


Preach the Word

A photograph of a person's hands holding an open Bible. The person is wearing a blue shirt. The background is a bright, out-of-focus scene with sunlight filtering through, creating a warm, golden glow. The Bible is open, showing its pages.

I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions...

2 Timothy 4:1-3 (ESV)

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Editorial

Preach the word

One of the most important things we must do this Easter is preach the word. This word, the gospel, is God's message concerning Jesus his Son, and what he has done in his Son for his glory and our salvation. There is nothing more important for people to hear this Easter than God's declaration about his Son.

But of course, this isn't an 'Easter only' thing. As Paul charges Timothy in 2 Timothy 4, the preaching task is a continuous task. It's *in season and out of season*. That is why with this edition of the ACR we've concentrated our efforts around the preaching task. The day has most certainly come *when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions*. And whilst that day has been around for centuries, our day is somewhat unique in that itching ears can easily accumulate any teacher they want online. You've got a 'passion' you want to fulfil and justify as a Christian, even if you've previously been taught it's unwise, or worse, ungodly? Easy! Find them online. More than ever, the pastors of our local churches need to proclaim and declare the word of God to the sheep to which God's Spirit has appointed them as overseers (Acts 20:28). They are to *reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching so that the sheep will not turn away from hearing the truth and turn aside to myths*. Our presbyters in particular should also remember their ordination vows.¹

In light of such exhortations and reminders, within this edition of the ACR we share some results from a survey that was sent to all rectors in Sydney Anglican Diocese in relation to their Sunday preaching frequency. Charles Cleworth then provides some observations and biblical thoughts in light of that survey and the preaching task. Additionally, Nathan Walter writes on the good necessity of the expository sermon, which is a great complement to James Russell's essay on John Stott and his influence on Sydney preaching. We then have an interview with Alistair Begg and his preaching ministry given his recent sermons at CMS Summer School, followed by an inspiring historical piece by Andrew Atherstone on J. C. Ryle and his preaching ministry.

1 See the reminder in Charles Cleworth's piece.

Photo: vecteezy



Of course, we also have our regular features, including some book reviews, interviews with Dave Jensen and Jeanette Chin, and the continuation of a discussion between Andrew Heard and Lionel Windsor, before a thought-provoking piece by Seumas Macdonald.

We do hope that you are encouraged, challenged, and spurred on to preach the word this Easter in light of this edition of the ACR.

God bless,

Mike Leite – Editorial Director

(On behalf of the Editorial Panel – Meagan Bartlett, Renee Capel, Charles Cleworth, Jocelyn Loane, Stephen Tong, Bronwyn Windsor, Lionel Windsor) **ACR**

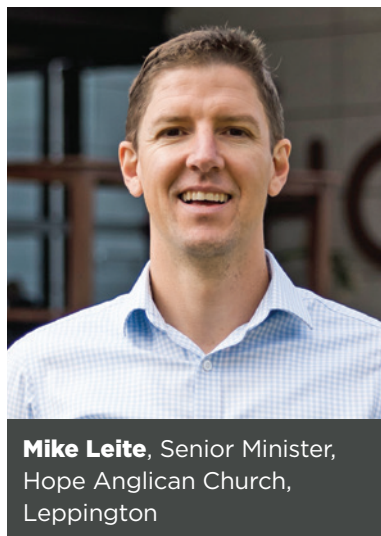
ACR Sydney Rector Preaching Survey – Results

In early January 2025 the ACR emailed out a survey to all Sydney Anglican Rectors – numbering just over 250. The survey was short and uncomplicated to ensure a good number of respondents. Below are the results for the survey and the questions that were asked.

The catalyst for the survey followed some anecdotes about preaching frequency amongst our Rectors, especially amongst those Rectors who serve in what might be called a large church.² The anecdotes suggest that Sydney Anglican Rectors are preaching less often than they used to, and that the frequency lowers as the church or staff team becomes larger. Anecdotes suggested that almost all Rectors of large Sydney Anglican Churches preached no more than 50% of the time.

In light of these anecdotes, our survey was conducted to get a sense of how often in reality our Rectors preach. Respondents were also asked to report on the size of their average Sunday adult attendance and number of full-time staff. These questions were asked to observe any correlation between preaching frequency and size of church/staff team.

As you read and interpret the data for yourself, please remember that the questions asked were simple and unspecific. Some Rectors fall in between suggested ranges (that is, they preach more than 3 times out of 5 on average per year, but not as much as 4). Respondents therefore had to either ‘round up’ their answer, or ‘round down’. One suspects that most would round up. Furthermore, there was no



² By large church, we mean churches with 400+ adult weekly attendance. We use this measure as it is consistent with the Attendance Patterns report at Synod 2024.

definition given in regard to ‘full-time staff’. Is it only pastoral staff who are in view, or administrative staff, or ministry apprentices? What about part-time staff? Would calculating the ‘full-time equivalents’ be acceptable? Again, the survey was kept simple by design. These things, amongst other such considerations, need to be kept in mind when reading and interpreting the data.

One final consideration is the human tendency to overestimate. The survey relied on the accuracy and honesty of the respondent. Some would have been overly diligent, calculating throughout 2024 how often they preached, and dividing by 52 to provide an accurate response. Others would have made a quick educated guess, but not taken into account things like annual leave. As an example of overestimating, it is fascinating to the ACR that out of the 185 respondents we have 21 large churches of 400+ adult weekly attendance. In the 2024 Synod Attendance Patterns report, there were only 10 such churches.³ Praise the Lord if this is indeed the case! But most likely, in reading such self-reporting data, we are wise to remember our human tendency to overestimate.

We leave the data below for your consideration. Be sure to read Charles Cleworth’s piece on preaching frequency to reflect on possible biblical principles when it comes to how often the Rector preaches. **ACR**

On the average Sunday, how many adults attend your church?

- ☐ Less than 50
- ☐ 50-100
- ☐ 100-200
- ☐ 200-300
- ☐ 300-400
- ☐ 400+

How many full-time staff are at your church?

- ☐ 1
- ☐ 2
- ☐ 3
- ☐ 4
- ☐ 5+

On average, how often do you preach?

- ☐ One week in every five
- ☐ Two weeks in every five
- ☐ Three weeks in every five
- ☐ Four weeks in every five
- ☐ Five weeks in every five

Submit

Clear form

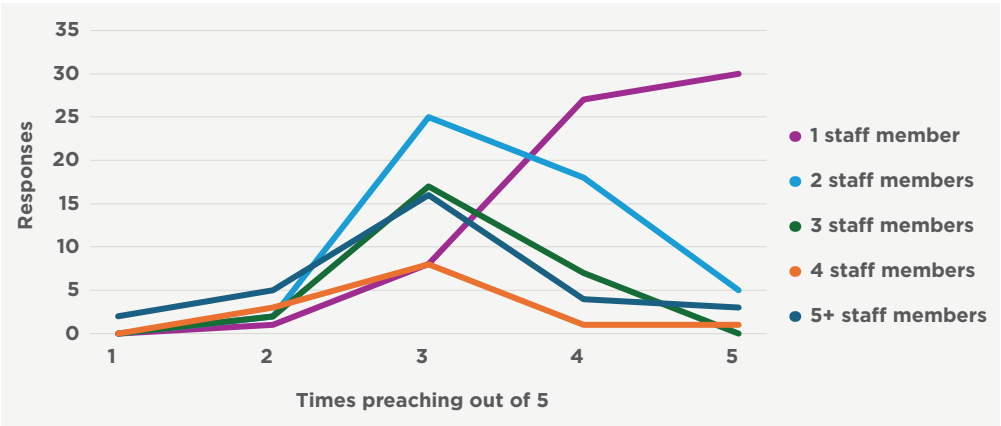
³ It is true that the Attendance Patterns report was interested only in ‘centres’, and didn’t calculate multisite churches as the one church. Nevertheless, it’s a big difference.

Total responses: 185

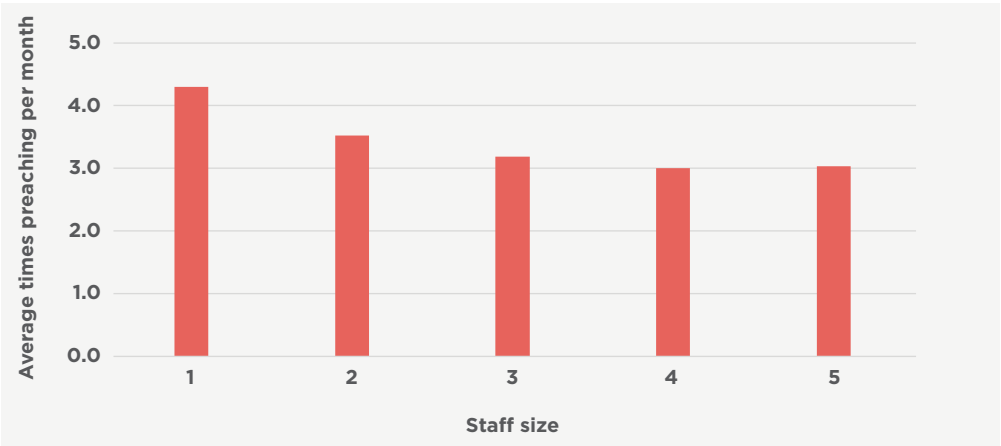
Results by staff size

On average, how often do you preach?						
How many full-time staff are at your church?	One week in every five	Two weeks in every five	Three weeks in every five	Four weeks in every five	Five weeks in every five	Average
1		1	8	27	30	4.3
2		2	25	18	5	3.5
3		2	17	7		3.2
4		3	8	1	1	3.0
5+	2	5	16	4	3	3.0

How often do you preach? (Staff size)



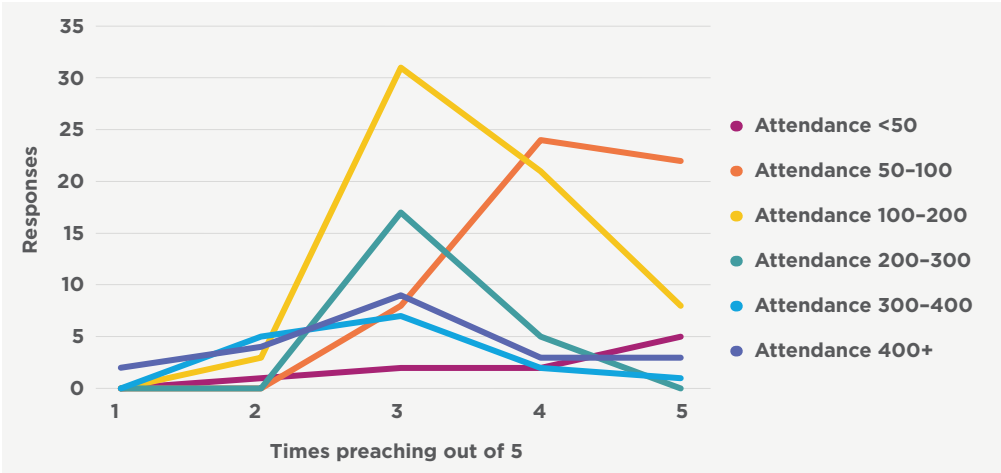
How often do you preach? (Averages by staff size)



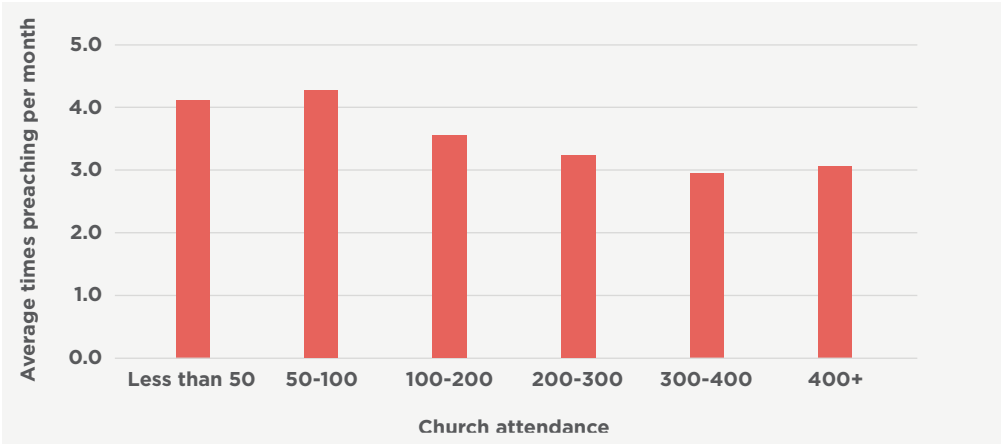
Results by number of church attendees

On the average Sunday, how many adults attend your church?	On average, how often do you preach?					Average
	One week in every five	Two weeks in every five	Three weeks in every five	Four weeks in every five	Five weeks in every five	
Less than 50		1	2	2	5	4.1
50-100			8	24	22	4.3
100-200		3	31	21	8	3.5
200-300			17	5		3.2
300-400		5	7	2	1	2.9
400+	2	4	9	3	3	3.0

How often do you preach? (Church attendance)



How often do you preach? (Averages by church attendance)



Does it matter how much a pastor preaches?



Charles Cleworth grew up in Sydney and is married to Ash. Together they have four children, and another child who's with the Lord. Charles lectures in theology and ethics at Moore Theological College, and together they attend Grace City Church in Waterloo, where Charles was a pastor for a number of years.

As introduced by Mike Leite, this edition of the ACR includes the results of a survey we conducted in order to investigate how frequently senior ministers are preaching in relation to the number of full-time staff and adult church attendance.

On the whole, there is a negative correlation between the number of full-time staff and the amount a pastor preaches. On average, a minister serving as the only full-time staff member of a church (35% of responders) preaches 4.3 weeks out of 5. For those serving in a staff team of two full-time equivalents (50% of responders), that average drops to 3.5 weeks out of 5. What is notable, however, is that this trend flattens out as the size of the staff team increases, stabilising at about 3 weeks out of 5. For a staff team of three (26% of responders), the average is 3.2

weeks out of 5. For a staff team of four (13% of responders), the average is 3 weeks out of 5. For a staff team of five or more (27% of responders), the average slightly increases back up to 3.1 weeks out of 5. This indicates that *pastors have a general preference to preach no less than 3 in every 5 weeks.*

This, however, prompts the question: Does it matter how much a pastor preaches? Or more specifically, does it matter *to God* how much a pastor preaches? And here, we have especially in mind those designated as elders or overseers in God's church, an office that often finds expression in an Anglican polity in the form of a presbyter/rector/senior minister. Does it matter how much such a person preaches? Pondering this question prompts a few thoughts and raises many more questions.

It ought to be immediately apparent that there is no one-size-fits-all answer; much less so a specific biblical stipulation of a how much a pastor ought to preach. The answer, of course, is ‘it depends.’ Nevertheless, we may still ask: On what does it depend, and what are the limits of flexibility?

Does it matter if a pastor preaches at all?

Perhaps it would be helpful to start by answering a question a little further back: Does it matter if a pastor preaches *at all*? This is a question we may answer with a little more certainty. What is clear in the Scriptures is that the authority of the *pastor* is tied to, and is ultimately dependent upon, the authority of *Christ* in the Scriptures; that is, the pastor has authority only to the extent that he heralds and ministers the Word of Christ.

Theologically, this is grounded in the fact that Christ is the ‘chief shepherd’ of his church who rules his people through his Word (1 Peter 5:4). As an under-shepherd, it is the role of the minister to bear witness to this Word. To the extent that a pastor proclaims this Word, his Word is to be received ‘not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God’ (1 Thessalonians 2:13).

This is why the New Testament consistently associates the *role* of pastor with the *task* of preaching and teaching. Hence, the ‘overseer’ must be ‘able to teach’ (1 Timothy 3:2). He must ‘hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it’ (Titus 1:9). Moreover, when Paul gathers the Ephesian elders at Miletus, he charges them to ‘care for the church of God’ (Acts 20:28), but this ‘care’ is specified as protecting the church from ‘men speaking twisted things’ (v. 30). Accordingly, Paul’s own ministry among them took the form of testifying ‘to the gospel of the grace of God’ (v. 24) and declaring ‘the whole counsel of God’ (v. 27). Thus, to be a pastor is to care for God’s church by preaching and teaching the Scriptures. The role of a pastor cannot be divorced from this responsibility – a pastor must preach.

“

The pastor has authority only to the extent that he heralds and ministers the Word of Christ.

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Some qualifications

There are, however, a few qualifications worth mentioning. First, we need to acknowledge that the task of preaching may be expressed in a multiplicity of ways beyond that of a typical 20–40-minute sermon during a Sunday church service. There are a variety of contexts and ways in which a pastor might fulfil the call to ‘preach the word.’ He must ‘be ready in season and out of season’ to perform various tasks: ‘reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teach-

ing' (2 Timothy 4:2). Having said that, preaching a sermon during a Sunday service is the form in which teaching is commonly expressed in our ministry culture and context. It is, therefore, appropriate for our purposes to associate the task of preaching with the delivering of a sermon during a Sunday service.

A second consideration is that Paul acknowledges that not all 'elders' will preach with the same regularity. There are some who will 'especially... labour in preaching and teaching' (1 Timothy 5:17). Likely, this is connected both to giftedness and circumstantial factors. Furthermore, Paul's mention in the same verse of elders who 'rule' reminds us that there is a diversity of responsibilities to be carried out by those in pastoral ministry and which may be carried out in different ways by different people. Nevertheless, we must remember that whatever his particular responsibilities, a pastor must be 'able to teach.' The fact that some pastors 'especially... labour in preaching and teaching' does not mean that there are pastors who *never* preach. The New Testament persistently associates the *role* of the pastor with the *task* of preaching.

So, to return to our question: Does it matter if a pastor preaches at all? Yes, it does. While it may not be expressed in the same form or with the same frequency

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Nevertheless, we must remember that whatever his particular responsibilities, a pastor must be 'able to teach.'

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as others, a pastor *must* preach the Word in order to fulfil faithfully his task of caring for the church of God.

Let's move on to the more difficult question with which we began: Does it matter how much? Having laid some biblical and theological foundations, we are now in a position to say something of a more constructive nature.

Preaching too little

First, there is arguably a danger in preaching *too little* or *infrequently*, especially for those who have been appointed as the senior minister/lead pastor of a church. The danger in preaching too little is that it risks severing the authority of the *pastor* from the authority of the *Word*, such that he may – implicitly or explicitly – begin to ground his authority in something other than the Scriptures – whether it be his winsome character, charisma, leadership style or competency in organisational oversight. This may begin to foster a culture in which the *leadership* of the church is dislocated from the *teaching* of the church. This is not to say that a pastor's *only* task is to teach, but that the various tasks he may fulfil can never be severed or dislocated from the authoritative teaching of the Scriptures.

For example, it is important for a pastor to *lead* with a clear vision or where – under God – he wants to take a church. This may even include key objectives that can be measured. Nevertheless, it is essential for such a vision to emerge organically from the shape and texture of the Scriptures themselves, and for such a vision to be *shown* to do so. Leadership cannot be severed from teaching. Likewise, the task of *training* and *equipping* others is inextricably linked to the task of *teaching*. In Ephesians 4, 'the pastors and teachers... equip the saints for the works of ministry' not by undertaking a task that is somehow *separate to* or *in addition to* the task of teaching; rather, the task of 'equipping' is fulfilled through the very act of being a '*pastor-teacher*' (the particular Greek construction here most likely binds together the role of pastor and teacher). Thus, it is the task of teaching which enables the church to 'speak the truth in love' and thus to 'grow' and 'build itself up' (Ephesians 4:15–16).



Rather, the task of 'equipping' is fulfilled through the very act of being a 'pastor-teacher'.



Preaching too much

So, if there is a danger of preaching too little or infrequently, then why not preach every week? There are several good reasons *not* to preach every week. For example, it is important for a pastor to rest from his work – and this includes resting from the work of preaching. This is necessary not only as a consideration of our frail and weak constitutions, it is also an act of obedience to the God who 'rested on

DOES IT MATTER HOW MUCH A PASTOR PREACHES?



