolution' in a sermon and its relation to human experience?

Answer: The clue to resolution often reveals a surprising truth that turns assumptions upside down, showcasing how true self-identity is received from the love and acceptance of others rather than being found through individual effort.

9.Question

What are the four different forms of the principle of reversal discussed?

Answer: 1) The cause-effect reversal; 2) the inverted cause reversal; 3) the inverted assumption reversal; 4) the inverted logic reversal.



10.Question

How does the concept of reversal relate to the gospel, according to the author?

Answer:The gospel often presents truths that are contrary to worldly wisdom, exemplifying a radical inversion where what is considered weak or foolish by societal standards becomes the source of divine strength or wisdom.

11.Question

What does the author suggest about the nature of biblical stories and parables in relation to reversal?

Answer:Biblical stories and parables are rife with reversals that challenge and disrupt expectations, encouraging deeper reflections on themes of grace, justice, and God's character.

12.Question

What can we learn from the puzzle analogy regarding assumptions in sermon preparation?

Answer:Just like in the puzzle that requires looking beyond assumptions about boundaries to solve it, sermons require questioning underlying assumptions to unlock new insights for the congregation.





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Chapter 7 | Experiencing the Gospel| Q&A

1.Question

What is the importance of diagnosis in preaching the gospel?

Answer:Diagnosis is crucial in preaching because it helps uncover the underlying issues people face. Just as a physician must diagnose a patient's condition before treatment, a preacher must thoroughly understand the problems of their congregation before proclaiming the gospel. Without proper diagnosis, sermons may provide superficial solutions that do not address the real needs of the listeners.

2.Question

How can impatience for answers affect the preaching process?

Answer:Impatience for quick answers can lead to 'homiletical short circuit,' where the sermon skips vital stages of analysis and understanding to jump straight to solutions. This can result in ineffective preaching that fails to engage the



audience and does not adequately address their needs.

3.Question

Why is timing important when proclaiming the gospel?

Answer:Timing is essential because the impact of the gospel message can change based on the context in which it is delivered. For example, a message of love may appear trivial if delivered without acknowledging a previous conflict, while it can become deeply healing and reconciling when timed appropriately after recognizing the issues at hand.

4.Question

What does the author mean by the phrase 'the cure must always match the disease'?

Answer:This phrase signifies that the gospel message offered must align with the identified problems of the human condition. Effective preaching requires understanding the specific struggles people face and offering a gospel response that genuinely addresses those struggles.

5.Question

How does the author view sin in relation to goodness and evil?



Answer: The author sees sin as often being a distorted form of good, implying that even in evil actions, there may be underlying good intentions. This perspective calls for compassion and understanding towards individuals while truthfully identifying and naming the evil present.

6. Question

What is the relationship between human experience and the gospel according to the author?

Answer: The author believes there should be a connection between human experience and the gospel, but it should occur after the experience is turned upside down by the diagnosis of truth. This makes the gospel profoundly relevant, as it engages with the actual struggles of life but also transforms and redeems them.

7. Question

What can be anticipated as a result of experiencing the gospel?

Answer: Once the gospel is effectively proclaimed and experienced, one can anticipate transformative consequences



in individuals' lives, such as healing, reconciliation, and a newfound understanding of identity grounded in God's love.

8.Question

In what ways can the homilist facilitate a deeper understanding of the gospel?

Answer: The homilist can facilitate deeper understanding by inviting the congregation to explore their struggles thoroughly, creating a context of empathy and relevance before presenting the gospel. This involves careful timing and a willingness to guide listeners through their collective experiences toward the hope found in the gospel.

Chapter 8 | Anticipating the Consequences| Q&A

1.Question

What does it mean to anticipate the consequences of the gospel in a sermon?

Answer: Anticipating the consequences of the gospel in a sermon means looking forward to the new possibilities that arise from the transformative message of the gospel. This phase of the sermon



allows the preacher and the congregation to explore the practical implications of the gospel in their lives, highlighting how faith can reshape their future by opening new doors and opportunities that were previously unseen.

2.Question

How does the narrative structure of a sermon differ from traditional sermon construction?