Photo: vecteezy

the seventh day from all his work that he had done' (Genesis 2:2). Moreover, as the laws and customs of Old Testament Israel demonstrate, the concept of *rest* involves more than simply having a day off each week; it encompasses broader patterns and seasons of rest. As anyone who preaches regularly knows, preaching can be very draining and demanding, and if it is possible, it seems good and wise to rest occasionally from such work.

Moreover, it also seems wise for a pastor to sit from time to time under the teaching of the Scriptures *himself*, in order to model humble submission to the word of God. And while reading sermons or listening to recordings from others can be helpful, it would also seem appropriate, where possible, for a pastor to *join with his church* in sitting under the Scriptures together. Once again, we must remember that there will be those who labour 'especially' in preaching and teaching, so it may only be occasionally that a pastor does so, but it would seem a good and wise thing to do for those who are themselves sheep under the care of the Good Shepherd Jesus Christ.

Furthermore, there are benefits to a congregation hearing from a variety of different preachers. Acknowledging the importance of a diversity of voices is connected to the biblical notion of gifts. The concept of giftedness is not a mere description of *competence*, it is a concept that highlights

personal particularity; that is, it describes the ways in which God has made us *different* to one another. This seems to be precisely Paul's point in 1 Corinthians 12–14. I take it that this diversity finds expression even within some of the broader categories of gifting described in the New Testament, such as teaching. While two pastors may both possess a gift for teaching, that gift may be expressed in a diversity of ways and with a variety of personal proclivities. Put simply, we don't all preach in the same way, and this is a feature of God's good design for the health and growth of his church. Where possible, it would seem to be beneficial for a congregation to sit under the teaching of multiple pastors – though perhaps not with the same frequency.

Finally, a good reason for a pastor *not* to preach every week is to create space and capacity for the training and development of others, whether that be assistant ministers, student ministers, MTS apprentices, other trainees or even lay preachers. This would be not only to open a 'slot' on a Sunday, but also to devote the necessary time and energy to training and offering constructive feedback. And while this may be expressed in various ways across different contexts, there is great wisdom in seeking to raise up others for the noble task of preaching the Scriptures.



We don't all preach in the same way, and this is a feature of God's good design for the health and growth of his church. Where possible, it would seem to be beneficial for a congregation to sit under the teaching of multiple pastors.



Further questions for reflection

There are, however, a whole host of other questions that are generated by reflecting on these issues – questions that deserve additional reflection and can likely only be answered within the context of a specific ministry.

For example, what is the interface between how much a pastor preaches and the size of the staff team that he leads? As mentioned above, the data we have gathered suggests there is a negative correlation between staff size and how much a pastor preaches. How much is it appropriate for a pastor to preach if he is the only full-time staff member of a church? How many weeks ought he to rest from the work of preaching? How does he seek to bring in and train other preachers? If he invites guests or lay members to preach, how much is it appropriate for them to preach?



How does the task of preaching interface with the ever-burgeoning portfolio of responsibilities that a lead pastor is required to manage?



What about a minister leading a larger staff team or perhaps four, five or even more full-time staff members? Moreover, how does the task of preaching interface with the ever-burgeoning portfolio of responsibilities that a lead pastor is required to manage? Must he maintain a certain regularity of preaching, regardless of

the size of the staff team and church attendance more broadly? How does the task of preaching relate to other essential responsibilities of the pastor, such as ‘management’ (1 Timothy 3:4) or ‘ruling’ (1 Timothy 5:17)? As mentioned above, our data suggests a general reluctance of senior ministers to preach *less than three in five weeks*, independent of staff size or church attendance. Additionally, our biblical and theological discussion above would suggest that it is imperative for a pastor to protect and maintain the task of preaching the Word – even amidst the various pressures and concerns of ministry.

Must all of those appointed to the office of elder within a church preach regularly, particularly on larger staff teams? Perhaps this is where we can make recourse to the biblical concept that some will labour ‘especially’ in preaching and teaching, whilst also maintaining that *all* elders must be ‘able to teach.’ Moreover, how does this apply to those appointed as assistant ministers and/or ordained as a deacon in the Anglican Church according to the Ordinal? Must they preach in order to fulfil their office? If the office of deacon within the Anglican Church is to be associated with the biblical description of ‘deacon’ (e.g. Acts 6:1–7; 1 Timothy 3:8–13), it would suggest that the task of preaching is not so tightly associated with the office of deacon. This coheres with the Ordinal, which appoints deacons ‘to read the holy scriptures’ and ‘to preach,’ but not with the same emphasis or priority as those

ordained as presbyters.¹ What about those who *functionally* fulfil the office of elder, despite not receiving formal ordination – such as in independent churches?

Furthermore, how do these issues find expression within different kinds of ministry models? For those operating within a typical ‘congregational’ based ministry, must those with particular pastoral oversight of a congregation preach more regularly at that congregation? What about if an assistant minister/deacon has particular oversight over a congregation? Must he preach more than perhaps the senior minister, if the senior minister has particular pastoral oversight over a different congregation? What about those operating within a ‘team’ based ministry? How does the task of pastoring people through preaching the Word interface with the responsibility of managing a particular area of ministry?

Finally, it is important to remember that, while we received a good number of responses to the survey, it still only represents a single snapshot in time. This leaves certain questions unanswered for now, such as: Is there a trend or a direction that we are moving in? Are pastors preaching *more* now than in the past, or *less*? Our data gives us an indication of how much pastors *are* preaching, but where do we *want* to be? What direction *are* we moving in, and what direction do we *want* to move in? These are questions that can only be answered through careful reflection (and perhaps another survey!). **ACR**

1 According to the Ordinal, presbyters are appointed ‘to be messengers, watchmen, and stewards of the Lord; to teach and forewarn, to feed and provide for the Lord’s family,’ to ‘instruct the people committed to your care from the Scriptures, and teach nothing (as required of necessity to eternal salvation) except what you are convinced may be proved by the Scriptures,’ to ‘teach the people committed to your charge to keep and observe [the commandments of God] diligently,’ and to ‘be ready to drive away all false and strange doctrines that are contrary to God’s word; and to this end both publicly and privately to warn and encourage all within your care.’

Expository sermons

The staple diet our churches
(and preachers) need



Wal (**Nathan Walter**) is the Senior Minister at Naremburn Cammeray Anglican Church. He is married to Sarah and they have four sons: three adult and one nearly-adult.

Preaching is an activity about which most Christians hold strong opinions; those who listen to sermons almost as much as those who deliver them. For those of us who preach regularly, few things sit so close to our sense of ourselves as gospel ministers. For those who listen to sermons, few things sit as high on the list of what is appreciated and loved in those who minister to them. Anecdotally, that someone is a ‘good’ or even ‘excellent’ preacher is

typically very important to parish nominators in their search for a new rector. Hearing a prospective candidate preach, whether online or in person, is one of the usual first steps.

All this, we might say, is exactly how it should be. After all, the gospel is, by its very nature, a declared thing much more than it is a discussed or discovered thing. Consequently, in both Old Testament and New, as well as the 2,000 years of Christian history that have followed, the faithful, urgent, and compelling preaching of God’s word has always been close to the unfolding salvation work of God. In contemporary church life, we may be able to lose all sorts of ministries without the upward and outward building of the church being overly compromised. But preaching is essential.

What, however, constitutes ‘good’ preaching? What makes for strong, healthy, faithful, dare we say it – biblical preaching? And not just in any one sermon, but also in a sermon series? Or in an entire year’s preaching calendar? On these matters I suspect that there is much less clarity or agreement.

In relation to any one particular sermon, I have often thought that the encouragement, ‘That was a really good

sermon' is better taken as an affirmation akin to, 'We really like you' than as any kind of objective assessment of the sermon. This is not to be scoffed at – it is excellent for a preacher to enjoy their congregation's affection. But not everyone who comments on a sermon is suitably armed to judge its merits. Very often, assessment is made primarily in terms of the sermon as artform. This, however, is quite different from the New Testament's vision of humbly but carefully testing, by the Scriptures themselves, the expositional and theological content of a sermon.

Even less common, in my experience, is to receive valuable feedback on a series, or an entire year's preaching programme. Beyond the obvious starting point of making sure that every year we include something from one of the Gospels, a New Testament epistle, something from the Old Testament, a topical or doctrinal series, and (these days!) something on the church's vision and mission, not much of my training over the years has focused on establishing the church's preaching 'diet.' But as any doctor will attest, in the normal run of things, the overall diet is of far greater importance than the contents of any one particular meal. It is the same with preaching.

It seems to me that in the course of 'dietary planning,' a church's preaching programme should consist primarily of expository preaching through the various parts of Scripture. By *expository preaching* I mean something more precise than merely *biblical preaching*. That term is so broad as to admit almost any sermon that uses the Bible in some

way. But if even the devil could (mis)use the Scriptures, we must insist that the key to expository preaching is rather using the Bible in accordance with the intentions for which it was given. We should aim to teach not only the content of a given passage, but also its purposes and implications, both for the original hearers and for those who



We should aim to teach not only the content of a given passage, but also its purposes and implications, both for the original hearers and for those who hear it today.



hear it today. We should also aim to model a good use of Scripture, teaching passages in their context, not only locally but also in terms of the book of which they are a part, and of the whole Bible. In sum: 'First, and above all, the thought of the biblical writer determines the substance of an expository sermon.'¹

That such preaching should be a church's staple diet may seem, to some, to be so obvious as to barely warrant mention. Surely this is just 'preaching to the choir.' Doesn't everyone 'expound' the Scriptures? If only it were that simple! For very easily, our so-called expositions can become human-centred messages that are only loosely tied to the Scriptures, and thus lose their capacity for preaching the gospel of

¹ Haddon Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, (Baker Books, Grand Rapids. 1980), 20.

God's grace. Consider two specific examples of how preaching can stray from the kind of expository preaching we might imagine we are engaging in.

Launch-pad preaching

The first has more to do with the individual sermons than a whole sermon series or a yearly preaching calendar. It is where passages are examined with hardly any reference to their original context and purpose. As a result, the passage in question is used essentially as a launch-pad for a discussion of matters and subjects which are, textually, only peripheral. They may well be doctrinally and pastorally sound; hopefully they are. But if they are not central to the concerns of the passage itself, and if these central concerns are left un-stated and un-examined and un-taught and un-applied, or if they are given, at best, only passing and cursory attention, the sermon can hardly be regarded as expository.

One of the factors that can make this manner of preaching so difficult to spot is that it can easily happen in the context of weekly Bible readings which look as if they are part of an expository model. That is, each week's reading may progress in an orderly manner, passage by passage, through a given book of the Bible. Since the sermons follow the readings, it can easily seem to the casual listener that they must therefore be expository. But if the passages are not being carefully taught in accordance with their original context and purpose, they are not.

Consider, for example, Paul's teaching

on financial generosity in 2 Corinthians 9. There are a number of important principles that could easily be drawn from: the pattern of reaping after the manner of our sowing (v.6); the freedom that Christians have to make personal decisions in this area (v.7); the ability of God to bless abundantly (v.8); the importance of Christian thanksgiving (vv.11-12); the obedience that must be joined to one's confession of the gospel (v.13). It would not be hard to imagine such matters being preached in relation to the regular giving of congregation members to provide for their gospel ministers, especially, say, in a situation where a church's regular giving was behind budget.

Would such a sermon be 'wrong'? It might be difficult to say so. After all, it is possible that everything it affirmed could be considered as Christianly true and helpful. Even more, we could imagine that the warrant for most of it could be provided by pointing straight down at the text of 2 Corinthians 9! Would such a sermon, however, be expository? Again, it would be difficult to say so, particularly if it made nothing of the pastoral context which Paul was first addressing, namely, the famine afflicting the Jewish believers in Judea, for which he dedicated himself to taking up a collection from among the Gentile churches of Macedonia and Achaia, a matter of such significance it is mentioned in four books of the New Testament (also Acts 11:27-30; Rom 15:25-27; 1 Cor 16:1-4). In this context, the Corinthians' generous giving was to be a public expression of the Gentiles' gospel-indebtedness to the Jews, and of the extraordinary achievements of the

gospel – the profound fellowship that Jewish and Gentile believers now shared together in Christ. Add to this the matter of the Corinthians’ constant boasting in what, from a merely human point of view, appeared strong and wise, over against Paul’s determination to keep boasting in that which looked weak and foolish (according to the wisdom of the world), and it’s clear that the generosity of the Corinthians’ giving is actually a kind of test of their entire grasp of the gospel!

On a broader front, these contextual matters also resolve what would otherwise loom as a potential conflict between Jesus and Paul. For Jesus teaches that one’s giving to the needy is to be done in secret (Matt 6:2-4), which is quite different to Paul’s open comparison of the generosity of different congregations (2 Cor 8:1-8)! But it is the pastoral purpose of these different passages that resolves any potential difficulty. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus is teaching against practising one’s righteousness before others in order to receive their praise. In the Corinthian epistles, Paul is

striving to shape a stubbornly boastful church to ways of thinking and acting that are in line with the message of the cross.

All of these matters, however, are of far greater importance than giving regularly to the church budget, as important as that can sometimes feel. The point is not that matters of the church budget

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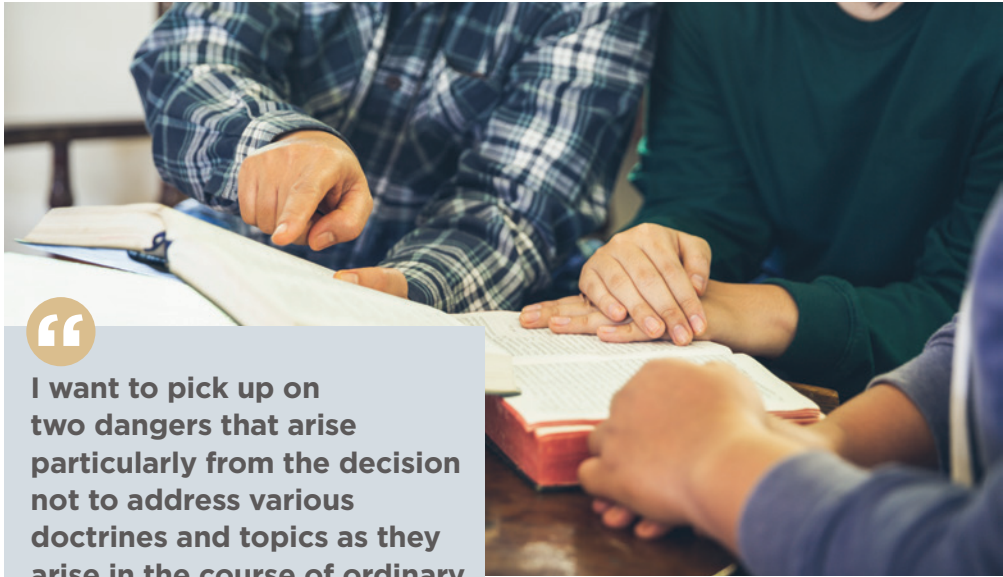
Nothing will replace the hard labour of slow, careful, prayerful exegesis, trusting that when proper procedure has been taken, then we will be ready to preach God’s word for all its effects.

”

should never be brought into a sermon on 2 Corinthians 9. If they are, however, we must help people see that we are jumping to a related matter, for which 2 Corinthians 9 may well have very important implications. Further, we must ensure that such jumps are secondary, not primary. But we will only keep all these things in their proper order when we are convinced of the trustworthiness, the sufficiency, the authority, and the relevance of Scripture, to do all the work of building the church, both by evangelism and by edification. And in the weekly outworking of these convictions concerning Scripture, nothing will replace the hard labour of slow, careful, prayerful exegesis, trusting that when proper procedure has been taken, then we will be ready to preach God’s word for all its effects.



Photo: cherdchai chawienghong | vecteezy



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I want to pick up on two dangers that arise particularly from the decision not to address various doctrines and topics as they arise in the course of ordinary expository preaching through books of the Bible.

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Photo: Thai Noipho | vecteezy

Topical/doctrinal preaching

A second danger to our regular expository preaching lies less in the individual sermon and more in the overall shape of a sermon series, especially series that aim to be topical or doctrinal, and which proceed by jumping from one key passage to another from across the Bible as the series develops. Some of the challenges and difficulties of this form of preaching are well known. Here, however, I want to pick up on two dangers that arise particularly from the decision not to address various doctrines and topics as they arise in the course of ordinary expository preaching through books of the Bible.

The first is the fact that, by moving from one passage to another across the Scriptures, it is very easy to lose track of how the Bible itself exhorts us to the

godliness that comes from the gospel. In particular, it runs a great risk of preaching a series of gospel imperatives without their foundational gospel indicatives. Imagine, for example, planning a series aimed at helping your church become more deeply connected. It's a fine goal, and, notwithstanding the use of a modern term (more *deeply connected*) in favour of biblical ones (such as: more *loving*, more *united in mind and purpose and spirit*, etc.), is fully in line with what the New Testament envisages for healthy churches. How easily a series with this goal could proceed by examining various passages which urge God's people to these various behaviours producing deeper and more loving connections with each other. And yet how easily, as well, such a series of sermons might fail to dedicate the same space and time to establishing the gospel basis of all such exhortations. In the book of Ephesians, for example, significant space is given to

exactly the kind of exhortations that could feature in this hypothetical series. But these only appear in chapters 4–6, after Paul has dedicated the entire first half of the letter to proclaiming the gospel of salvation with majestic breadth and depth. Every exhortation found in chapters 4–6 is an imperative founded on these gospel indicatives.

Given that examining passages in context is such a key part of careful expositional preaching, it is very possible that a sermon based on a passage chosen from Ephesians 4–6 could faithfully lay the appropriate indicative foundations from chapters 1–3. Even just by volume of words, however, such a sermon is still unlikely to reflect the same emphasis, order, and proportions established by Paul. More serious by far would be a sermon that fails to lay this gospel foundation. But a commitment to preaching sequentially and expositionally through Ephesians has far greater potential to establish the gospel indicatives in the manner and proportions that Paul does, before outlining the gospel imperatives. And it does so in the terms set by the Scriptures themselves, which in the case of Ephesians have to do with the mystery of the gospel, namely, that salvation is now also for the Gentiles. There may be all sorts of human factors that can keep us from being as deeply connected with one another as we ought to be, but few of them will reach the gulf that once existed between Jew and Gentile and which has now been overcome by Christ.

A second danger of the topical or doctrinal series is to think primarily of various passages and to overlook the

broader theology that arises from the large-scale features of the Bible’s plot line. Consider a series on the topic of work. Whilst it would be relatively straightforward to think of all sorts of important passages that contribute to the Bible’s teaching on this topic, it is much harder to think through this topic in terms of fundamental biblical categories such as, to give just one very simple example, creation, human sin and rebellion, redemption, and new creation. Human sin and rebellion don’t simply lead to the frustration of work in the ongoing experiences of thorns and thistles and sweaty brows. There is now, in our experience of work, a fundamental inability for any of us to do that



More serious by far would be a sermon that fails to lay this gospel foundation.



which we were created to do. No amount of work hacks can alter this. The cure we need is the reconciliation with God made possible by the only one who was perfectly able to do the work of ruling the world under God’s rule of him, Jesus Christ, who died and rose again. Now, it is only as we submit to him in faith and obedience that godly work – work as to the Lord – is made possible. What is more, we wait for a world that is to come where we will somehow share in his rule, just as God intended from the beginning!

Once again, however, a commitment to preaching sequentially and expositionally through books of the Bible will

force the preacher to consider these matters in the terms set by the Bible itself. For example, as part of Paul's instructions for Christian members of the household, Colossians 3:22-25 are important verses for any series on this topic. In a series of sermons through the book of Colossians, however, the preacher must face the question of how Paul's instructions to slaves can be con-

may turn to the end of chapter 3 without naturally laying the foundational Christology of chapter 1. But Paul put these two things together! Why? How? Although it is possible for both preachers to face up to these questions, the one who works steadily through Colossians will typically find them much quicker than the one planning a series that jumps around the Bible.



Preaching sequentially and expositionally through books of the Bible will force the preacher to consider these matters in the terms set by the Bible itself.



sidered a gospel outworking of the exalted Christology in Colossians 1:15-23, for example. I suspect that if we were teaching a series on biblical Christology, we might quickly turn to the passage in chapter 1 without naturally seeing the implications for work at the end of chapter 3. And in a series on work, we

Conclusion

In the usual run of things, an overall diet is more important than any particular meal. It's true in health care and it's true in preaching. The commitment to expository preaching that works steadily through books of the Bible is the best staple diet for a church, since it lets God set the agenda for our lives as his people. It treats the Bible on its own terms. It also equips God's people to exercise their responsibility as hearers of the Word, to humbly test, by the word of God, the things they are taught.

ACR

An analysis of the impact of John Stott's 1958 and 1965 visits on the evolution of expository preaching in the Sydney Anglican Diocese



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John Stott has been credited with sparking the emergence of expository preaching in the Sydney Anglican Diocese. This impact can be traced back to Stott's two watershed visits in 1958 and 1965, where his pioneering style of expository preaching left a lasting impression on subsequent generations of Sydney Anglican preachers. This essay will investigate the historical factors surrounding these visits and delve into the elements that made them so significant. It will begin with a survey of the historical context before examining the 1958 visit in detail. Following a brief overview of the intervening period, the focus will shift to Stott's 1965 visit, culminating in an analysis

of one of his seminal sermons. The essay will conclude by tracing Stott's enduring influence in the diocese.

1950s: Historical Context

The 1950s began with Reverend John Stott, then 29, being appointed as the young rector of the busy London church, All Souls' Langham Place, in September 1950. By this time, Stott was already well-known for his evangelistic strategies and was

considered ‘a thoughtful biblical preacher with a powerful message and an impelling delivery’.¹ His preaching style, marked by its unity, perspicuity, and simplicity, was shaped by his biblical studies and campus ministry experiences with the Cambridge Inter-Collegiate Christian Union (CICCU) at Cambridge University.² Stott led several successful mission campaigns at Cambridge and Oxford in 1952, 1954, and 1958. By 1953, he was training a succession of curates at All Souls’ in the art of expository preaching.³

Stott’s first article on preaching appeared in the IVF publication *The Christian Graduate* (1954), where he shared his thoughts on the expository method: “To ‘expound’ the Word of God is so to treat a verse or a passage from the Bible as to draw out its meaning, its application and its challenge.” Stott broke this methodology down into three key stages. “First, the congregation must *understand the meaning* of his text.”⁴ This involves carefully noting the historical situation, literary context, wording, and related Scriptures, which the preacher clearly states, explains, and illustrates.⁵ The second stage is “that the congregation should *grasp the relevance* of the text”. This involves making the exposition appropriate and relevant by applying the message to the ordinary man’s experience.⁶ Thirdly, “the congregation must be made to *feel the urgency* of the message”.⁷ This goes beyond mere explanation and application – preachers must exhort the congregation with all their might so that “the people can feel us preach when they hear us”.⁸ Stott explained the different kinds of texts used in expository preaching:

*The most common text is the single verse, but there is great value in the exposition of a series of verses, a paragraph, a chapter, a book or even an author’s complete message. There is a place also for the exposition of a biblical theme traced in several distinct passages or throughout the whole Bible.*⁹

Stott concluded the article with a brief account of the New Testament metaphors for preaching, such as sowing seeds, building, and stewarding.¹⁰ This content would later be expanded into his 1961 book, *The Preacher’s Portrait*, which was

- 1 Timothy Dudley-Smith, *John Stott: The Making of a Leader* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1999), 1:258.
- 2 Baden P. Stace, *Sydney’s One Special Evangelist: John C. Chapman and the Shaping of Anglican Evangelicalism and Australian Religious Life, 1968-2001* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2022), 104.
- 3 Dudley-Smith, *John Stott: The Making of a Leader*, 1:266.
- 4 John R. W. Stott, “The Ministry of the Word: Some Thoughts on Expository Preaching,” *Christian Graduate*.7.3 (1954): 106.
- 5 Stott, “The Ministry of the Word,” 106–7.
- 6 Stott, “The Ministry of the Word,” 107.
- 7 Stott, “The Ministry of the Word,” 108.
- 8 Stott, “The Ministry of the Word,” 108.
- 9 Stott, “The Ministry of the Word,” 108.
- 10 Stott, “The Ministry of the Word,” 109.

based on a series of lectures at Fuller Theological Seminary in California.¹¹ This demonstrates that the expository preaching methods we are familiar with today were being practised by Stott as early as the 1950s.

Stott's preaching style synthesised the English 'plain style' influences of Charles Simeon with the informed conservatism he learned at Cambridge. According to Stace, this amalgamation of influences resulted in 'an approach that wrapped the inner exegesis of the Continental Reformation in the congenial arrangement of the English plain style'.¹² Stott's expository method was distinct from the traditional 'plain style' that had dominated the Australian preaching tradition since the late 18th century, exemplified by English colonial chaplains Richard Johnson and Samuel Marsden.¹³ Originating from William Perkin's Reformation-era preaching manual, *Arte of Propheying* (ca. 1592), the 'plain style' involves focusing on a single Bible text, elucidating doctrinal points in simple terms, and then applying them to Christian life.¹⁴ This typically followed a four-fold structure: the preacher would briefly comment on the text, before extracting points of doctrine, demonstrating the truth of those doctrines, and finally, applying them to the hearers.¹⁵ This homiletical approach formed the foundation for Anglican clergymen in this era – as seen in the sermons at Sydney Synod in the 1950s.



Stott's expository method was distinct from the traditional 'plain style' that had dominated the Australian preaching tradition since the late 18th century



The tendency was to extract a main point or theme from the biblical text, before then exploring that doctrine within loose parameters, and commenting briefly on its significance for those present.

Rev. R. A. Cole, preaching at the 1957 synod on Deuteronomy 8, used verses from the passage to draw parallels between the early hardships of the Sydney Diocese and Israel's wilderness wanderings, exhorting those present to humbly remember God's provision, even in times of abundance.¹⁶ In 1959, Rev. Canon H. M. Arrowsmith preached on Psalm 8:3–4, reflecting on the significance of the Russian moon landing, Karl Marx's *Das Kapital*, and Hiroshima. Arrowsmith concluded that man is neither a master of his destiny nor a plaything of fate but a child of God

11 John R. W. Stott, *The Preacher's Portrait: Some New Testament Word Pictures*, 1967 Reprint ed. (London: Tyndale Press, 1961), iv.

12 Stace, *Sydney's One Special Evangelist*, 106.

13 Stace, *Sydney's One Special Evangelist*, 73, 94.

14 Stace, *Sydney's One Special Evangelist*, 88–89.

15 William G. Houser, "Puritan Homiletics: A Caveat," *CTQ* 53.4 (1989): 256.

16 R. A. Cole, "Synod Sermon (1957)," in *Diocese of Sydney Year Book 1958* (Sydney: William Andrews Printing Co., 1958), 221–24.

under His sovereign authority.¹⁷ These sermons illustrate the inclination of Sydney Anglican preachers to use the Bible as a launchpad to address a broad spectrum of doctrinal, moral, and existential questions, and their intersection with contemporary events. Former Archbishop Peter Jensen described the preaching of this era as starting “characteristically from a verse, sometimes taken out of context,” which was “used as a starting point for an extended Christian homily with exhortation”.¹⁸

As Stott developed his ministry in London, the Sydney Anglican Diocese, under the leadership of conservative evangelical Archbishop Howard Mowll (1890–1958), was meanwhile experiencing remarkable growth and development. Mowll, elected as Archbishop in 1933, was a pivotal figure in shaping the evangelical identity and direction of the diocese during his tenure. The post-war 1950s saw a boom in Sydney as migrants settled, the population grew rapidly, and housing developments proliferated across an expanding suburban area. The diocese matched the energy of the era – in 1950, there were 173 parishes in Sydney, and by 1958 this had grown to 220.¹⁹ Between 1957 and 1958, over 50 new church halls and rectories were built in Sydney parishes.²⁰ Meanwhile, at Moore Theological College (MTC), Cambridge-trained scholars Donald Robinson and Broughton Knox began teaching a new generation of students a deeper and more critical approach to exegetical analysis and biblical theology.²¹

As his tenure drew to a close, Archbishop Mowll was anxious to maintain the evangelical character of the diocese and set about appointing younger men to secure the continuity of his efforts. In 1956, Mowll reached out to John Stott:

*I write to ask if you would prayerfully consider coming to our help as a Coadjutor Bishop... again and again, as I have prayed over the future of our Church in Australia, your name has come to mind, and I urgently beg you to think and pray about it before you make your decision.*²²

This premonition of Stott’s impact would prove prescient, but he ultimately declined the invitation.²³ At the time, Stott was heavily engaged in parish and family responsibilities, as well as undertaking successful mission campaigns across university campuses in Britain and North America (1956–57).

17 H. M. Arrowsmith, “Synod Sermon (1959),” in *Diocese of Sydney Year Book 1960* (Sydney: William Andrews Printing Co., 1960), 219–25.

18 Peter Jensen, “On John RW Stott 1921–2011,” *Sydney Anglicans*, 28 July 2011, https://web.archive.org/web/20130427105906/http://sydneyanglicans.net/seniorclergy/articles/on_john_rw_stott.

19 Marcia Cameron, *Phenomenal Sydney: Anglicans in a Time of Change, 1945–2013*, eBook ed. (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 2016), chap. 4, <http://eaccess.library.moore.edu.au/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=1427092&site=eds-live&slope=site>.

20 Stephen E. Judd and Kenneth J. Cable, *Sydney Anglicans: A History of the Diocese* (Sydney: Anglican Information Office, 1987), 260.

21 Stace, *Sydney’s One Special Evangelist*, 108.

22 Howard Mowll, Letter Dated 24 July 1956, cited by Timothy Dudley-Smith, *John Stott: The Making of a Leader* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1999), 322.

23 Dudley-Smith, *John Stott: The Making of a Leader*, 1:322.



1950s suburban new build. Photo courtesy Joy Lankshear

1958: The Sydney University Mission

Later in 1956, Stott received a second letter from Australia; this time, the Inter-Varsity Fellowship invited him to conduct missions at the Universities of Sydney and Melbourne. Accepting the invitation, Stott embarked on a speaking tour commencing in Perth on 30 May 1958. He then briefly travelled to Melbourne and Adelaide, before arriving in Sydney on 6 June 1958.²⁴ While in Sydney, Stott had speaking engagements across the diocese, including lectures to MTC students and sermons at St. Andrew's Cathedral and various parish services. He conducted hour-long lunch meetings at the University of Sydney, preaching to audiences of around 700 students.²⁵ During these sessions, Stott preached evangelistic sermons on topics



The report from *The Australian Church Record* framed it more positively: “Many took notes of his talks and all listened with obvious interest.”



including ‘Who was Jesus of Nazareth?’, ‘What is Man?’, ‘Why did Christ die?’, ‘Can Human Nature Be Changed?’, ‘What Must I Do?’, and ‘What Will It Cost?’²⁶ Stott clarified that his intention was not to lecture on Christianity but “to share some of the Christian convictions and experiences which God has given to me”.²⁷

Reporting on the university mission campaign, *The Anglican* described Stott as “a very different kettle of fish from most of the missionaries who have visited the University during the past five years”.²⁸ The article labelled his approach as “severely intellectual” and described the meetings as “completely free of ‘enthusiasm’ one way or the other”.²⁹ The report from *The Australian Church Record* framed it more positively: “Many took notes of his talks and all listened with obvious interest. The topics of the talks were the main conversation throughout the university and created much interest.”³⁰ Stott’s lunchtime talks exemplified the sharp expository preaching that would go on to influence many in the Sydney diocese. For instance, in his sermon ‘Can Human Nature Be Changed?’, Stott carefully expounded John 3:1–15, stating his expository aim: “I’m seeking to tell you what our Lord Himself said these many years ago.”³¹ Closely outlining Jesus’ conversation with Nicodemus, the exhortation centred on seeking Christ, that you may be

24 “University Mission Commences in Sydney,” *The Australian Church Record* (Sydney, 12 June 1958), 36th edition, 1.

25 “University Mission Commences in Sydney,” *The Australian Church Record* (Sydney, 12 June 1958), 36th edition.; “Theatre Packed for Mission,” *The Australian Church Record* (Sydney, 26 June 1958), 37th edition.

26 “University Mission Commences in Sydney”; “Theatre Packed for Mission.”

27 “Mission Draws Crowds at Sydney University,” *The Anglican* (Sydney, 20 June 1958), 306 edition.

28 “Mission Draws Crowds at Sydney University.”

29 “Mission Draws Crowds at Sydney University.”

30 “Theatre Packed for Mission.”

31 John R. W. Stott, *Sermon: Can Human Nature Be Changed?*, Digitised Cassette Tape Recording (University of Sydney Mission, 1958).

born again of the Spirit. In ‘What Must I Do?’ Stott traced the biblical themes of repentance and faith, referencing 19 verses to explain the Bible’s call to turn from sin and open the door to Jesus (Rev 3:20).³² In ‘What Will It Cost?’ Stott moved verse-by-verse through Jesus’ call to discipleship in Luke 14:25–35, considering the demands Jesus makes and the reasons behind them.³³ Throughout these 1958 talks, each point was meticulously grounded in the biblical text, with Stott providing clear explanations, vivid illustrations, and practical applications.

After laying down a call to Christian discipleship throughout the week, the mission climaxed in a packed Sunday night service attended by over 1000 students and led by the university chaplain, Donald Robinson.³⁴ Stott was suffering a sore throat but preached a powerful sermon, to which many responded by committing their lives to Christ.³⁵ Present as the assistant missionary was Dudley Foord, who would later become the Dean of Students at Moore Theological College (1965–1972) and a key figure in establishing the College of Preachers.³⁶ Foord, capturing the sentiment of many, described this mission as a key moment: “I shall never forget the University Mission at Sydney in 1958... it was the power of John’s model plus warm encouragement from John himself that launched me on university missions in the period 1960–80”.³⁷ The localised impact of Stott’s 1958 visit, characterised by his impactful expository preaching, significantly influenced the clergy and emerging leaders in Sydney, laying the groundwork for his ongoing influence on preaching in the diocese. In the Presidential Address to Synod that year, William Hilliard noted that Stott’s visit “provided an opportunity for the Clergy of the Diocese to learn from him” and it was “a fitting preparation for the arrival of Dr. Billy Graham”.³⁸ This influence would be further solidified during Stott’s return visit in 1965.

1958 – 1965: The Growing Expository Shift

The intervening period saw promising advancements as expository preaching began to gain traction in the Sydney Diocese. An evangelical revival swept through Australia in 1959 with the arrival of the Billy Graham Crusades, attended

32 John R. W. Stott, *Sermon: What Must I Do?*, Digitised Cassette Tape Recording (University of Sydney Mission, 1958).

33 John R. W. Stott, *Sermon: What Will It Cost?*, Digitised Cassette Tape Recording (University of Sydney Mission, 1958).

34 “Anglican of the Week,” *The Anglican* (Sydney, 27 June 1958), 307 edition; “Theatre Packed for Mission”; “University Mission Commences in Sydney.”

35 John R. W. Stott, *Basic Christian Leadership: Biblical Models of Church, Gospel, and Ministry* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 50–51; Dudley-Smith, John Stott: The Making of a Leader, 1:404–5.

36 Stace, *Sydney’s One Special Evangelist*, 109.

37 Letter from Dudley Foord to Timothy Dudley-Smith dated 16 June 1997, cited by Timothy Dudley-Smith, *John Stott: The Making of a Leader* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1999), 400–401.

38 William G. Hilliard, “Synod Presidential Address (1958),” in *Diocese of Sydney Year Book 1959* (Sydney: William Andrews Printing Co., 1959), 226–27.



Photo courtesy Joy Lankshear (taken by her grandfather in Melbourne at the 1959 Billy Graham crusade.)

by 980,000 in Sydney.³⁹ Graham's influence on the contemporary preaching scene was well captured by Stott himself, who wrote in 1954:

*Everyone who has listened in these last months to Mr. Graham has been impressed not only by the content and the style of his preaching, but its expository nature... The Crusade's success was partly due to the old-fashioned preaching of God's Word. He exhorted us to preach from our own pulpits with authority, clarity, simplicity, urgency and decisiveness.*⁴⁰

Graham delivered dynamic gospel presentations with clarity and confidence, supporting each point with Bible verses, and calling many to a decision for Christ. Peter Jensen, 15 years old at the time, later reflected: "The thing that struck me was that he held the Bible in his hand, and he preached the Bible."⁴¹ The extraordinary surge in conversions and church attendance following Graham's campaign elevated the status and confidence of the preaching ministry in Australian evangelicalism. The consolidation of 57,000 new converts in Sydney through biblical teaching was now the priority.⁴² While Graham's preaching did not adhere to the English style of exposition, his emphasis on biblical authority and clarity significantly strengthened the rising expository tide among Sydney Anglicans.⁴³

This heightened respect for the pulpit and growing expository shift was bolstered by changes at Moore Theological College under the leadership of Knox and Robinson. The college, thriving after the Crusades boosted enrolments, shifted the focus of its curriculum to a more explicitly Reformed evangelical theology and began placing a distinctive emphasis on the sole authority of the Bible as God's Word.⁴⁴ It followed, according to Knox, that the primary task of the minister was to teach and proclaim the Bible as God's Word and means of salvation.⁴⁵ A wave of evangelical expositors began to emerge from MTC and filter into the parishes of the diocese, armed with a passion for preaching rooted in Christocentric biblical theology and careful expository practice. Among them was John Chapman, later dubbed the 'Australian Billy Graham', who began preaching at key forums in Sydney while serving as the Youth Director of the Armidale diocese.⁴⁶ Following an early sermon series in 1963 at Moore College retreat, Chapman was praised by a

39 Marcia Cameron, *Phenomenal Sydney: Anglicans in a Time of Change, 1945–2013*, chap. 5.

40 Stott, "The Ministry of the Word," 106.

41 Tess Delbridge, "Peter Jensen: Billy Graham Changed My Life," *Eternity*, 22 February 2018, <https://www.eternitynews.com.au/australia/peter-jensen-billy-graham-changed-my-life/>.

42 Michael Orpwood, *Chappo: For the Sake of the Gospel: John Chapman and the Department of Evangelism* (Russell Lea, Australia: Eagleswift Press, 1995), 78.

43 Stace, *Sydney's One Special Evangelist*, 108.

44 Stuart Piggin, *Spirit, Word and World: Evangelical Christianity in Australia*, 3rd ed. (Brunswick East: Acorn Press, 2012), 184.

45 Stuart Piggin, *Spirit of a Nation: The Story of Australia's Christian Heritage*, 2nd ed. (Sydney: Strand Publishing, 2004), 185.