Answer: The narrative structure of a sermon focuses on the progression towards resolution and transformation through the gospel, rather than solely on a climactic call to commitment. Unlike traditional sermon construction, which emphasizes immediately presenting a problem and giving a solution, the narrative approach involves building tension through the human condition that culminates in the gospel's revelation, which in turn leads to the anticipation of how lives can change as a result.

3.Question

Why is the 'asking' in a sermon seen differently in a narrative approach compared to traditional sermons?



Answer: In a narrative approach, the ‘asking’ phase comes after the experience of the gospel, serving as a way to articulate the new possibilities created by that experience. In contrast, traditional sermons often place the ‘asking’ as the climax, which can unintentionally shift the focus from God’s action to human response, mistakenly appearing as works righteousness.

4. Question

What is the significance of the phrase ‘Behold, I make all things new’ in the context of sermons?

Answer: This phrase signifies the transformative power of the gospel, suggesting that the message of Christ leads to a complete renewal of life circumstances, attitudes, and relationships. It emphasizes that the old ways are replaced with new opportunities and ways of living that reflect the essence of God's grace.

5. Question

How does the tension in a sermon resolve in relation to biblical examples?



Answer: The tension in a sermon resolves when the gospel intersects with the human situation, similar to how pivotal moments in literature, like the arrival of freedom in 'Roots', create a turning point. This resolution opens up new expectations and actions that reflect the transformative effect of the gospel on the lives of believers.

6.Question

What is the practical implication of viewing the gospel as a release from the necessity of doing evil?

Answer: Viewing the gospel as a release from the necessity of doing evil implies that it empowers individuals to make choices rooted in love and freedom rather than coercion or guilt. This liberation allows people to act out of grace instead of obligation, fostering genuine relationships with others and with God.

7.Question

How should a sermon address the question 'What then shall we say to this?' after delivering the gospel?

Answer: After delivering the gospel, a sermon should explore



the implications of this message by inviting the congregation to reflect on changes in their lives and community. It might include calls to action, encouraging them to live out their faith in tangible ways, such as embracing love for others, seeking justice, or engaging in community outreach.

8.Question

How can understanding the dynamics of tension and resolution enhance sermon preparation?

Answer:Understanding the dynamics of tension and resolution can enhance sermon preparation by helping preachers identify the narrative arc of their message. This insight allows them to effectively build tension in the first stages of the sermon, leading to a climactic resolution where the gospel is revealed, resulting in a powerful call to envision the new possibilities for life and action.

9.Question

What caution does the author express regarding the approach of ‘pushing’ congregations towards change?

Answer:The author cautions against a ‘push’ approach,



which pressures congregations to enact change without addressing deeper struggles or fears. This method can create resentment and apathy; instead, the focus should be on removing barriers to freedom through the gospel, which inherently generates a willingness to respond and change.

10.Question

In what ways can a sermon utilize the concepts from modern behavioral change theories?

Answer:A sermon can utilize concepts from behavioral change theories by recognizing that effective transformation often requires addressing the underlying tensions and fears that hold people back. Rather than simply increasing pressure on congregants, preachers might focus on reducing these tensions through the empowering message of the gospel, enabling genuine change that aligns with the grace of God.

Chapter 9 | Variations| Q&A

1.Question

How can a sermon maintain listener engagement while varying its narrative structure?



Answer:By preserving ambiguity within the narrative structure, a sermon can keep listeners engaged. It is important to avoid a predictable format; instead, a dynamic approach that allows for unresolved conflicts or questions can invigorate the experience, giving the congregation something to ponder and act upon beyond the sermon itself.

2.Question

What is the role of ambiguity in a sermon?

Answer:Ambiguity acts as the 'glue' that connects listeners to the sermon's themes and messages. It encourages them to actively engage with the content rather than passively receive it, allowing for deeper reflection and personal connection to the material.

3.Question

Why might the traditional three-point sermon become boring?

Answer:The traditional three-point sermon, being a rational discourse rather than a communal engagement, risks



becoming monotonous if repeated unchanged. Its structured format can become predictable, leading to disengagement among listeners.

4.Question

In what circumstances is it unnecessary to upset the listeners' equilibrium at the beginning of a sermon?