46 Stace, *Sydney's One Special Evangelist*, 5.

participant for his “great capacity to analyse and present the text”.⁴⁷ Others such as Paul Barnett, John Reid, Donald Cameron, and Dudley Foord were early models of expository preaching in their parish ministries during this period.⁴⁸

1965: CMS Summer School Sermons

If the tinderbox of expository preaching in Sydney had begun to smoke in the early 1960s, a spark was ignited into flame in January 1965. John Stott was invited to Australia for a second time to preach at the residential conferences of the Australian Church Missionary Society (CMS) in New South Wales and Victoria, along with an Inter-Varsity Fellowship conference in Queensland.⁴⁹ The CMS Summer Schools were to be held at Katoomba (8–16 January 1965) and Belgrave Heights (26 January–2 February 1965).⁵⁰

The Katoomba Summer School was already a staple in the church calendar for many Sydney laypeople, clergy, visiting missionaries, and their families. The Katoomba conference that year averaged around 900 people for the daily sessions and peaked at 1130 people during the Tuesday evening session.⁵¹ Many in attendance were current or emerging figures of influence in the Sydney Anglican Diocese – names such as Clive Kerle, Dudley Foord, A.J. Dain, John Reid, John Chapman, Kenneth Short, and Marcus Loane.⁵² Across the 10-day conference, Stott delivered a series of five Bible studies on 2 Corinthians 3–6, centred on the theme of ‘Our Ministry as Christians’:

1. ‘Our Privilege’ – 2 Corinthians 3:1–12
2. ‘Our Problems (Part 1)’ – 2 Corinthians 3:12–5:10
3. ‘Our Problems (Part 2)’ – 2 Corinthians 3:12–5:10
4. ‘Our Motives and Our Message’ – 2 Corinthians 5:11–21
5. ‘Our Responsibilities’ – 2 Corinthians 6:1–13⁵³

Stott preached two additional sermons during the conference: ‘All Glory to God’ (Acts 17:16–17) on Sunday morning and ‘The Love that Compels’ (Eph 3:14–21) on Tuesday evening.⁵⁴ The week included a meeting of 90 clergymen from the

47 Interview with Donald Howard, 17 February 2017, cited by Stace, *Sydney’s One Special Evangelist*, 110.

48 Stace, *Sydney’s One Special Evangelist*, 109.

49 Timothy Dudley-Smith, *John Stott: A Global Ministry*, Repr. (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 2002), 2:114–16.

50 “Large Attendances at Katoomba C.M.S. Summer School,” *The Anglican* (Sydney, n.d.), 651 edition; “London Vicar in Melbourne,” *The Anglican* (Sydney, n.d.), 651 edition.

51 “Large Attendances at Katoomba C.M.S. Summer School”; “‘Remarkable’ Summer School at Katoomba,” *The Australian Church Record* (Sydney, 28 January 1965), 1330th edition.

52 “Large Attendances at Katoomba C.M.S. Summer School.”

53 John R. W. Stott, *Our Ministry as Christians*, Series of five sermons, Digitised Cassette Tape Recording, CMS Summer School (Katoomba, 1965), https://moorecollege.access.preservica.com/index.php?name=SO_65368af0-7085-4806-985d-a34dce364fdd.

54 “Large Attendances at Katoomba C.M.S. Summer School.”

Fellowship of Evangelical Churchmen in Katoomba, where Stott preached from Philippians.

Stott's expository preaching style left an immediate and indelible impression on the audience. A contemporaneous article on the 'Large Attendances at Katoomba C.M.S. Summer School' noted (*The Anglican*, 28 January 1965):

*The clear verse by verse exposition of the chapters was concise and highly instructive as well as being deeply searching and challenging. "The interesting thing", someone remarked, "was that you were barely conscious of the personality of the man himself, as we were faced with our responsibilities from God's Word."*⁵⁵

Another article reported (*ACR*, 28 January 1965):

*... this year's Katoomba C.M.S. Summer School [was] a "remarkable" one. Both in numbers attending and from a spiritual point of view, the Summer School just ended was the most successful yet... [John Stott] gave excellent Bible studies on II Corinthians, dealing with the ministry.*⁵⁶

John Chapman was present for only one of these Bible studies, but later described his experience:

*I was so taken by the way he stuck to the text and stayed with it. He could show you the logic of the argument in the Scriptures. Prior to that, I tended to get an idea from a passage and leap all over the Bible supporting the idea... He provided a model for expository preaching that I could copy and make my own.*⁵⁷

Stott's expository prowess in these sermons caused a ripple effect that would significantly alter the landscape of Sydney Anglican preaching thereafter. It prompts us to explore then, what specific elements in Stott's preaching led to such a profound impact.

1965: Sermon Analysis - 'Our Privilege'

The first sermon in Stott's Summer School series, 'Our Privilege,' was 47 minutes long and based on 2 Corinthians 3:1-12. The style of this sermon, like the remaining four, demonstrates the expository acumen, precise phrasing, and insightful application that characterised Stott's preaching and influenced so many. The following features of Stott's expository preaching style can be discerned from this sermon (and taken to be representative of the sermon series as a whole).

55 "Large Attendances at Katoomba C.M.S. Summer School."

56 "'Remarkable' Summer School at Katoomba."

57 Orpwood, *Chappo*, 158.

Big Idea

Before moving into the body of the sermon, Stott begins the sermon series with some introductory remarks about the Corinthian epistles, highlighting how Paul exposes his heart to the Corinthian church and thus provides an exemplary model for the Christian minister. In a rapport-building aside, Stott notes the coincidence with his 1958 visit – mentioning his current bout with a “Sydney wog” and expressing concern about potentially losing his voice once more. Stott then introduces the five-part series by providing a single-sentence proposition for each study and pinpointing a key verse to support it. Stott here isolates and foregrounds the ‘dominant thought’ of each sermon, practising what he considered to be a critical step in expository preaching. “Once the precise meaning of the text is understood,” he writes, “the preacher will be able to state it lucidly and simply”.⁵⁸ Stott considered this crucial in helping not only the preacher, but the congregation understand the central meaning of the text. He worked hard to ensure that the sermon’s structure and details clearly stated and explained this lead theological idea so that the congregation might “grasp its message and feel its power”.⁵⁹ In this instance, Stott cites 2 Corinthians 3:6 as the key verse and states the ‘dominant thought’ of the passage in clear, crisp terms: “God has made us able ministers of the New Covenant”. This is repeated at the 23-minute mark, where Stott reinforces it with reference to verse 6 as “the key phrase of this whole chapter”. After framing the sermon series and positioning the audience, Stott proceeds to launch into the body of the sermon.

Structure

Stott’s approach typically involved a three or four-point rhetorical structure, designed to systematically expound the lead idea across the units of the biblical text. Each point would then be subdivided into numbered sections for clarity and coherence.⁶⁰ The intention was to avoid imposing an arbitrary or overly clever sermon structure, and instead allow the biblical text to supply its own structure.⁶¹ In this sermon, Stott configures a three-part outline that closely accords with the movements of 2 Corinthians 3:1–12, including some brief remarks on the preceding verse in 2:17 and a concluding exhortation based on 3:12. This structure, though not overtly disclosed by Stott, can be discerned as he announces shifts in his exposition (e.g., “Now we come on to verses 4 and 5”) and moves through the numbered subdivisions of each point. A detailed sermon outline has been provided and demonstrates Stott’s thorough and sequential movement through each verse in the passage. The outline also shows the evenly weighted attention he gives to each main point across the 9, 8, and 14-minute segments.

58 Stott, “The Ministry of the Word,” 106–7.

59 John R. W. Stott, *I Believe in Preaching*, I Believe Series (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1982), 225.

60 Stace, *Sydney’s One Special Evangelist*, 106 (n. 149).

61 Stott, *I Believe in Preaching*, 229.

Sermon Outline – ‘Our Privilege’, John Stott (1965)

Introduction: 2 Corinthians (00:00 – 10:00)

- Paul opens his heart and (*application*) provides an example for our ministry.
- Series outline and key points.

Preface: 2 Cor 2:17 (10:00 – 12:48)

Our motives in preaching the gospel are sincere because:

- i) We speak from God
- ii) In the sight of God
- iii) We speak of Christ

Point 1: 2 Cor 3:1–3 (12:49 – 21:37)

Our letter of recommendation has been written:

- i) In your hearts (v.2a)
- ii) As an open letter (v.2b)
- iii) By Christ (v.3a)
- iv) With the Spirit (v.3b)

Application: This is also our letter of recommendation – the supernatural work of Christ in the hearts of those we serve.

Point 2: 2 Cor 3:4–6 (21:38 – 29:16)

- God has made us sufficient (vv. 4–5)
 - God has qualified us to be ministers of the New Covenant (v. 6)
- i) The nature of the two covenants: letter/Spirit
 - ii) The effects of the two covenants: death/life

Point 3: 2 Cor 3:7–11 (29:17 – 43:11)

The ministry of the New Covenant is superior because –

- i) It is a ministry of the Spirit – not the letter (vv. 7–8)
Application: It's a glorious privilege to preach the gospel of the Spirit
- ii) It is a ministry of justification – not condemnation (v. 9)
Application: It's a glorious privilege to preach the gospel of salvation
- iii) It is a ministry of permanence – not transience (v. 10–11)
Application: Meditate on these three.

Conclusion: 2 Cor 3:12 (43:12 – 46:00)

- We are very bold in our ministry of the New Covenant (v. 12)
Application: We are timid because we have not grasped the glory of the Gospel.

Prayer (45:59 – 47:09)

Manner and Pedagogy

Stott's homiletical approach in this sermon emphasised clarity and theological depth over rhetorical flourishes. The manner of preaching is characterised by Stott's reserved demeanour, measured delivery, and clipped, concise phrasing. The serious tone employed by Stott underscores the weight and significance of the subject matter – with only minor variations in pace, volume, and pitch. Stott's discourse is marked by its organisation into numbered subdivisions, which serve as rhetorical markers throughout, signalling transitions between key points and guiding the listener through the text. This is reinforced by the repetition and summative recapitulation of points at strategic intervals (e.g., “Now let us sum up”).



As Stott moves through the main and subsidiary points, he is clearly and explicitly restricting himself to the boundaries defined by the passage.



Deliberately linking successive points at these junctures, Stott connects the theological ideas into the overall flow of logic in the passage.

Stott generally refrains from illustrating these points and only makes two fleeting analogies. In the first, Stott touches on the imagery of verse 3, comparing the Holy Spirit's work and the written letter (“There are such things as ink eradicators,

whereas the Holy Spirit's work in human hearts is ineradicable.”) In the second, Stott borrows Charles Hodge's comparison of the moon losing its brightness in the presence of the sun to illustrate how the glory of the Old Covenant is eclipsed by the New Covenant. Despite considering illustrations an essential feature of expository preaching, Stott humbly acknowledges his own shortcomings in their use: “I know how bad I am at using them myself. My friends keep teasing me about it, and I'm trying to improve.”⁶²

Exegesis

Preaching to a theologically informed audience, Stott pays close attention throughout to the subtle meaning and nuances of the Greek text. Throughout the sermon, Stott makes 7 references to specific Greek words and 10 references to alternative biblical translations. These translations and the attendant exegetical decisions are frequently supported by quotes from biblical commentators. As Stott moves through the main and subsidiary points, he is clearly and explicitly restricting himself to the boundaries defined by the passage. Stott does not deviate from the biblical text and consistently quotes or paraphrases the relevant verses to substantiate each point. The only departures from the passage are necessary references to Jeremiah 31 (v. 31, 33, and 34) which Stott cites to explain the New Covenant and

62 Stott, *I Believe in Preaching*, 236.

its superiority as a ministry of the Spirit. Stott considered the controlling function of biblical exposition to be one of the principal benefits of the expository discipline: “Exposition sets us limits. It restricts us to the scriptural text... our text is invariably taken from God’s Word.”⁶³

Exhortation

Stott seeks to make this exposition appropriate and relevant by applying the example of Paul’s ministry to *our* ministry as Christians.⁶⁴ Stott exhorts the congregation at each point of the sermon, demonstrating his preference for applying the text as he goes through it.⁶⁵ Tightly adhering to Paul’s intentions, Stott exhorts the congregation to feel Paul’s deep commitment, to minister with sincere motives, to consider your ‘letter of testimonial’, to meditate on the glories of the New Covenant, and to preach the gospel with boldness. For Stott, building this bridge between the biblical world and the modern world is essential to the preacher’s task: “Preaching is not exposition only but communication, not just the exegesis of a text but the conveying of a God-given message to a living people”.⁶⁶ The points of application are conveyed in sincere and earnest language and strike a challenging, emotive chord.

Reception and Enduring Impact

As one reviews the observable elements of these 1965 sermons, it is striking just how normal and unspectacular they sound to a contemporary Sydney Anglican in 2024. This, in itself, highlights the enduring influence of Stott’s expository style and the accompanying empowerment of the Spirit that must have affected those present. At the time, Stott’s Summer School sermons were received as revolutionary and groundbreaking models of expository preaching – unprecedented at this point in Sydney Anglican circles. At Stott’s memorial service in 2011, John Chapman recalled:

*I came out of one of the expositions at Summer School and I remember saying to Dudley Foord, ‘Surely that is the way all preaching should be done on Sundays.’ He said, ‘You’ve seen the model, all we’ve got to do is practice,’ and I’ve tried to do that ever since.*⁶⁷

63 Stott, *I Believe in Preaching*, 126.

64 Stott, “The Ministry of the Word,” 107.

65 Stott, *I Believe in Preaching*, 246.

66 Stott, *I Believe in Preaching*, 137.

67 Russell Powell, “John Stott Remembered in Sydney,” *Sydney Anglicans*, 4 August 2011, https://sydneyanglicans.net/news/john_stott_to_be_remembered_in_sydney/.

Trevor Edwards credits this precise moment as the catalyst for the formation of the College of Preachers.⁶⁸ Indeed, the cascading effect of this expository explosion would go on to decisively shape the Sydney Anglican Diocese and its enduring pulpit ministry until the present day.

In 1970, Dudley Foord, influenced by the success of the English College of Preachers – an institution he was connected to through English preaching networks in the 1960s – submitted a resolution at the Sydney Synod.⁶⁹ He sought the appointment of a committee, including himself and Chapman, with the stated purpose as follows:

*to investigate the possibility of establishing such a College of Preachers, with a view to furnishing instruction, encouragement and stimulation to ministers engaged in the task of preaching.*⁷⁰

This was to be a compulsory annual conference for recently ordained Sydney clergy. It was designed to assist the numerous clergymen who had been “expressing the desire for further training in preaching skills.”⁷¹ The resolution passed and the Committee launched the first College of Preachers conference at Moore College in November 1970. This was followed up by a second conference in 1972.⁷² Reporting to Synod in 1973, Bishop John Reid described the 1973 conference at Gilbulla Conference Centre as “highly successful and of great benefit to the participants”.⁷³ The conference included a paper by Foord on ‘Sources, Structures and Types of Sermons’.⁷⁴ The participants of these conferences attended workshop sessions led by guest speakers, reviewed a video of a previous sermon, and practised sermon preparation in small groups.⁷⁵ The key objective was to develop expository preaching skills, and to this end, each participant crafted a *lectio continua* series of sermons that could be taken back to their parish pulpit.⁷⁶ Over the 15 to 20 years that followed, the College of Preachers grew in size and stature, welcoming home-grown speakers from the emerging scene of expository preachers in Sydney – such as Chapman, Foord, Reid, Knox, Robinson, and Graham Goldsworthy – as well as international speakers, such as Stott, Dick Lucas, and Don Carson.⁷⁷ The College

68 Trevor Edwards, “Responding to ‘the Romance of Preaching and the Sydney Sermon,’” *St Mark’s Review* 226 (2013): 38.

69 Stace, *Sydney’s One Special Evangelist*, 112 n. 177.

70 D.T. Foord, “Synod Resolution 10/1970: College of Preachers,” in *Diocese of Sydney Year Book 1972* (Sydney: Ambassador Press, 1972), 350.

71 Foord, “Synod Resolution 10/1970: College of Preachers,” 350.

72 Stace, *Sydney’s One Special Evangelist*, 112; “Video-Tape for College of Preachers,” *Australian Church Record* (Sydney, 14 June 1973), 1539 edition.

73 J.R. Reid, “Standing Committee Report: 4/71 College of Preachers,” in *Diocese of Sydney Year Book 1974* (Sydney: Ambassador Press, 1974), 309.

74 “Video-Tape for College of Preachers.”

75 Reid, “Standing Committee Report: 4/71 College of Preachers,” 308–9.

76 Interview with John Chapman, *Cornhill Training College*, 2009, cited by Stace in *Sydney’s One Special Evangelist*, 112–13.

77 Stace, *Sydney’s One Special Evangelist*, 112–13.

shaped the emerging generation of preachers to follow in the footsteps of Stott's expository style.

This development was paralleled across several other channels which progressively consolidated expository preaching in the Sydney Anglican Diocese. Under the chairmanship of Reid (1971–76) and Phillip Jensen (1983–91), the Katoomba Christian Convention (KCC) flourished and became a renowned platform for the best expository preachers in Sydney and beyond.⁷⁸ This included John Chapman, who by the mid-1970s was being championed as the leading evangelist in Sydney, and was called upon to preach throughout the 1970s and 1980s at the Katoomba Youth Convention (1977, 1979, 1981, 1984, 1986, 1988, 1997).⁷⁹ This was followed by successive waves of expository preachers in the 1980s and 1990s – including John Woodhouse, Phillip Jensen, Peter Adam, and Simon Manchester.⁸⁰

In 1969, Reid and Chapman launched a series of “Lunchtime Bible Encounters” at St. Andrew’s Cathedral in Sydney. This innovation had been inspired by the likes of Stott’s lunchtime ministry program to workers in London through All Souls’ in the 1950s. This group provided another platform for expository preaching to gain traction in the Sydney Diocese. The expository preaching of Chapman and Reid’s lunchtime Bible talks was distributed widely through the Anglican Radio Unit and these lunchtime groups grew in popularity in the decade that followed.⁸¹ By 1978, the Sydney lunchtime group was paralleled in five other city locations and drawing combined audiences of several hundred per week.⁸² This would develop into the City Bible Forum, established in 1991 by David Mansfield, which has been an effective vehicle for evangelistic expository preaching to city workers ever since.⁸³ Chapman would go on to shape a generation of expository preachers across an array of teaching platforms and fellowships, ranging from mentoring programs, MTS Training Conferences, to sermon review sessions at Moore Theological College.⁸⁴

In conclusion, the significance of Stott’s 1958 university mission and 1965 CMS Summer School sermons cannot be overstated. During these visits, Stott provided compelling models of expository preaching that influenced multiple generations of key figures in the Sydney Anglican Diocese. These elements, combined with the broader evangelical revival and developments at Moore Theological College, fostered a shift towards expository preaching that resonated throughout the diocese and beyond. Stott’s approach not only reshaped preaching practices in Sydney, but also laid the groundwork for sustained growth and influence in Sydney Anglicanism, highlighting the enduring power of clear, biblical exposition in the preaching ministry. **ACR**

78 Stace, *Sydney’s One Special Evangelist*, 112.

79 Stace, *Sydney’s One Special Evangelist*, 115–16.

80 Stace, *Sydney’s One Special Evangelist*, 115–16.

81 Stace, *Sydney’s One Special Evangelist*, 117.

82 Stace, *Sydney’s One Special Evangelist*, 117.

83 Stace, *Sydney’s One Special Evangelist*, 118.

84 Stace, *Sydney’s One Special Evangelist*, 123.

FINE PROPERTY FOR YOUTH ON MTNS.

The Church of England Fellowship, Diocese of Sydney, has purchased a magnificent property for youth work at Springwood, in the Blue Mountains.

The property, known as "Beverley Hall," is a former guest house. Its purchase will mean that youth groups in Sydney will have a property to replace "Shuna," the house at Leura which was destroyed in the disastrous fires last year.

The main building, which is set in nine acres of beautiful bushland, has 15 bedrooms, two large lounge rooms, and dining hall. Hot and cold water is laid on to many bedrooms.

RELIEF

Beyond the main building there is a large hall, two caretakers' flats, four garages, a tennis court and a swimming pool.

The Archbishop of Sydney, Dr. Mowll, realising the urgent need to replace "Shuna," made the sum of £2,527 available from his Bushfire Relief Fund, thus enabling the fellowship to purchase the property.

The house is in excellent repair, and the Valuer-General's valuation is £15,000. About £1,000 will be required to purchase furniture to make the property ready for use by fellowships.

The Chaplain for Youth, the Reverend Neville Bathgate, said this week that the acquisition of the property was a major step forward in youth work in the Diocese.

"Beverley Hall is ideally suited for the work of houseparties and conferences," he added. "It will house 70 young people easily."

"In every way it is superior to the property it replaces — 'Shuna.' It has far more poten-

Mr Scott's topics at the lunch-our meetings will include: "Who was Jesus of Nazareth?" "What is Man?" "Why did Christ Die?" "Can Human Nature be Changed?" "What Must Do?" "What will it Cost?"

PREMIERE

On Friday evening he spoke a well-attended meeting in Assembly Hall, Margaret Street. At this meeting the Faith film, "Red River of Life," was given its Australian premiere.

Mr Scott spoke again in the Assembly Hall on Saturday night at a youth rally.

On Sunday Mr Scott saw a considerable area of the Diocese of Sydney. He spoke at St. Mark's, Darling Point at 10 a.m., travelled to Wollongong where he addressed a combined churches' meeting at St. Michael's Church at 3 p.m.

On the evening he preached at St. Philip's, Eastwood. On Monday and Tuesday Mr Scott conducted combined clergy services at St. Stephen's Presbyterian Church, Macquarie Street. There were morning and noon sessions on each day.

CATHEDRAL

On Monday and Tuesday evening he spoke at two public meetings in St. Stephen's. On Sunday morning, Mr

Andrew's, Summer Hill, at 11 a.m.

Mr Scott will attend the Annual Meeting of the Evangelical Alliance on Monday, June 23, and will be present at a gathering of the I.V.F. Graduates' Fellowship at St. Philip's, Church Hill, at 6 p.m. on Thursday, June 26.

At 11 a.m. on Sunday, June 29, Mr Scott will preach at a special service for National Scripture Union Week in St. Andrew's Cathedral. This service will be broadcast through the A.B.C. In the afternoon he will address a Pleasant Sunday Afternoon at the Lyceum Hall (Broadcast 2CH), and in the evening will preach at St. John's, Darlinghurst.

Mr Scott will conduct a Church of England Clergy Conference at Gillingarra, Menangle, on Monday June 30.

Mr Scott will be in Brisbane on June 24-25, and in Hobart on July 1-2.

On July 3 he will go to Melbourne, where he will conduct a Mission in the University of Melbourne from July 10 to 20.

DEATH OF BISHOP A. L. WYLDE OF BATHURST

BATHURST, June 9.—The death occurred on Saturday of the Bishop of Bathurst, the Right Reverend Arnold Lomas Wyld.

Bishop Wyld, who was 78, died in his sleep at his home, Bishops Court Bathurst. He had been Bishop of Bathurst since 1937.

Bishop Wyld was ordained in England in 1906. In 1921, after

service in the Diocese of London, he came to Bathurst as a priest of the Brotherhood of the Good Shepherd.

In 1923 he was appointed Principal of the Brotherhood, and in 1927 Bishop Coadjutor of Bathurst.

R.C. ECUMENIST

The property will be available for bookings from August 1.

trial, and may well prove to be eventually one of Australia's finest youth centres.

"Increased train fares and transport costs led us to look for something closer to Sydney," he added.

LONDON, June 2.—Dom Clement Lilaire of the Benedictine Abbey of Chevetogne, in Belgium, died on April 26, at the age of 56. He was for many years active as an interpreter of Russian Orthodoxy in Roman Catholic circles, and maintained close contact with ecumenical leaders of many confessions. Many of Dom Lilaire's publications dealt at length with the ecclesiology of the World Council of Churches.

LUTHER FILM

NEW YORK, June 1.—The American film about Martin Luther now has a Korean sound track, and has been sent to the Council of Churches in Korea. A representative of the film production company reports that this year about 500,000 more people will be able to see the film in Central and South America.

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University mission commences in Sydney

At the end of the first week of his Sydney visit, the Reverend John Stott will today commence a long-awaited Mission to the University of Sydney.

Mr. Stott, Rector of All Souls' Church, Langham Place, London, is visiting Australia to lead clergy conferences and university missions under the joint sponsorship of the Evangelical Alliance and the Inter-faith Fellowship.

Lunch-hour meetings will be held at the University each day during the mission, and there will be a number of additional special meetings, including an evening with a "brains trust."

Stott will preach in St. Andrew's Cathedral. In the evening he will be at St. Stephen's, Wolloughby.

On the following Sunday, June 22, he will preach at St.



The Reverend John Stott, Rector of All Souls' Church, Langham Place, London, who is at present conducting a Mission to the University of Sydney.

Interview: Alistair Begg



Alistair Begg has been in pastoral ministry since 1975. He graduated from the London School of Theology and subsequently served in Scotland at Charlotte Chapel in Edinburgh and Hamilton Baptist Church. In 1983, he became the senior pastor at Parkside Church near Cleveland, Ohio, where he continues to lead the congregation and teach God's word Sunday by Sunday. Alistair is also the Bible teacher on the daily and weekend program *Truth For Life*. *Truth For Life* is distributed through 1,900 radio networks across the United States and can also be heard online at truthforlife.org, through YouTube, via

podcast, and by way of numerous other listening platforms. Alistair is the author of several books. He and his wife Susan were married in 1975 and have three grown children and eight grandchildren.

The following is a transcript of a section of an interview with Alistair conducted by the ACR during the 2025 CMS Summer School, Katoomba, where Alistair was speaking on the book of 1 Peter.

Mike Leite: Alistair, I'd love to hear how you came to call Jesus your Lord and Saviour?

Alistair: I had the privilege of being brought up in a Christian home. My mother and father were Christians before they married, from different backgrounds. The world into which I was brought was that world. Kind of a Deuteronomy 6 thing, but my dad had parents who were godly in the highlands of Scotland. So taken to church, dropped off in Sunday school, the usual stuff. I was very small, young.

I had one sister who had been born, and one Sunday I came home from the Sunday school, and I was obviously exer-

cised about things because I asked my dad, how old do you have to be to trust Jesus? And I don't remember the conversation, but my dad obviously spoke with me and said, it's not about how old you are, it's about this, it's about that. And in that context, I remember so vividly, we knelt down together by a chair in the family room, and he led me in prayer, and essentially led me to Christ.

I went, and this is the strangest thing, that I went the next day to school, to my primary school, and I asked the teacher if I could sing a chorus to the class. Well, I can't sing, but there must have been something about that chorus that was supposed to convey whatever had happened to me, whatever that meant. And that was the genesis of it.

When I was 15, 16, then you find out whether you're floating on the divine afflatus of a family structure, or it's your own. And in that context, I was baptised when I was 15. And that was, I think, if it was in Lutheran terms, it would be your confirmation.

Yeah, and then I was involved in stuff from there with school friends and everything, so that the reality of Christ as a saviour and a friend, and somebody that is very important to tell others about, was then part of my later teenage years as well.

Mike: Praise the Lord! What has ministry looked like for you as a pastor over the years?

Alistair: Well, I started in the mid-70s. Charlotte Chapel, in Edinburgh was and is strong in its Bible teaching. And I inherited all of that. I was caught up into that. I was the assistant to the pas-

tor Derek Brine, not the assistant pastor.

Derek said, 'If the hand of God is clearly on you, and that is acknowledged by the leadership and by the congregation, then you can be ordained to the ministry. But I don't want you to come under the notion that that is a for sure thing'. So I did whatever Derek told me to do.

I taught the discipleship class. I visited like a crazy person, up and down the stairs of all the tenement buildings, going to nursing homes, going into schools. And he gave me one Sunday a month when I could preach in a local church, if they wanted me to preach.

And since there were so many churches in Scotland at that time without pastors, they would take anybody just about. And so, I got the opportunity to go and do that. That then opened up to a church inviting me to actually come there on a permanent basis.

And when I got there, I did just what Derek had done. You know, I taught the Bible. We had the prayer meeting. We did the Bible study. I worked with the young people. We were evangelistic in our fervour. We were trying to just build things up. We enjoyed a wonderful six years there. Many young people came to Christ.

Mike: And how did you get from there to Parkside in Ohio, America?

Alistair: Yeah, well, somebody gave my name to this church in Ohio. And it all sounds a bit of a joke... so, there was a prayer meeting, and somebody says, 'We're looking for a minister in our church'. And this other person says, 'Well, I've got a name for you, but you



have to go a long way to get this person', never thinking that they would actually follow through on that!

And so, it was quite bizarre. And with their initial invitation to me, I said no. For all kinds of reasons. But in large measure, because I didn't have any hankering to go to America. I had an American wife, I'd been to America quite a lot since 1972, and it was now 1981. But when the call came a second time, it was a bit like, you know, the word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time. And Cleveland, Ohio is not the obvious place you're going to go in America. There are places you might like to go. And yet, I've discovered along the way that there is no ideal place to serve God, except the place he sets you down.

And so, when we finally went there

in 1983, it was a heart-rending experience, really. Because I was going across the ocean on a one-way ticket. And the rest, as they say, is history. I mean, it's been a long journey.

Mike: Yes, you've been at Parkside 40-ish years?

Alistair: Yeah, I've been there for 41 years and by the time it gets to September this year [2025], I'll finish up at 42 years. It is incredible actually, because time is such a strange thing.

Mike: Was it quite a different ministry back then to now, or did you inherit something that already had some size and complexity?

Alistair: No, no. I inherited a fledgling congregation where there had been

one pastor before who had graduated from Ted's in Chicago. When I came I'd started to do the only thing I knew what to do, and I started to teach the Bible. After three years, we sold the building. We moved into a local high school because of the growth. We thought we'd be there for maybe two years. We ended up being there for seven and a half years doing church in a way that was just radically different, which was both arduous and fascinating. Eventually, in 1993, we opened the building where we are now, and then it's just grown and gone on from there.

Mike: Well, let me ask you some questions about preaching now. I'll start with a broad question. When you come to the preaching task, what sort of general convictions do you bring to the task? What are you trying to keep in mind? What are you hoping to achieve?

Alistair: Well, standing way back from it, that the Bible is a book about Jesus. The old Sunday school stuff in the Old Testament is predicted in the Gospels, is revealed in the acts, is preached in the epistles, is explained in the book of Revelation. It's anticipated. The Bible is a book about Jesus. Take your eyes off Jesus, you lose your way around the Bible. Guys like Goldsworthy have helped me a lot. I'm saying to myself all the time, Did you offer Jesus to them? So that is at least one mechanism to prevent us from going off on a tangent or turning it into 43 topical studies.

In teaching the Bible, I also want to see unbelieving people become committed followers of Jesus Christ. So, I want to teach the Bible with clarity and

relevance so that unbelievers will be converted and that believers will be established, disciplined in such a way that they, in turn, are taking that same message into their workplace and into their sphere of activity.

Mike: Now, don't take this comment the wrong way... but since John Woodhouse has put me on to you, I've listened to quite a few of your sermons. And I find them edifying. But it's quite different to our style of preaching in Sydney. I've labelled it 'good different'. You know, Alistair's preaching is 'good

“

I'm saying to myself all the time, Did you offer Jesus to them? So that is at least one mechanism to prevent us from going off on a tangent.

”

different', like Aldi! And I don't know if you've listened to much Sydney preaching – I assume not because you're only here for the week – but we're fairly influenced by John Stott's style of preaching. Very expository, almost exegetical, almost line by line, verse by verse. You probably saw an extent of that with John when he was over in Ohio with you – verse by verse preaching.

Are there particular ways that have influenced your style of preaching? Or people? Or is it just formed naturally out of yourself?

Alistair: Well, I'm influenced by all of these things. You know, Stott is fantastic. But if you read Stott's commentary before you try and preach, don't tell me

you've found a better way to thread the needle. Because he was so masterful at it. Therefore, it's wonderful to read and to benefit from. But to try and attempt it, the average person shouldn't.

Because there was about Stott an X factor. He was unusual. There is about Dick Lucas an X factor. He is unusual. Dick is not Stotty. And Dick will say strange things in the midst of his talk. But in essence, it's truth through personality. So, I've just developed my own way over time. I don't think it is there as



All you do is you just really read the text, and then you say what's in the text, and you apply it in ways that many people can't even think of. And it's effective.



an example to be followed. But it is true to myself.

And I cannot do your kind of preaching. I cannot do it in those huge, big chunks. I mean, at Parkside, we're going through John 17 at the moment. I think I've done 11 or 12 sermons so far. I was being interviewed by Kevin DeYoung. And Kevin said to me, 'I don't understand how you are able to do what you're doing. Because all you do is you just really read the text, and then you say what's in the text, and you apply it in ways that many people can't even think of. And it's effective'. And I said, 'Well, yeah, I don't know. I mean, I'm of the conviction that nobody knows how to preach. That preaching is such an awesome thing, that it should humble us,

but it shouldn't paralyse us. But I always tell my guys, listen, be yourself and forget yourself. And to forget yourself is more important than to be yourself.'

I guess I'm just true to my own mantra. I just do it [preach]. And that's why I would never be a good teacher. Because people who do stuff – do things instinctively or naturally – they usually don't know what they're doing. That's why some guys like Wayne Rooney, who was one of the great footballers, has already been fired three times as a manager. Because he knows how to do what he does. But he doesn't know how he did what he does. Therefore, he can't tell me how to do it.

So yeah, I take that as an encouragement that it was good different rather than bad different.

Mike: Definitely an encouragement! I'm very thankful for the gift you are in your ministry to us. How do you stay fresh then in preaching? I mean, 42 years! That's a long time in the one church. And I've heard it described in this sort of way... Every week there's a right sense, in which as we bring forward Christ, we need to preach something that is true and good and life-changing and life-altering, because *it is* good, and because *it is* the gospel, and *it is* life-altering and transformative. We want people to become more like Christ... that's what we desire.

Alistair: Right.

Mike: But that's a pressure. It's one thing doing the itinerant thing, but you have been so long in the one parish, the one church. How do you stay fresh?

Alistair: It's the steady week-by-week ministry that keeps your nose to the grindstone. If people say to me, 'Well, you'll be finishing with a pulpit, now you can go roaming around the universe', that doesn't hold any appeal to me at all. And in the steady week-by-week, some weeks, it's good. Some weeks, it's great. Some weeks, it's horrible.

I used to joke with [my wife] Sue in the early days – I still actually do it, but it's going to run out of impact. When I came home on Sunday night after the evening service, I'll come in the door, take my shoes off, and say, 'Tomorrow, I'm going to get a proper job'. And she used to say, 'Oh, honey, today's been a great day'. She doesn't say that anymore. She says, 'Oh, shut up. I don't want to hear your nonsense'.

I don't know that I actually think about whether I'm fresh or not. I remind myself: Endure hardship. Do the work of an evangelist. Discharge all the duties of your ministry.

It's a bit like a marriage in some ways. Faithfulness is demanded of us and is accompanied by tremendous benefits, which may be more present at one time than at another time. But we're not deciding whether we're faithful in order that the benefits might be accruing. It is the Lord who rises with healing in his wings.

But how do I keep fresh? I'm reading all the time. I'm engaged with my colleagues all the time. I'm asking them questions all the time. And I can't get over the fact that God gave me this privilege! You know, you sometimes get up from your desk and walk up and down the room, and say to yourself, 'They actually

give me money in order that I can be able to read my Bible right now so that I can try and tell them what I've discovered'.

Mike: Can I change tack slightly here and ask about your preaching frequency? We've just put out a survey to all senior ministers asking about how often they preach. Now Parkside is a fairly large church, with a big team. I think I saw on the website that there are 12 pastoral staff and 20 support team members. So, how often do you preach?

Alistair: My preaching frequency has been essentially 40 weeks out of the 52. And if I were in another context and doing things again, and didn't have the radio thing [where Alistair Begg's sermons are broadcast], then I would be far more willing to share in the teaching through a book. But I'm jealous for my pulpit, I don't give it out to any-

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”

body. And I'm gratified by the fact that my guys, none of them deviate from the course. That is, they follow the course of 'Let's pray together, here's the Bible, let's go'. It is a shared responsibility. But the person who has the preponderance of the pulpit, of the word of God, that person has their hand on the tiller for the longest time, the prolonged time, and is going to be the most influential per-

son, and the influence will be simply the influence of being the servant of the word over a consistent period of time. Up until Covid, I was preaching four times a Sunday. I had three morning services plus the evening service, and the evening service is a different service.

Mike: Last question, sort of a self-indulgent one. I'm 10 years into the preaching task. What's your wisdom for a still young-ish preacher like me? What's your wisdom for me, brother?

Alistair: Work really hard not to lose the wonder... that the routine doesn't squeeze out the sense of privilege and joy. I resist everything that would allow you to say, 'well, this is becoming somewhat mundane now, or this is routine'.

Part of it has to do with the danger of becoming more capable, and the more capable we become, the danger is that we start to believe our own stories. We

need to take our task seriously without taking ourselves too seriously. If we get that reversed, then we're in trouble. I guess what I'm saying is, make sure we don't lose the wonder of the preaching task. Whatever's involved in doing that. For me, reading biography, poking around in things, and just remember that in marriage as in ministry, really the key is doing the basics well most of the time. I always ask the question to my associates, 'Are you encouraged, brother? Are you in good heart? It's such a great privilege to be a servant of God's word, that he speaks through his word. And that he uses the most unlikely people in the process.'

And be yourself. Your DNA is yours. He made you exactly as you are. To use you as you are. You're not a clone. You're not a copy of this guy or that guy. You are Mike. **ACR**

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BE INFORMED**

J. C. Ryle on the priority of preaching



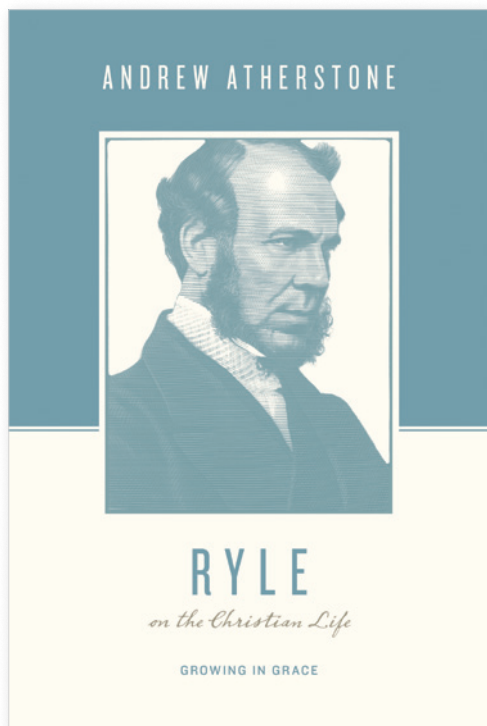
Andrew Atherstone is Professor of Modern Anglicanism at the University of Oxford, and Latimer Research Fellow at Wycliffe Hall, Oxford. This article is an excerpt from his book, *Ryle on the Christian Life: Growing in Grace* (Crossway), due to be published in November 2025.

Throughout his nearly six decades of public ministry, as parish clergyman in Suffolk and diocesan bishop in Liverpool, J. C. Ryle (1816–1900) was first and foremost a preacher. Many of his famous tracts began as sermons, and retain his pithy, urgent, dramatic style of delivery which forced congregations (and then millions of readers) to sit up and take notice. Proclamation of the gospel was his greatest joy and his life's work. It was motivated by theological conviction that the Word of God has divine power to transform lives, the means by which the Holy Spirit revives and strengthens the church.

A divine commission

As a young man, aged 26, at his ordination to the presbyterate in 1842, Ryle was exhorted by the Bishop of Winchester, in the words of the *Book of Common Prayer* ordination liturgy, to remember 'into how high a dignity, and to how weighty an office

and charge ye are called: That is to say, to be messengers, watchmen, and stewards of the Lord.' The presbyter's role was to teach the Scriptures as a pastor and evangelist, 'to feed and provide for the Lord's family; to seek for Christ's sheep that are dispersed abroad... that they may be saved through Christ forever.' As the symbol of his new office, Ryle was presented with a Bible and instructed by the bishop, 'Take thou authority to preach the Word of God.' This was a divine commission which he took extremely seriously.



Lifeless preaching

Before his conversion, Ryle had experienced the spiritual detriment of sitting under poor preaching. In his autobiography, he recalled that there had been ‘no ministry of the gospel’ at the two churches his family attended in Macclesfield, Cheshire, in the 1820s: ‘The clergymen were wretched high and dry sticks of the old school, and their preaching was not calculated to do good to anybody. I can truly say that I passed through childhood and boyhood without ever hearing a single sermon likely to do good to my soul.’¹ You could sleep as comfortably under their preaching ‘as you might in your own armchairs, with nothing to wake you up.’² Likewise, he reckoned the sermons he heard as a pupil at Eton Col-

lege were ‘a perfect farce,’ ‘a disgrace’ and ‘beneath contempt.’ It was no better as an undergraduate at Oxford, where the sermons he was expected to attend at the University Church were ‘exceedingly dry, and lifeless.’³ Therefore when Ryle himself became a clergyman, he was determined to pioneer a different approach, with lively biblical preaching at its heart. His influential tract ministry had its roots in his pulpit ministry.