Answer:In instances of clear trauma or significant events, such as during a funeral or immediately following a tragic occurrence like an assassination, the equilibrium is already upset, making it redundant for the preacher to further instigate discomfort.

5.Question

How can the conclusion of a sermon influence its impact on the audience?

Answer:Leaving a sermon with an open or ambiguous conclusion can prolong its impact, inviting the congregation to continue processing the message and engage with it beyond the service. This aligns with contemporary storytelling techniques in films where unresolved endings



keep viewers reflective and engaged.

6.Question

What factors can contribute to the failure of dialogue sermons?

Answer:Dialogue sermons may fail due to a lack of meaningful ambiguity, overly rehearsed exchanges that resolve conflicts before they are presented, or polarized debates that force the audience to choose sides instead of fostering a collaborative exploration of ideas.

7.Question

What is the importance of knowing the audience's context when preparing a sermon?

Answer:Understanding the audience's context helps the preacher tailor the message appropriately, ensuring that it resonates with their current experiences and challenges, ultimately enhancing engagement and relevance.

8.Question

How can varying the type of discrepancy discussed in a sermon create a different experience for the congregation?



Answer:By shifting the focus of the discrepancy from 'why' something is true to 'how' or 'when' it can change the narrative dynamics and spark different types of engagement from the audience, allowing for richer understanding and deeper inquiry.

9.Question

What lessons can be learned from the examples of impactful sermons during tragic events?

Answer:Sermons given during traumatic times emphasize the need for empathetic engagement and the power of addressing collective grief. They also highlight the necessity of being sensitive to the emotional and spiritual needs of listeners rather than adhering strictly to structured sermon formats.

10.Question

What is the significance of the preacher's role in maintaining interest during a sermon?

Answer:The preacher must take responsibility for captivating the listeners' interest by crafting messages that resonate and provoke thought, particularly in contexts where congregants



may come with little readiness for engagement.

11.Question

What should a preacher do if their special sermon occasions become routine?

Answer:If special occasions begin to feel routine, the preacher should evaluate factors contributing to this perception and explore new forms of engagement or different approaches to the content to revitalize the experience.

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Chapter 10 | Preparation| Q&A

1.Question

What is the first task in sermon preparation according to Lowry?

Answer: The first task in sermon preparation is to identify the beginning point between the problem (the human predicament) and the solution (the gospel), and then to explore the dynamics of that relationship.

2.Question

How does Paul's statement in Romans 7:24 serve as a model for identifying a problem in sermon preparation?

Answer: Paul's statement, 'Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?' is a clear problem text that illustrates the need for a solution. The sermon preparation process involves digging deeper into this expressed problem to find a relevant solution rooted in the gospel.

3.Question

Why is it important to make the problematic text more



concrete in sermon preparation?

Answer: Making the problematic text more concrete helps clarify the specific human predicament it addresses, allowing the preacher to frame the solution more effectively and connect it to contemporary issues.

4.Question

What role does biblical exegesis play in understanding the relationship between problematic and solution texts?

Answer: Biblical exegesis is crucial for analyzing the texts to discern how they relate to each other and how they can be connected for effective sermon preparation. It helps identify contradictions and deepens understanding of the text's implications.

5.Question

What does Lowry mean by the 'clue to resolution'?

Answer: The 'clue to resolution' refers to the insights gained during the preparation process that reveal how to articulate the gospel in response to the identified problem, illuminating the way forward for the sermon.



6.Question

How does Lowry suggest preachers can overcome conventional wisdom during sermon preparation?

Answer:Preachers can overcome conventional wisdom by actively questioning assumptions, considering opposites, and engaging in broader reading and exploration of scripture to create space for serendipitous insights.

7.Question

What is the significance of preparing for a sermon when not actively seeking one, according to Lowry?

Answer:The best sermons often emerge when the preacher is not actively hunting for ideas. This indicates that creative insights can arise from a more relaxed engagement with scripture, free from the pressures of expectation.

8.Question

What does Lowry mean by 'being alive and open to the surprise of the gospel'?

Answer:Being alive and open to the surprise of the gospel involves an openness to unexpected revelations and insights that can change both the preacher and the congregation,



emphasizing that sermon preparation is a dynamic interplay between the human experience and divine revelation.

9.Question

How does Lowry describe the preacher's role in the sermon preparation process?

Answer: The preacher acts as a 'midwife' in the kerygmatic moment, facilitating the delivery of the gospel message rather than producing it. This emphasizes the importance of the preacher's preparation and their openness to God's work.

10.Question

What is the importance of perspective when analyzing biblical texts for preaching?

Answer: Changing the perspective from which a story is told can lead to new insights and a deeper understanding of the text. By considering the views of different characters, preachers can uncover fresh interpretations that resonate with contemporary audiences.

Chapter 11 | Biblical Narrative Preaching| Q&A

1.Question

What makes biblical narrative preaching simpler

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compared to other sermon types?

Answer: Biblical narrative preaching is simpler because biblical narratives are already in a plot form, requiring less transformation to become an event-in-time. In other sermon types, themes must be translated into narrative, which adds complexity.

2.Question

Why is it important to attend to every 'insignificant' line in a narrative?

Answer: Focusing on seemingly insignificant lines can reveal unique angles and insights that are often overlooked, allowing for a fresh perspective on familiar stories.

3.Question

How can looking between the lines enhance understanding of a biblical story?

Answer: By considering cultural context and what is unsaid in the narrative, deeper meanings and the subtleties of the characters' actions can be discerned, enriching the listeners' experience.



4.Question

What does it mean to 'catch every encounter' in storytelling?

Answer:Catching every encounter involves pausing to imagine the implicit actions and emotions that occur between explicit events in the story, allowing for a fuller understanding of the characters' experiences.

5.Question

Why is it helpful to bring personal experience into biblical narratives?

Answer:Integrating personal experiences allows preachers to connect empathetically with the characters of the story, making the narrative more relatable and impactful for listeners.

6.Question

What is the significance of moving behind behavior to uncover motives?

Answer:Understanding motives helps listeners identify with the characters beyond their surface actions, providing a more complex and relatable portrayal of the narrative's figures.



7.Question

How can moving behind facts to prior dynamics change our understanding of a story?

Answer:Examining underlying dynamics, rather than just facts, reveals the complexities of situations and characters, helping to clarify ambiguities and contradictions within the narrative.

8.Question

In what ways do the senses play a role in storytelling?

Answer:Using sensory details allows listeners to engage more deeply with the narrative, making them feel as though they are participating in the story rather than just hearing about it.

9.Question

What does 'switching identification' mean in the context of storytelling?

Answer:Switching identification involves placing oneself in different characters' shoes to experience their feelings and perspectives, thereby enriching the narrative's impact and emotional depth.



10.Question

How can utilizing active grammar enhance storytelling?

Answer:Active grammar creates vivid and lively storytelling, making the narrative more engaging and immediate for the listeners, as opposed to using passive or abstract language.

11.Question

What does breaking into the first and second person singular form achieve in a narrative?

Answer:Using first and second person language makes the narrative more intimate and immediate, allowing the audience to feel as if they are part of the story rather than just observers.

12.Question

Why is moving between subjective and objective perspectives important in storytelling?

Answer:This movement captures the richness of experience by combining personal feelings with broader realities, creating a more nuanced and engaging narrative.

13.Question

How does foreshadowing contribute to a biblical



narrative?

Answer: Foreshadowing sets the stage for later events, enhancing their significance by providing earlier cues that resonate when the time comes, making the narrative more cohesive and impactful.

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1. Sermons should be viewed merely as collections of organized notes and fragments.
2. A well-developed sermon often emerges from the inherent energy and vitality of an idea.
3. Preaching should be approached solely as a mechanical construction process, similar to an assembly line.

Chapter 2 | Getting Started| Quiz and Test

1. The first stage of sermon preparation is called 'wandering thoughtfulness' and involves gathering ideas and contemplating notes.
2. Preachers should focus solely on a central theme in order to ensure a clear sermon idea without addressing any felt needs or problems.
3. Sustaining sermon tension involves outlining what will be said in a sermon to keep the audience engaged.