What is Wanted?

Ryle’s tract *What is Wanted?* (1854) offered an analysis of the Church of England’s numerous weaknesses and the corresponding remedies. He warned that many clergy were so absorbed in running their parishes, supervising the schools, and visiting the sick, that they neglected preaching which should be their chief priority:

No pastoral labour will ever compensate for inadequate pulpit preparation. A minister’s sermons should be incomparably the first thing in his thoughts. He is not ordained to be a schoolmaster, a relieving officer, or a doctor, but

- 1 *Bishop J. C. Ryle’s Autobiography: The Early Years*, ed. Andrew Atherstone (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2016), 62–63.
- 2 *Abstract of Report and Speeches at the Forty-Fifth Annual Meeting of the Church Pastoral-Aid Society* (6 May 1880), 8.
- 3 *Bishop J. C. Ryle’s Autobiography*, 35, 66.

to preach the Word; and if he neglects his sermons under the excuse of other work, he has no right to expect God's blessing.

Many preachers, he observed, were stuck in a rut with a narrow range of topics, working 'round and round upon them like a horse in a mill' (one of Ryle's favorite agricultural images), rather than preaching the whole counsel of God. Furthermore, their style of delivery left a great deal to be desired: 'We are neither plain enough, nor direct enough, nor bold enough, nor discriminating enough. Our sermons are too like essays, flat, pointless, tame, and wearying—unawakening to sinners, and unedifying to saints—blunt swords, and headless arrows.' Probably no Protestant ministers in the world, Ryle claimed, were so badly trained in preaching as the clergy of the Church of England – indeed the vast majority had never been trained at all.⁴ These were reiterated themes in many of his exhortations on preaching.

Learning from the Reformation

In Ryle's reading of church history, he noticed that the spiritual high points of the sixteenth-century Reformation and the eighteenth-century Evangelical Revival were both marked by a revival of biblical preaching. Conversely, at the periods when spiritual life was at its lowest ebb there was a corresponding decline in preaching. Ryle saw a causal link between the two.

Lecturing in February 1853 on Bishop Hugh Latimer (c. 1485–1555) to the London branch of the Church of England Young Men's Society for Aiding Missions at Home and Abroad, Ryle portrayed English medieval religion on the eve of the Reformation as 'a period of utter spiritual darkness.' The Roman Catholic priests were 'profoundly ignorant'; they might be able to read their breviaries, but 'knew nothing whatever of the Bible... Preaching there was scarcely any, and what there was, was grossly unscriptural and unedifying.' The English people were also, inevitably, 'utterly ignorant of true religion... they had neither sound preaching to hear, nor Bibles to read... Thus the blind led the blind, and all wallowed in the ditch together.'⁵ Similarly, lecturing in 1868 on the martyrdom of Bishop John Hooper (c. 1495–1555), Ryle declared that before the Reformation, in the absence of gospel preaching, there was 'a conspicuous absence of all knowledge of true Christianity' and 'gross darkness overspread the land.'⁶

That parlous situation was only redeemed when the Reformers began to preach

4 J. C. Ryle, *What is Wanted? Beings Thoughts and Suggestions on Some of the Chief Wants of the Church of England in the Present Day* (Ipswich: William Hunt, 1854), 28–30.

5 J. C. Ryle, "Bishop Latimer," in *Lectures Delivered Before the Church of England Young Men's Society for Aiding Missions at Home and Abroad, at Freemason's Hall, January and February 1853* (London: Seeleys, 1853), 158, 160.

6 J. C. Ryle, *John Hooper (Bishop and Martyr): His Times, Life, Death, and Opinions* (London: William Hunt, 1868), 7–8.

Christ, Ryle explained. He agreed with the Reformers, as a matter of theological conviction, that proclamation of the gospel was the means ordained by God to bring spiritual conviction and conversion, quoting approvingly from Latimer's writings: preaching was 'the office of salvation, and the office of regeneration'; 'take away preaching, and take away salvation'; 'this office of preaching is the only ordinary way that God hath appointed to save us all. Let us maintain this, for I know none other.'⁷



Latimer's sermons offered 'sound Gospel doctrine' combined with 'plain Saxon language, boldness, liveliness, directness, and simplicity.'



If this was true in the sixteenth century, Ryle believed, it was true in the nineteenth century also. If the Victorian church was to be reformed and revived, the catalyst would be the pulpit. He acknowledged that Latimer's sermons would 'not suit modern taste,' but he complained that Victorian Christians were very poor judges of good preach-

ing. A typical modern sermon, Ryle chided, was 'too often a dull, tame, pointless, religious essay, full of measured round sentences, Johnsonian English, bald platitudes, timid statements, and elaborately concocted milk and water.' Latimer's sermons offered 'sound Gospel doctrine' combined with 'plain Saxon language, boldness, liveliness, directness, and simplicity.'⁸

When Ryle surveyed the history of the seventeenth century, he noticed the same pattern. Lecturing on the puritan Richard Baxter (1615–1691) to the Young Men's Christian Association at London's Exeter Hall in 1853, he outlined how the high church revival under Archbishop Laud (1573–1645) had undermined the Reformation. Evangelical doctrine was despised, Calvinistic bishops were snubbed, Arminian bishops were promoted, the Sabbath was neglected, communion tables were railed and 'profanely called altars.' But the tell-tale sign of theological declension was the pulpit: 'Preaching and lecturing were depreciated, and forms and ceremonies were exalted.'⁹

Learning from the Evangelical Revival

By the early eighteenth century the situation was even worse, Ryle asserted in *The Christian Leaders of the Last Century* (1869). His portrayal of pre-revival times was dire: 'cold morality', 'barren orthodoxy', and sermons which were 'little better than miserable moral essays, utterly devoid of anything likely to awaken, convert,

7 Ryle, "Bishop Latimer," 196.

8 Ryle, "Bishop Latimer," 186.

9 J. C. Ryle, "Baxter and His Times," in *Lectures Delivered Before the Young Men's Christian Association in Exeter Hall, from November 1852 to February 1853* (London: James Nisbet, 1853), 366.

or save souls.’¹⁰ The parochial clergy were ‘sunk in worldliness,’ illustrated again by the decline in preaching: ‘They hunted, they shot, they farmed, they swore, they drank, they gambled. They seemed determined to know everything except Jesus Christ and him crucified.’ Their sermons were ‘so unspeakably and indescribably bad,’ Ryle lambasted, that their congregations deserted the church. As for theological literature, ‘Inquire at any old bookseller’s shop, and you will find there is no theology so unsaleable’ as Hanoverian sermons.¹¹

But according to Ryle’s historical schema in *Christian Leaders*, the method by which the church was revived, through the ministry of men like George Whitefield (1714–1770) and John Wesley (1703–1791), was ‘the old apostolic weapon of *preaching*.’ The evangelicals preached everywhere – in parish pulpits, barns, fields, village greens, market places, standing on tables, benches, or horse-blocks, wherever a crowd could be gathered. They preached simply, ‘not ashamed to crucify their style, and to sacrifice their reputation for learning’ in order to be understood. They preached fervently and directly, believing that ‘you must speak *from* the heart if you wish to speak *to* the heart.’ And their sermons were ‘eminently doctrinal, positive, dogmatical, and distinct,’ full of the gospel and full of Jesus Christ.¹²

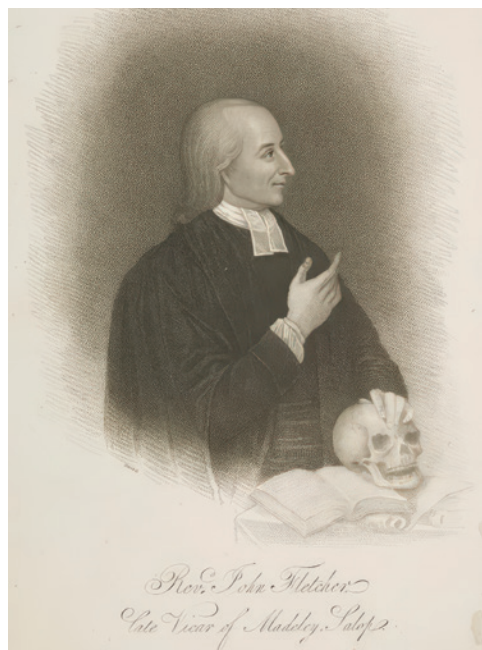


Image: Portrait of John William Fletcher (1729–1785), British Methodist cleric. Engraver Thomas Blood, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons

All Ryle’s individual vignettes in *Christian Leaders* focused on their preaching ministries, often with a detailed analysis of their sermons. Whitefield, for example, was celebrated as ‘the greatest preacher of the gospel England has ever seen.’ His sermons were said to be packed with gospel truth, remarkably lucid, bold, earnest, and delivered with immense pathos and feeling.¹³ Likewise the Methodist leader John Fletcher (1729–1785), during his ministry at Madeley in Shropshire was ‘always doing one and the same thing—always preaching, always teaching, always trying to awaken sinners, always trying to build up saints.’¹⁴

10 J. C. Ryle, *The Christian Leaders of the Last Century; or, England a Hundred Years Ago* (London: Thomas Nelson, 1869), 14.

11 Ryle, *Christian Leaders*, 17–18.

12 Ryle, *Christian Leaders*, 23–26.

13 Ryle, *Christian Leaders*, 31, 50–56.

14 Ryle, *Christian Leaders*, 408.

Evangelical busyness

Many Victorian clergy had succumbed to the wrong set of priorities, Ryle warned, distracted from their central obligation to proclaim the gospel. A busy ministry was not necessarily a fruitful ministry. In ‘Real Church Work’ (1884), he observed that large numbers of clergy were investing their time and energies in church ceremonies, social reforms (like temperance and improved housing for the working classes), secular lectures, entertainments, guilds and societies, and congratulating themselves, ‘What a great deal of Church-work there is in these days!’ But amidst the ‘incessant bustle and stir about matters of entirely secondary importance,’ many churches neglected the priority of evangelism and preaching to which the apostles had dedicated themselves. ‘It is quite certain,’ Ryle noted, ‘that musical services, and church decoration, and concerts, and penny readings, and bazaars, and improved cookery, and the like, will not save souls.’¹⁵



Ryle noted, ‘that musical services, and church decoration, and concerts, and penny readings, and bazaars, and improved cookery, and the like, will not save souls.’



Yet his censures were not merely aimed at Social Reformers or Anglo-Catholics. He acknowledged that in the Victorian age there was a ‘vast quantity of religious machinery’ created by evangelical networks – city missions, evangelical

societies, annual conferences, numerous committees. Every well-oiled evangelical parish invested in them, alongside the regular round of classes for young men, groups for mothers, day schools for children, Sunday School outings, and so forth. The very success of the evangelical movement had given rise to a national and parochial infrastructure unimaginable to those in revival times like Henry Venn, who had arrived in 1759 as vicar of Huddersfield in Yorkshire with ‘nothing but his Bible, and his Master at his side.’ Therefore, Ryle explained, Venn was ‘forced to be pre-eminently a man of one thing, and a soldier with one weapon, a perpetual preacher of God’s Word.’ In contrast, modern evangelicals had ‘lost sight of apostolic simplicity in our ministerial work... It is hard to have many irons in the fire at once, and to keep them all hot. It is quite possible to make an idol of parochial machinery, and for the sake of it to slight the pulpit.’¹⁶

Sounding the gospel trumpet

This call to prioritise preaching was reiterated in Ryle’s sermon to the Church Pastoral Aid Society (CPAS), founded in 1836, one of the many ‘home mission’ agen-

15 “Real Church Work,” in J. C. Ryle, *Principles for Churchmen: A Manual of Positive Statements on Doubtful or Disputed Points* (London: William Hunt, 1884), 282–83.

16 Ryle, *Christian Leaders*, 269–70.

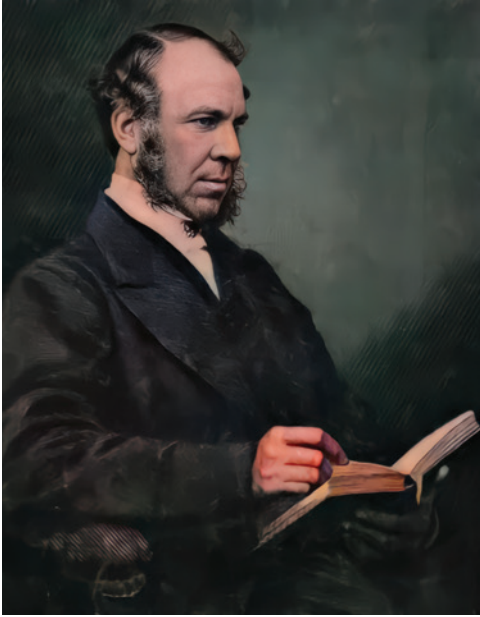


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cies established by evangelicals in the nineteenth century. In parallel with organisations like the Church Missionary Society which sent missionaries to far-flung parts of the globe like Africa and India, the CPAS aimed to multiply gospel ministry closer to home among the many unreached people in England, principally by raising funds for missionary workers in local parishes. In May 1882, Ryle preached the CPAS annual sermon, taking as his text a question from the Apostle Paul, ‘If the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself for the battle?’ (1 Cor 14:8). His central application was the absolute priority of the preaching ministry as the God-ordained means ‘to arouse,

to awaken, and to stir careless souls’.

Ryle feared that some Anglicans were seeking to exalt the priestly office (turning the clock back to the days of medieval Romanism or high church Laudianism), but he insisted that ‘the first, foremost, and principal work of the minister is to be a preacher of God’s Word’ and ‘in no sense is he a sacrificing priest.’¹⁷ The bishop lamented that too many ministers were obsessed by liturgical duties, exalting the communion table so extravagantly that it overshadowed the pulpit, and neglecting their preparations for preaching. Too many congregations therefore had to endure ‘short, shallow, hastily-composed sermons, devoid alike of matter, power, fire, or effectiveness.’ The Lord’s Supper, Ryle suggested, was mentioned in at most five books in the New Testament whereas almost every page testified to the value of preaching, the ‘chief instrument’ used by the Holy Spirit to awaken sinners and establish saints. He agreed with the saying of old Hugh Latimer that ‘it is one of Satan’s great aims to exalt ceremonies and put down preaching.’

‘A contempt for sermons,’ Ryle warned, ‘is a pretty sure mark of a decline in spiritual religion.’ This was one of the chief lessons he took from church history, as he reiterated in a rousing peroration: ‘Do not forsake the old paths. Let nothing tempt you to believe that multiplication of forms and ceremonies, constant reading of liturgical services, or frequent communions, will ever do so much good to souls as the powerful, fiery, fervent preaching of God’s Word.’ They must therefore ‘blow the trumpet of the everlasting Gospel loud and long.’¹⁸ **ACR**

17 J. C. Ryle, *Soldiers and Trumpeters: A Word for the Times* (London: William Hunt, 1883), 12, 14.

18 Ryle, *Soldiers and Trumpeters*, 16–19.

Book review

Motherhood: How the Gospel shapes our Purpose and Priorities

by Jocelyn Loane



Renée Capel is married to Matt and spends her week with her daughter being involved in various ministries of Wairoa Anglican.

There are myriad places you could turn for wisdom regarding motherhood. Over the past eight months since I became a mother, I have often found myself scrolling Google looking for answers (normally at 2am!) or watching Instagram reels looking for a silver bullet. While sometimes entertaining,

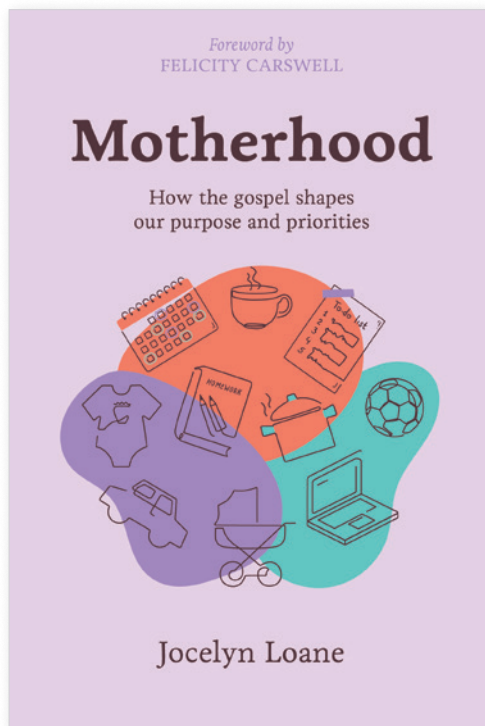
this strategy easily leads to being overwhelmed. The purposes and priorities of motherhood on the internet are confused and flawed. In contrast, the gospel provides deep, lasting truths for motherhood. Jocelyn Loane insightfully and warmly lifts our eyes to God's purposes in motherhood in her aptly named book *Motherhood: How the Gospel shapes our Purpose and Priorities*.

Our world seems to simultaneously overvalue and undervalue motherhood. It can be seen as the ultimate goal of life for many, but, we are told, it also should not impede on one's career or ability to live out one's dreams. In her opening chapter, Jocelyn shows us how God values motherhood by placing it in God's grand scheme to bring all things to unity under Christ. 'There is no better opportunity to disciple somebody – to instil a deep love for the Lord, a deep trust in his goodness, a deep passion for his glory – than the one we have with the children we raise in our own homes' (p 16). When we value motherhood as

God values it, many of the worries of the world diminish, and we are reminded of the great privilege to raise children in the Lord. With this scene set, the rest of the book is divided into two sections: Principles and Priorities, and Decisions and Difficulties.

The eight principles and priorities which Jocelyn outlines are soaked in Scripture and sprinkled with warm stories from her own experiences. The priorities help us view God, ourselves, and our children rightly. Children are great gifts from God whom we are called to love. But these great gifts are also going to be those whom God uses to show us our sin and shape us to be more like Jesus. Reading these chapters feels like sitting down and having a cup of tea with Jocelyn. She walks you through passages from all over Scripture showing their relevance to motherhood.

Considering motherhood from Scripture has helped me ensure my heart is in the right place, and with my daughter's heart in view. When I think about mothering, I can think about all the things I need to 'do' – the food to cook, the developmentally appropriate toys to acquire, the cute clothes to dress my daughter in (these are the things Instagram prioritises!). While those things aren't bad things, it is more important for me to remember my identity as a child of God as I parent. I am a sinner who has been shown grace by my Father in heaven. 'As we parent we should be more like newborn babies than toddlers. We need God desperately for everything.' (p 102). Rather than focusing on all the things I need to 'do' as a mother, I need to constantly



bring my requests before my loving heavenly Father in prayer.

We desperately need God because we are not able to change the hearts of our children; only God does that. Jocelyn helps us think about discipling our children. She has great tips and wisdom for opening God's word and praying with our children when we 'sit at home and when [we] walk along the road, when [we] lie down and when [we] get up' (Deut 6:7). Yet Jocelyn also acknowledges that none of these things guarantee salvation for our children: 'God has no grandchildren' (p 124). But God does have a wonderful family of believers which our children are to be part of. I find myself slightly embarrassed by my baby babbling during all the quiet moments of a church service, but Jocelyn shows how wonderful it is



Photo: Helen Xing | @helenxing_photography



Photo: Helen Xing | @helenxing_photography



Decisions and difficulties section ... Mum guilt; paid work and ministry; idols and identity; when motherhood is hard.



to raise our children as part of God's church. It's a great privilege that we need to prioritise.