Chapter 3 | Plot Forms| Quiz and Test

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1. There are three distinct types of plot forms: movie plots, television series plots, and sermon plots.
2. Sermons typically parallel the movie plot structure, starting with a congregational bind and moving toward a resolution centered on the gospel.
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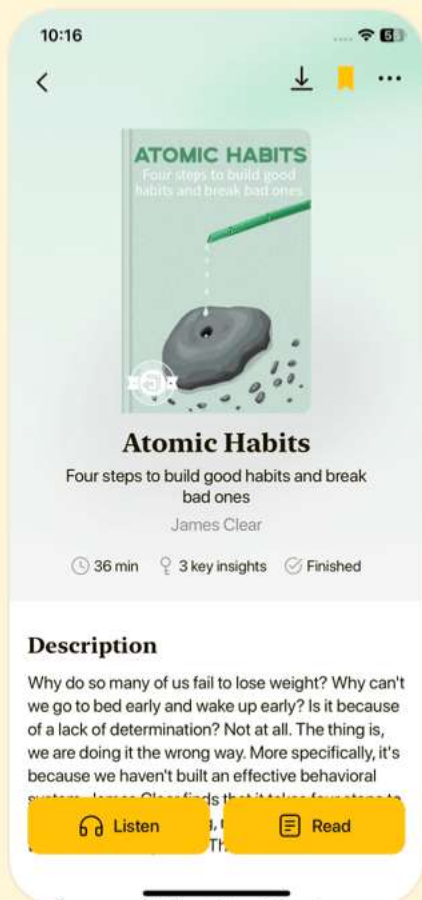


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Chapter 4 | Upsetting the Equilibrium| Quiz and Test

1. The initial step in delivering a sermon is to disrupt the listeners' mental state to draw them into the theme.
2. Preachers should strive to avoid ambiguity in their sermons, as it might confuse the listeners.
3. A great sermon opening should present an initial ambiguity that stimulates interest and leads to deeper engagement.

Chapter 5 | Analyzing the Discrepancy| Quiz and Test

1. The analysis stage of preparing a sermon is considered the least critical part of the process.
2. Preachers should avoid their own personal reflections when diagnosing discrepancies in others' behaviors.
3. Effective diagnosis in the analysis stage seeks to identify the gap between what is and what ought to be.

Chapter 6 | Disclosing the Clue to Resolution| Quiz and Test

1. The goal of analysis in preaching is to uncover a



significant 'why' that helps both the preacher and the congregation understand the problematic issue at hand.

2. The principle of reversal suggests that initial assumptions about a situation are often validated rather than challenged.
3. Forms of reversal in homiletics include cause-effect reversal and inverted assumption reversal.

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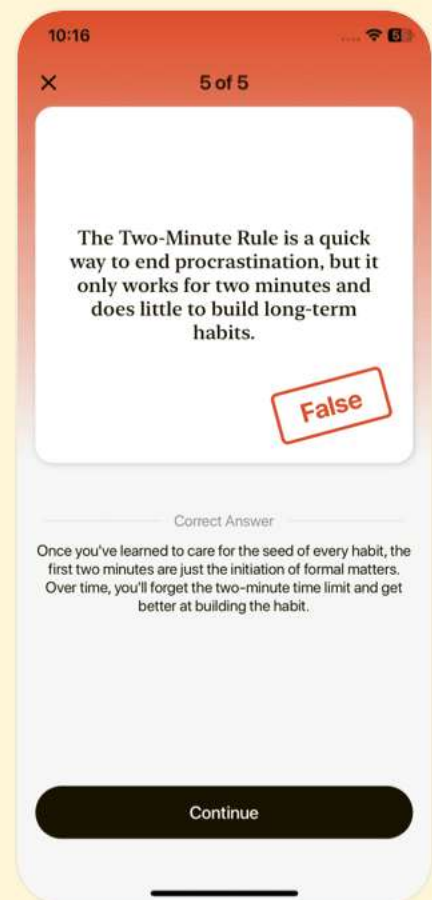
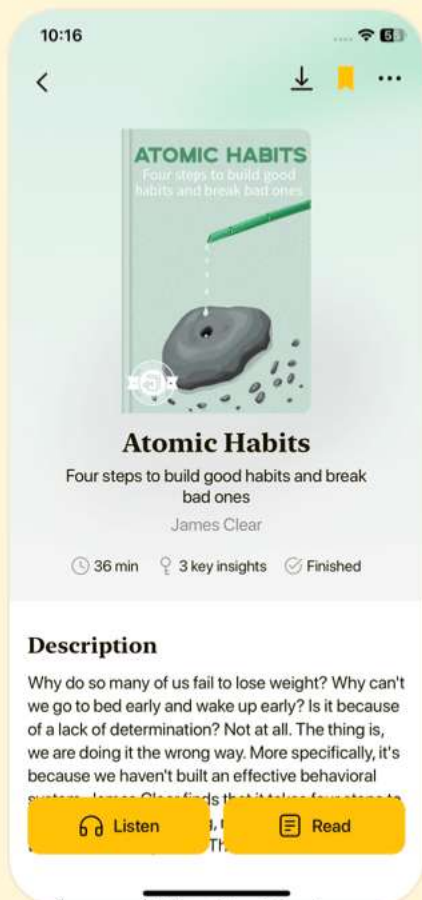