The decisions and difficulties section moves through four areas that can cause sleepless nights for many mothers: Mum guilt; paid work and ministry; idols and identity; when motherhood is hard. If I had a dollar for every time I got asked when I was going back to work after having my baby, I wouldn't need to go back to work! The questions Jocelyn addresses are the ones so many mothers are wrestling with. She helps us wrestle with them in the context of God's mercy and grace. As I read this section, I made a '2am truths' note on my phone. I put quotes and Bible verses in there to read when I'm up at night finding motherhood hard. Those 2am moments, while mundane, are still significant in raising

a little person to know and trust the Lord.

This book has helped me to consider some of the principles I'd like to apply as my daughter grows. While discipline for my 8-month-old currently revolves around keeping her away from electrical power points and cords, I found the two chapters on discipline to be gold! There is something in this book for every stage of parenting. I feel as though I'm going to have to come back to this book every year or two to keep being refreshed on what my priorities are as a mother.

If you're a mum, spend lots of time with a mum, or would like to be a mum – you should read this book! You can read it in a day, or move through it slowly, or read it with a friend. There are even great discussion questions to help you reflect. This book is the perfect baby shower or mother's day gift! It will ease the 'Instagram-mum-guilt' and refresh the heart with the beauty and importance of motherhood. **ACR**

Book review

Priests of History: Stewarding the Past in an Ahistoric Age

by Sarah Irving-Stonebraker



Stephen Tong is author of *Building the Church of England: The Book of Common Prayer and the Edwardian Reformation*, and is a secondary school history teacher.

In 1997, Irish rock band U2 released a song called ‘Wake Up Dead Man’. Ostensibly, it’s a monologue pleading Jesus to reawaken, and reveal himself to the world that had abandoned him. Nearly thirty years on, one can reimagine this lyrical thought and reappropriate it to the current wave of public intellectuals experiencing their own ‘reawakening’. News headlines

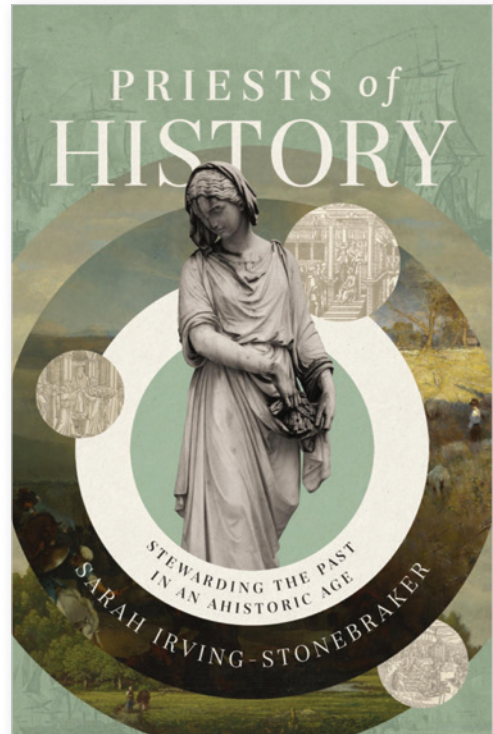
sometimes exclaim the latest celebrity conversion, or point to a well-known figure taking a significant step on their journey of faith – people such as Niall Fergurson and his wife, Ayaan Ali Hirsi, to Jordan Peterson or Tom Holland.¹ But celebrity Christians are no new phenomenon. Recently deceased former President Jimmy Carter famously conducted his daily devotions in Spanish. However, what is interesting about the recent spate of global scholars turning to Christianity, if not embracing a full faith, is that many of them are historians.

Sarah Irving-Stonebraker is one such convert (although she converted many years ago now). In her latest book, *Priests of History* (Zondervan, 2024), Irving-Stonebraker describes how she had been ‘a critic of religion for much of my life... [and was] especially hostile to Christianity’ (p xix). One of the most

1 See for instance, Greg Sheridan, ‘The influential intellectuals who became religious believers’, *The Australian*, 20 December, 2024; Glen Scrivener interview with Tom Holland in 2020: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=favILmUsVdg&t=2091s>

compelling aspects about Irving-Stonebraker's story is that it 'unsettles a number of popular but misguided assumptions about people who convert from atheism' (p 213). Irving-Stonebraker came to faith 'at a high point' in her life and through 'an explicit engagement with atheism' (p 213). Rather than seeing faith as a crutch for the needy, or a so-called blind faith in a mystical creature, Irving-Stonebraker shows how 'Christianity marries truth to an entire way of life' (p 219), anchored in knowable truth and coupled to perceptible beauty. The 'yearning for transcendence and meaning' (p 173) confronted her as she pursued a doctoral thesis in the history of science at Cambridge University, took up a research fellowship at Oxford, and finally as an assistant professor at Florida State University. In the end, witnessing the beauty of Cranmer's liturgical masterpiece – the Prayer Book's Communion service – helped Irving-Stonebraker make sense of previous intellectual pursuits. It is this story of conversion, woven throughout her expert analysis of our current time, that makes this book stand out from the crowd. It is also a deeply encouraging testimony, and one worth knowing as an aid in pastoral care and evangelism – particularly for those of us involved in school or university ministry. But the value of this book is much wider, and it should be read by anyone who takes their faith and mission seriously.

The main thesis presented in *Priests of History* is that all Christians 'have a particular responsibility to tend and keep the past' (p 75). The title borrows a phrase that initially arrested Irving-



Stonebraker during her doctoral research into Robert Boyle (1627–1691), a founder of modern science and devout Christian. Boyle saw himself as a 'Priest of Nature' because his scientific pursuits were one way of expressing 'thanks and praises to his Maker' (p 93). The accumulation, and application, of knowledge can be seen as a fulfilment of God's pre-fall command to Adam, since 'the fall had profound effects upon the human intellect and cognition' (p 194). Therefore, Christian 'epistemology... [should be] grounded in theology' (p 93). Indeed, when we look closely at the past, we see that a Christian understanding of the world has consistently made positive contributions to the progress of society throughout history. For instance, it was fascinating to read about Sir Doug Nicholls (1906–1988)

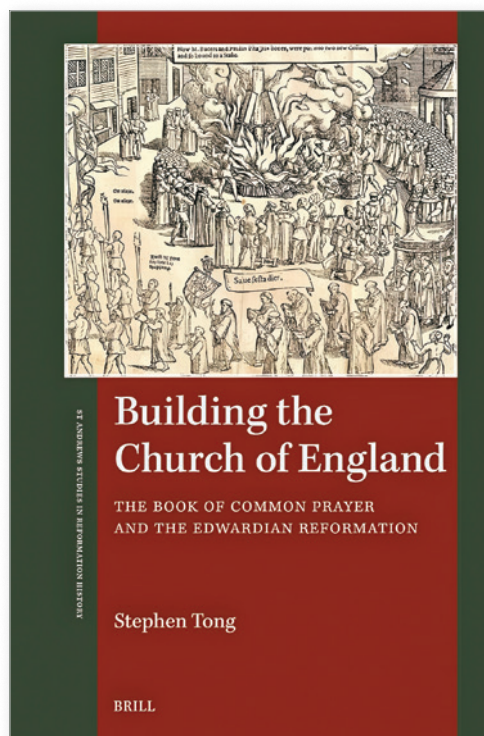
and William Cooper (c.1861–1941) (pp 101–106), two Indigenous leaders of the twentieth century. Nicholls’ sporting talent is recognised by the AFL via their Indigenous Round, and Cooper’s political nous is celebrated by Australia’s National Museum in an online tribute. However, few remember (or barely recognise) that their lives were animated by their evangelical faith. Recapturing these types of stories is part of our role as ‘priests of history’.

The second refrain of Irving-Stonebraker’s thesis is her appeal to use history to deepen our worship and strengthen our evangelism. As Irving-Stonebraker explains, we live in an Ahistoric Age. It is an age of false news, instant gratification, and a constant egotistical urge to make oneself relevant with no reference to the past. As C. S. Lewis once put it, we suffer from ‘chronological snobbery’. Generally speaking, Western society has ‘no grounding in any larger narrative... [it is instead] primarily a quest for self-discovery, self-fulfilment, and personal happiness’ (p xxi). The current generation is comprised of ‘atomised individuals’ (p 13), who have been subconsciously ‘unmoored from [our] historic sources of identity – that is, from [our] history. [We] now carry the existential burden of creating [our] identity for [ourselves]’ (p 16). While Irving-Stonebraker presents a bleak assessment of modern society, her real target is the church.

Drawing on her observations as a university lecturer, Irving-Stonebraker has noticed that younger Christians ‘know little about the history of Christianity, are ill-equipped to deal

with its complexities... and have difficulty understanding what it means to be part of the church as a historical people’ (p xxii). This is a dangerous trend. It stunts our spiritual growth, limits how we see ourselves as children of God in his eternal kingdom, and blunts our witness in the world. An antidote to the ahistorical age lies in history. Irving-Stonebraker encourages us to reconnect with our Christian heritage through study and the revival of past devotional practices. In doing so, we will be rewarded with an enlarged understanding of our identity within the church family and an enhanced ability to engage with the world.

Some may find this book confronting. Irving-Stonebraker is unafraid to make suggestions that might chafe against common varieties of low-churchman-



ship. For instance, she observes that ‘we struggle to engage biblically and fruitfully with sacredness and a sense of God’s transcendence’ (p 153). And she sees this as unhelpful because when Christians ‘devalue beauty, they embrace secularisation rather than the Bible’ (p 166). Going further, an entire chapter throws light on lost devotional practices: regular hours of prayer including a night vigil, meditation, reading aloud at mealtimes, and adopting various postures of worship (i.e. kneeling for prayer). Far from being high-church rituals, these were spiritually helpful disciplines practised by evangelical Protestants for centuries – as attested to by J. I. Packer (p 205).² To illustrate this, *Priests of History* is filled with biographical sketches of, or references to, saints who have embodied this ethos, including J. S. Bach, Isaac Watts, George Herbert, Lousia May Alcott, William Wilberforce, Hannah More, Gladys Alward, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Frederick Douglass, Mary Prince, Joseph Hall, and Mary Wodenoth Ferrar, to name a few. It was so encouraging to read about these people, and it prompted me to think through my own devotional disciplines. Similarly, pastors can respond to this book by ‘striv[ing] to learn about and draw upon your own tradition and heritage so you can educate and encourage your flock’ (p 99).

There is a lot to grapple with in *Priests of History*. Structured into three sections, Irving-Stonebraker presents

an erudite assessment of why we live in an Ahistoric Age and how to prevent its effect of spiritual erosion. The first half, which stretches across the first two sections, provides a concise discussion of historical theory and practice. This is not only necessary groundwork to cover, but highly valuable for anyone seeking to understand the intellectual and cultural currents of the Western world. *Priests of History* thus sits happily on the bookshelf alongside other recent works that dissect Western



The first half [is] ... highly valuable for anyone seeking to understand the intellectual and cultural currents of the Western world.



thinking.³ The second half takes a more practical turn to highlight various ways the Christian life – individual and corporate – can be invigorated through a conversation with our forebears. The overall effect is that *Priests of History* challenges our modern cultural assumptions and encourages us to engage with our Christian heritage with renewed respect and appreciation. It is an accessible and valuable resource that rewards careful reading and reflection. By turning us back to the past, this book will help prepare us to face the future. **ACR**

2 See also J. I. Packer, *The Quest for Godliness: The Puritan Vision of the Christian Life* (1990).

3 For example, Carl Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self* (2020); Glen Scrivener, *The Air We Breathe* (2022); Lionel Windsor, *Truth Be Told* (2023); Christopher Watkin, *Biblical Critical Theory* (2023).

Bold Preaching and Evangelism: Interview with Dave Jensen



Dave Jensen, is the assistant director of Evangelism + New Churches (ENC). He is also the Chairman of 'Hearts on Fire', a new, one-day Evangelism Conference in Sydney, which is launching on 16 August, 2025. You can listen to him on the 'Fire Up!' podcast.

ACR: Hi Dave, welcome back to the ACR. It's been 12 months since you started your role with ENC [Evangelism and New Churches], so let me start by asking how you're enjoying it?

DJ: I can say without reservation that I'm loving it! I love evangelism and find the challenge of both reaching the lost and pushing the saints forward exhilarating and exciting; and this role gives me an incredible number of opportunities to do both those things. It's also a great privilege to encourage pastors and church leaders in thinking through how to more effectively accomplish those aims.

ACR: What/how have opportunities opened up for you to preach Christ boldly?

DJ: I've been working as a pastor in churches for the last 10 years and doing between 5 to 10 external preaching spots every year. In one respect nothing's changed except I preach at my local church far less and have the opportunity to preach at other churches and events far more often, and very often explicitly evangelistically. It's an interesting position because the itinerant evangelist primarily bounce off the hard yards of others. I'm very grateful for all the gospel work that goes on across our city. In 2024 I preached well over 100 times at different churches, conferences and events; which is a great privilege that this role provides. Whilst some of those invitations come from people who know me or have heard

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me preach before, a great deal of the opportunities I have occur as a result of the trust that many in our Diocese and beyond have in ENC. The legacy of John Chapman is still very present around the place and I try to leverage that as much as I can... so long as people don't listen too much to his sermons to notice exactly how much I (and many others) rip him off!

ACR: Have you been surprised by any of these opportunities or reactions to your preaching?

DJ: I have been both completely surprised, and unsurprisingly simultaneously!

ACR: Haha, well ok! But what do you mean by that? Can you unpack both sides of it for us?

DJ: I'll start with being un-surprised. Prior to my taking up this position I worked in four churches, two inside Sydney, two outside Sydney, including overseas in Belfast. I've had the opportunity to preach the gospel to people in prison, retirement homes, primary schools, high schools, military bases,

weddings, funerals, you name it. Not to mention the myriad of different people who are in church every Sunday: rich, poor, black, white, right-wing, left-wing, tradie, professor and so on. What that has taught me is that what unites us as people is far more powerful than what divides us. I'm persuaded from God's word that no matter who they are or where they come from, the biggest problem every single person faces is that they are a sinner in the hands of an angry God. They need the gospel, desperately. So my job is to explain the gospel as clearly as I can, no matter who they are. The stories and illustrations I use might bend and mould a little bit, but the message is always the same. Fascinatingly enough, the response is always the same too – it is just as Jesus promises it will be in the parable of the soils! Some reject outright, some show cursory interest then slip away, but some are wonderfully, gloriously saved!

Which leads me to the part where I'm completely surprised: no matter how many times you witness people become Christians, it's always end-

lessly, relentlessly surprising and joyful! This is especially so if you have to spend much time listening to people engage in ‘analysis paralysis’ of our culture. You’d very possibly be forgiven for thinking that ‘post-Christianity’, however we define it, has meant that the gospel is no longer powerful to save. Yet one of the best parts of my job is that I get to meet new converts all the time, so I know that he’s not done!

ACR: Now, in terms of executing the mission of evangelism – the nuts and bolts of the task – where do you rate *preaching* in importance for winning souls for Christ?

DJ: Preaching is of paramount importance for winning souls for Christ... and I mean that in respect to the two different ways the word is used.

There’s two ways of using that word of course. Each are critically important regarding the main business of evangelism which is glorifying God by winning souls for Christ. In Romans 10 Paul wonderfully points us as to why. Look at verses 14–17: ¹⁴ *How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?* ¹⁵ *And how can anyone preach unless they are sent? As it is written: “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!”* ¹⁶ *But not all the Israelites accepted the good news. For Isaiah says, “Lord, who has believed our message?”* ¹⁷ *Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ.*

When it comes to preaching being the authoritative teaching of Scripture undertaken by your pastor in the pulpit as he points to the truth of God’s word week by week in the gathering, it’s obvious that God can and does use this method of communicating his gospel to save people all the time. From the very start of the church in Acts 2, when Peter preaches the gospel in Jerusalem and God saves at least 3000 people, we see that this is the case; for the last 2000 years it’s clear that God uses sermons to save people.

The book of Acts is wonderful in displaying for us the primacy of the publicly proclaimed gospel word. When Paul and Barnabas engage in the first cross-cultural missionary journey in Acts 13 and 14, we witness this again and again. Paul preaches – and he preaches well! In fact we’re told in 14:1 that he preaches ‘so effectively’ that God saves people. But here’s what I want you to notice: he doesn’t visit, put down roots, and build a hive of deep relationships. Of course in some places, he does stay. But the order is important: he preaches first, then stays. He doesn’t stay and then eventually, possibly, preach. He preaches and stays. And his staying is very often dependent on their response. At the end of chapter 13 he wipes the dust off his feet and changes course to reach the Gentiles.

The second way of using the word preaching is to mean any type of gospel proclamation. We see Stephen do this in his speech before his death. We witness the early church do as they scatter from persecution in Acts 8:1–3. We see Philip do it as he explains the gospel to

the Ethiopian eunuch. None of these people were apostles; yet they preach the word of life so that others may believe and be saved.

And of course, the two types of preaching are deeply entwined with one another. Ephesians 4 outlines this wonderfully for us:

¹¹ So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, ¹² to equip his people for works of service...

Jesus gives his church Bible teachers, including evangelists, because he has a plan for them... a plan that includes serving.

This activity of the church must therefore include evangelism. So, evangelistically speaking, the gospel preaching in the pulpit should be aimed not only at non-Christians present for their salvation but to the Christian, to encourage, equip and establish them for a lifetime of evangelism themselves. And this is done not only to evangelise the lost but, look how it ends:

... so that the body of Christ may be built up ¹³ until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

It is also done to edify the saint. In other words, engaging in evangelism matures the believer.

It should, but sadly doesn't, go without saying that I hold both types of preaching the gospel up to be fundamentally, critically essential. Urgently

so! The mission of God's mission – in other words what we're trying to achieve under God – revolves around this gospel word being proclaimed by men and women and boys and girls whose lives have been transformed by this same word.

ACR: That gets me thinking about the old saying 'preach always; use words if necessary'. At CMS Summer School recently, Alistair Begg declared that he hates that saying. Do you agree with Begg? If so, in what ways is he right to correct our thinking about the relationship between preaching and evangelism?

DJ: Yes, I do agree with Begg! I can't stand the saying, 'Preach always; use words if necessary.' Why? Because it completely misses the point of evangelism in the New Testament. It's like saying, 'Feed the hungry; use food if necessary.' Words aren't optional in preaching the gospel; they're essential. As I said previously about Romans 10, Paul is clear that faith doesn't come from observing your nice behavior – it comes from hearing the message about Christ. If the apostles had simply lived exemplary lives and kept their mouths shut, the early church wouldn't have got past Jerusalem.

Of course the way we live matters. 1 Peter, which Begg preached on at Summer School, is so helpful in this regard. In 2:12 he says we're to 'live such good lives among the pagans that... they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.'

But notice something here: Peter isn't giving us an excuse to stay quiet. He's saying our good lives are evidence

of the transforming power of the gospel we proclaim. It's not a replacement for words – it's backup. And just a few verses later, in 1 Peter 3:15, he tells us to *'always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.'* In other words, people should see your life and ask, 'Why are you like this?' And then, you need to tell them about Jesus. Simple as that.

So, while it's good to live in a way that reflects the gospel – please don't hear me wrong on that – we mustn't fall into the trap of thinking that actions are enough. The gospel is news. It's something you have to tell people. If we don't speak, we're not doing evangelism. Full stop.

ACR: Okay, so what about those of us who don't have your job? How can ordinary layfolk *preach* more effectively in their daily lives (at the watercooler, or

at a children's playdate, or at the school gate etc.)?

DJ: In my experience the most effective form of evangelism training is evangelism planning.

I think 1 Peter is most helpful here. Peter tells us to be prepared to give an answer; in other words, to plan what we will say. To think through what we will say if and when we get the opportunity to preach to the people we engage with.

There are three things I encourage all Christian people to do.

Firstly, know the gospel inside and out. *Two ways to live* has been incredibly beneficial to generations of Aussie Christians in doing just this; it operates almost as a catechism for Christians in grasping hold of the foundations of our faith.

Secondly, practise how you will explain it to someone else. Practise on your own, with other Christian friends,



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...practise how you will explain it to someone else. Practise on your own, with other Christian friends, and even with non-Christian friends!