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Chapter 7 | Experiencing the Gospel| Quiz and Test

1. Understanding the underlying issues in preaching is vital before delivering gospel messages.
2. The 'homiletical short circuit' occurs when preachers take too long to analyze a problem before reaching an application.
3. Preaching the gospel effectively requires aligning the message with the diagnosis made in earlier sermon preparation stages.

Chapter 8 | Anticipating the Consequences| Quiz and Test

1. The climax of a sermon should focus on human action as the central theme.
2. Genuine transformation emerges from the gospel's ability to liberate individuals rather than from external pressures.
3. In a traditional sermon structure, the resolution is recognized as a new perspective informed by the gospel.

Chapter 9 | Variations| Quiz and Test

1. Ambiguity is unnecessary for maintaining listener



interest in sermons.

2. Narrative sermons should adhere strictly to an externally imposed structure to be effective.

3. Adjustments in sermon structure are not needed for occasions that disrupt listeners' equilibrium, like funerals.

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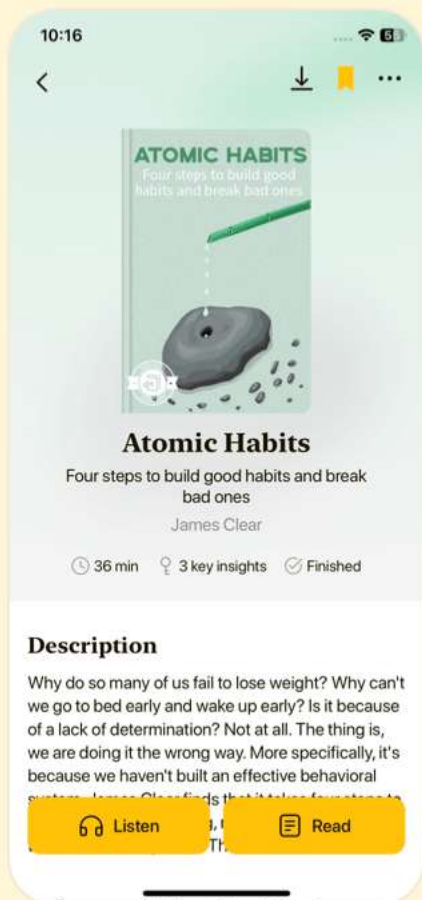


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Chapter 10 | Preparation| Quiz and Test

1. Sermon preparation can begin with either the problem or the solution.
2. Using Paul's text from Romans 7:24, the preacher should avoid acknowledging the tension between problem and solution.
3. Engaging with Scripture only for sermon creation is more beneficial than reading for personal enrichment.

Chapter 11 | Biblical Narrative Preaching| Quiz and Test

1. Biblical narrative preaching is simpler because it utilizes stories that already have a plot structure.
2. All Scripture qualifies as narrative, including passages that do not describe events with a sense of time.
3. Engaging listeners through vivid sensory descriptions is one of the pointers for telling a story in biblical narrative preaching.





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