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Photo: vecteezy.com

and even with non-Christian friends! Tell them you're trying to learn something as part of being a Christian and could you practise with them.

Finally, pray! Pray for opportunities to speak, and for the courage to do so.

Of course, not every spiritual conversation will be a full-blown opportunity to explain the gospel; it may be that it's more appropriate to invite someone to something, or even to just listen. But we should never let a lack of planning and preparation be the reason why we don't speak.

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But we should never let a lack of planning and preparation be the reason why we don't speak.

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ACR: Moving back to the organised gatherings – how bold should we be in our preaching? Is there a place for ‘pre-evangelism’ from up the front?

DJ: Yes, and no. If by pre-evangelism you mean evidential apologetics, or speaking about how the Bible engages and interacts with social issues, then absolutely I believe those things have a place within and throughout sermons. However not as pre-evangelism, but rather as post-evangelism or as a side dish of a sermon, not the main event. For example, if you're preaching on the resurrection then it is of course absolutely appropriate to speak about the historical evidence for the resurrection; after all, Paul does in 1 Corinthians 15! I also think it's helpful to explain how

the Bible is the paradigm through which Christians should think about the world and all manner of issues that occur throughout life. However, the practice of ‘topical’ sermons (or ‘sermon series’) or the answering of specific apologetic questions should be very rarely done. Perhaps over a brief holiday break, in between studying the word of God in an expository manner.

As non-Christians visit our churches, what they need to hear is the Word explained. Church isn't for them; but they greatly benefit from being there. What we should do is dedicate ourselves to explaining the Word faithfully and also engagingly so that they can easily listen to what we're saying.

ACR: Moving away from the pulpit, then, what about structures and programmes (e.g. Christianity Explored)? Where's the balance between trusting God's Spirit to use bold preaching and the slower drip feed effect of intentional structures in churches (outreach events, weekly gatherings etc.)?

DJ: Hahaha great question. A loaded one though! I think the language you use here is telling, and points to a common error people have as they consider courses like Discover, or Christianity Explored, and their role in evangelism. It's pretty common to think of pre-packaged courses like these as somehow cold and clinical whereas live preaching is Spirit-dependent and bold. Yet I want to offer that this is a misreading of reality.

Evangelistic courses like these are not separate to bold gospel preaching; at their very core they are wonderful

examples of bold, word-centric, gospel preaching. They are utterly dependent on God's Spirit to do the work in people's hearts; wonderfully they are also the way that most adults in Australia are converted. The key difference is that we are giving opportunity for people to ask questions and engage throughout the talk in a way we wouldn't do on a Sunday. Not only that, but because Sundays are for Christians primarily, it's not appropriate to dedicate a huge number of weeks to evangelistic investigation in the gathering in the way a course can.

Perhaps it's more helpful to think of them the way you think of an evangelistic book like *A Fresh Start* or *Mere Christianity*. If someone becomes a Christian as a result of reading one of those books, it is not because the Spirit hasn't been at work in the pen of the authors; but exactly because he has. These courses are like that.

The churches who see the most conversions in courses are usually the churches who also see the most conversions on Sundays; usually because the non-Christian has been to both of them and is being gospelled effectively from both sides!

ACR: Finally, what is one takeaway tip for parish ministers to help them preach boldly with evangelism in mind?

DJ: Here's my tip: before you get up to preach, imagine that the person you love the most who isn't a Christian has decided to enter into church without your knowledge and is listening intently. Allow that thought to shape how you preach, what you preach, because every single Sunday it is most likely that in front of you is a beloved non-Christian who has been prayed for by a desperate Christian.

This doesn't mean we preach the passage as if it's only heard by non-believers, but that we preach God's truth no matter what the passage says whilst being dedicated to having the non-believer understand what we're saying; no matter whether it offends them or not! Don't compromise and pander to the world in what you're saying; that doesn't serve the non-believer at all. Yet dedicate yourself to preaching in such a way that they can grasp hold of the big idea of the passage.

ACR: A brilliant encouragement to finish on! Thanks for your time, Dave. **ACR**

Interview with Jeanette Chin



Jeanette is married to Richard who serves as the National Director of AFES. Alongside Richard, Jeanette has ministered with AFES at Wollongong University and the Australian National University. Now living in Sydney, they attend St Matt's Anglican Church in Botany, and Jeanette teaches Biblical Studies to the junior students of St Catherine's Anglican School in Waverley.

Jeanette started teaching at St Catherine's School in Waverley at the beginning of this year. We caught up with her before she began her new role.

ACR: Jeanette, sharing Jesus with others has been a big part of your life. Can you tell us how you came to know Jesus as your Lord and Saviour? Were there particular seasons, people, or experiences that played key roles?

JC: By God's grace, my parents both love Jesus and prioritise his glory, so I first learnt about Jesus through them. They taught *and* modelled (both are necessary!) what it means to treat Jesus as the most important person in the world. We didn't do family devotions, but they faithfully prayed and read the Bible themselves every day (something I took note of) and also with me until I could read the Bible for myself. My mum taught High School Scripture full-time, and my dad was very involved in church as a lay preacher. Their lives matched their words – they wanted to wholly live for the glory of Christ Jesus.

My childhood faith grew and matured through Sunday School, Youth Group and various Christian camps. In early high school, for example, I heard a talk on Mark 7. Immediately after Jesus taught the Pharisees and disciples that uncleanness infects us all because of our sinful hearts, the Syrophenician woman comes to Jesus. Unlike the

Pharisees, this woman knows that she's unclean and that Jesus is the only one who can help her. Desperately eager to be part of God's family, she's happy to accept the meagre 'crumbs that fall from under the table' (Mark 7:28). God used that passage to convict me of my sin. I felt the dirtiness of my heart – my disrespect, my envy and anger... so, when the speaker offered the invitation, I asked for forgiveness and committed my life to following Jesus.

Another significant season of growth came through opposition. I had a friend who was a Jehovah's Witness. She questioned my understanding of Jesus and salvation. 'You've been brainwashed', she said. 'You only believe in Jesus' divinity because that's what you've been told. But the Bible says otherwise.' I pondered her concerns and thought, 'Yes, I should read the Bible for myself and see if I've been wrongly taught.' So, as I kept chatting with my friend, I started reading the Bible more and more. Our one rule was that we could only reference the Bible – theologians and other writers couldn't be used to defend our position. By God's grace, the Lord used this season to give me a genuine hunger and thirst for the Bible. I spent hours poring over large slabs of Scripture and seeing Christ clearly in both Testaments. I felt like the guys on the road to Emmaus – 'Did not our hearts burn within us... while he opened to us the Scriptures?' (Luke 24:32). The Lord opened my eyes to see with great delight – Jesus truly is the Lord of the universe, the creator of the ends of the earth; salvation is found in no one else; we're rescued by God's gracious work not our own efforts.

I'm very grateful for how God graciously revealed himself to me in the Bible and confirmed the faith first taught to me by my parents.

ACR: What was your pathway into ministry?

JC: As high school drew to a close, I started thinking about what to do with my life. In God's sovereign goodness, he exposed me to the pain of death in multiple ways. While hard, this clarified my priorities (as Psalm 90 says). This life is very short – eternity is forever. So how could I use my life to promote Jesus?

When I got to university and discovered there were hundreds of students eagerly thinking the same way, I was thrilled! AFES and Beach Mission (with Scripture Union) were very formative in training me for a lifetime of loving Jesus. I learnt how to read the Bible for myself, how to run Bible studies, how to think theologically about different things, and how to talk to unbelievers about Jesus. AFES's National Training Conference was a particular highlight – going from a small country town with few Christian peers to a student conference with thousands of people who were zealous for God's glory felt like a tangible glimpse of heaven.

So, when an AFES Staff worker invited me to consider full-time ministry, I was like, 'Where do I sign up?'

ACR: After formal ministry training, you served with AFES. What have been some of the highlights?

JC: I've loved opening up the Bible with young women and, together, discover-

ing more and more about God's goodness in Christ Jesus. I loved walking up to strangers and asking them about faith and life beyond the grave. And I loved seeing people become Christians simply by reading a Gospel one-to-one.

Every year, AFES groups are boldly inviting friends and strangers to meet Jesus in the pages of Scripture. But in 2024, all campus groups combined their efforts by using the same slogan and branding. I had the privilege of serving with the Evangelism Team to think through the logistics of this National



I loved walking up to strangers and asking them about faith and life beyond the grave. And I loved seeing people become Christians simply by reading a Gospel one-to-one.



Mission. We wanted to keep the Scriptures central – just as God spoke and created light, so too does God still speak today, rising people to eternal life as the dead hear his voice in the Bible (2 Cor 4:1-6; John 5:19-29). So, we simply sought to encourage and equip people to read John's Gospel with unbelievers using five simple questions (see www.uncover.org.au for more). In God's mercy dozens and dozens have been saved across Australia.

I was particularly encouraged to hear of God's work on some of our smallest campuses – in Albury-Wodonga, their tiny group of four Christians saw two students become believers. In Darwin,

they had about ten unbelievers regularly reading Uncover John in Bible-reading-triplets. In Toowoomba, the AFES group partnered with local churches where older men and women started evangelistic reading groups in their retirement home and studied John's Gospel with other 90-year-olds!

How wonderful to see people of every generation boldly sharing Jesus with such eager joy. Please pray that AFES will never cease in its fervent zeal to proclaim Christ from the Scriptures in all his glorious truth and grace.

ACR: After many years with AFES, can you tell us a little bit about your new ministry and why you decided to take on this new role?

JC: I'm eager to use all the gifts and opportunities that the Lord has given me for his glory in whatever context I'm in ('To him who has been given much, much is expected' – Luke 12:48). In the Lord's sovereignty, my role with the National Mission came to a natural end last year, while my husband's role as National Director concludes this year, so we've been prayerfully pondering what to do next.

When I heard about a vacancy at St Cath's in their Biblical Studies department, I was immediately excited about the possibility of teaching children about Jesus. I've always enjoyed kids' ministry and love the creative challenge it is to simplify theological truths in a way that kids will understand. I also hope they'll enjoy learning about Jesus, so I hope to incorporate music, drama, arts and crafts as I teach God's word.

School ministry is also an immense

privilege. I'll get to teach the Bible to almost 320 girls in Biblical Studies classes, chapel services and lunchtime Christian groups. What a wonderful chance to share Christ every week with so many people who might not otherwise know about Jesus! As I've spoken with people about this new role, I've been so encouraged by the many people faithfully teaching the Bible in our schools through SRE and School Chaplaincy. May we continue to make the most of these opportunities!

ACR: What are some of the challenges that you anticipate in school ministry?

JC: The compulsory nature of Christian education in Christian schools requires thoughtfulness to navigate. I want students to know the supreme goodness of knowing Jesus, but I don't want them to feel forced to believe or bored by the weekly Bible lessons. I want to work out how to teach in a way that is full of respect for their agency but gives them an irresistible taste of the blessings that can only be found in Christ Jesus.



Photo: vecteezy.com

I'm therefore wanting to be considerate of song choices. Most of our church songs assume belief – 'thanks for saving me', 'I worship and adore you', 'I know you'll bring me safely home'. I don't want to put lies into the children's mouths as they sing and accidentally slip into a form of universalism – this would give students a false sense of assurance, which would be unhelpful.

Otherwise, please pray that I'll pitch the lessons at the right level! Having spent the majority of the past 20 years on university campuses, I'll need to significantly adjust my language choices and teaching methods. Please pray I'll be faithful in this!

ACR: Do you have any particular hopes or areas that you really want to focus on as you start this school role?

JC: I really want to show the joy of following the true Jesus. It can be tempting to teach good morals when teaching children (they do need to learn right from wrong!), but a focus on human flourishing is hollow and empty without knowledge of Christ Jesus. I'm praying that I'll not stray from the gospel but will faithfully teach through books of the Bible so that kids understand that Jesus is the best thing ever! We all need to know that life isn't about us and our happiness, but everything – all of human history – is about Jesus! I hope children are so enamoured by Christ's glory and grace, his kindness and power that they'll want to give their entire lives to him.

One way I hope to do this is through song. Songs are a wonderful teaching tool – I can still remember many of the

songs that I learned as a child! So, I spent the summer listening to lots of kids' music – Colin Buchanan, Sovereign Grace Kids, Slugs & Bugs and Emu Music. I've been particularly listening out for didactic songs that teach truths about God and what he's done for us through Jesus. Again, I want to avoid false assurances of salvation. I'm also trying to look for songs that reinforce the big ideas we're looking at in the Bible each term. So, when I've not been able to find songs for particular topics, I've come up with some of my own! Here's a small collection I've come up with so far – www.hearthymns.com

ACR: What can we be praying for you and your future students?

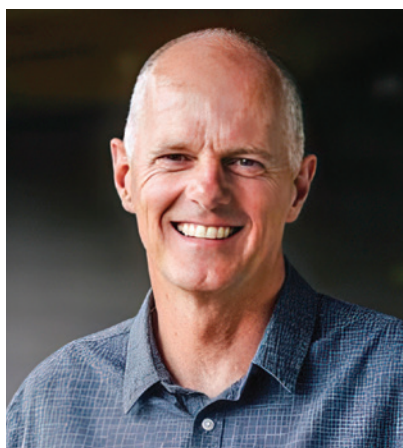
JC: Please pray that I'll get to know the students quickly and remember everyone's name! This will be quite the challenge given I'm teaching over 300

young people. But I'd love to know them personally so that they know that Jesus also loves them as individuals.

Please also pray for godliness, grace and courage. Pray that I'll be a fragrance of life in the school and a shining light of Christ's glory as I interact with students, staff and the broader community. Pray that I'll conduct myself in a way that honours Jesus and abounds in patience, humility, dignity and self-control. Please also pray that I'll speak of Jesus in a way that is gracious and kind, but doesn't shy away from teaching about sin, death and punishment. The sweet salvation of Jesus is all the better when we truly comprehend our desperate plight.

And so finally, please pray that people would be receptive, and many will come to humbly trust in Jesus as King and Saviour! May he be exalted above all. **ACR**

Reflections on ‘The dangerous necessity of goal- driven ministry’



Andrew Heard, Lead Pastor,
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In the Easter 2024 edition of the *ACR Journal*, Lionel Windsor helpfully pushed us to think about the ‘dangerous necessity of goal-driven ministry’. I very much appreciated his analysis and warnings. The sharpening he provides is invaluable, and there is so much to agree with and love. The ‘gospel of Christ crucified’ is not just the means by which we are saved; it is also the key frame of thinking that shapes all that we do. Paul’s teaching in 1 Corinthians 1–4 is critical in this regard: the gospel of Christ crucified shaped not only what he preached, but how he preached and ministered. Yes, and Amen.

But I want to take what Lionel has said and, hopefully, strengthen it.

I would like to offer three points. First, I want to make clear that the thing Lionel says is necessary – namely, goal-driven ministry – is also *unavoidable*. We *must* do it, and we can’t *not* do it. Knowing this is crucial to our ministries and their health. Second, I want to give greater clarity to this thing Lionel calls ‘goal-driven ministry’ (GDM). Without this clarity, I fear his approach can give with one hand while taking with the other. That is, he writes of the necessity of GDM, but in various ways makes it difficult to believe that a truly faithful gospel minister should embrace it at all. Third, I want to offer what I believe is a more nuanced exegesis of 1 Corinthians 3:10. I hope to offer a richer sense of Paul’s thought in 1 Corinthians 3 so that we are better positioned to make sense of a properly constructed GDM.

Goal-driven ministry is both necessary and unavoidable

The subheading of Lionel’s article – ‘the dangerous necessity of goal-driven ministry’ – says a great deal.¹ He believes that being goal-driven in ministry is necessary. I’d wholeheartedly echo this thinking, and I’ve written about it at length in other contexts – especially in my book *Growth and Change* (I use the language of ‘outcome thinking’ instead of ‘goal-driven ministry’).²

I think Lionel is right: being goal-driven is a ‘logical implication of the gospel of Christ crucified’, and ‘ministry has a goal: the salvation of many through Christ crucified’. Everything Paul did and said and wrote was done and said and written with a goal, or an outcome, in mind.

Another way of saying this is that Paul was intent on producing change in the people to whom he ministered. He wasn’t content with the status quo; he wanted something to happen. He had a goal to achieve, and he ministered in such a way as



... even within the section of 1 Corinthians where Lionel suggests Paul is critiquing GDM, Paul is most definitely still pursuing it.



to pursue that goal. Perhaps ironically, even within the section of 1 Corinthians where Lionel suggests Paul is critiquing GDM, Paul is most definitely still pursuing it – just not according to Lionel’s definition of GDM.

What is Paul’s goal in those first four chapters of the letter? He is seeking to show the Corinthians why he ministered

the way he did and convince them his way is necessary given the cross of Christ. Paul is most definitely goal-driven, even in these chapters that Lionel suggests are written to critique GDM.

But the point I want to make is that not only was Paul goal-driven at every point of his ministry; it is *impossible* to be otherwise, especially as gospel ministers.

Everyone ministers with a goal in mind – an outcome we’re pursuing. This is, almost by definition, what it is to be human. We are made for a ‘telos’, an end goal. It is wired into our very being. This means there is no ministry that is *not* goal-driven.

The danger with some of what Lionel has written is that it might be heard to suggest we can choose whether or not to be goal-driven. For example, at the beginning of his discussion on the dangers of GDM he states, ‘the more we engage in goal-driven ministry, the more necessary it is to critique ourselves for using it’. Note the specific wording: it’s not that all our ministry is goal-driven, but that we may engage in GDM more or, therefore, less. And it’s not that we should critique the nature of our GDM to ask whether it is healthy and biblical, but that we should

1 I couldn’t help noticing the similarity to the subtitle of my book *Growth and Change: The danger and necessity of a passion for church growth*; language I’ve used for some years.

2 See especially chapter 12, ‘Leading with outcomes at the centre’.

critique ourselves for using it.

It is not clear where Lionel finally stands on this. Parts of his article hint towards the thought that GDM is essential. But in the final section, where he contrasts two kinds of ministry – the one that appears aimless, and the one that is goal-driven – one wonders whether he is suggesting that it is possible to choose to be goal-driven or not. For example, he says we will need to apply 'the gospel of Christ crucified' as the 'antidote' if we find ourselves 'despising ministries that seem weak and aimless [i.e. presumably not goal-driven], while glorifying ministries that are goal-driven and measurably effective'. This potentially opens the door to those who think they can choose whether or not to be goal-driven.

I want to be clear in stating that we can't choose, because we can't be other than goal-driven. Moreover, knowing this will affect the health of our ministries.

If there are two kinds of ministry, it isn't goal-driven versus non-goal-driven; it is *consciously* goal-driven versus *unconsciously* goal-driven (or perhaps *more* consciously versus *less* consciously). Buried in every minister's heart is a reason for all they do, a goal they're pursuing. Sometimes it is as profane as simply being liked or thought well of by the people around them, but that is still a goal (and it drives a minister's actions). Grasping this enables us to make proper sense of leadership decisions that seem random or counterproductive. It is only when the leader's real goals are revealed and understood that the otherwise confusing decisions make perfect sense. The leader may seem to be erratic in sometimes saying 'yes' and sometimes saying 'no', but the underlying goal – that no one thinks poorly of him – explains everything.

Without owning the fact that we all engage in GDM, we are less able to bring our goals to the bar of Scripture to be assessed, critiqued and corrected. Is our goal a worthy one? Is it faithful to Scripture and to God's purpose? How are my hidden goals subverting my ability to lead towards those outcomes God would have me pursue?

When we conduct the conversation about goals and outcomes without acknowledging that GDM is inevitable and unavoidable, we provide cover for unbiblical, profane, unworthy goals to keep driving and shaping all we do – including our conversations around whether we ought to be goal-driven! So many of these conversations unnecessarily falter because our reaction to the thought of being goal-driven hides a host of other goals – unspoken, unknown, and hidden, sometimes even to the protagonist.



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Clearly defining ‘goal-driven ministry’

Closely related, Lionel’s article would be stronger if there were greater clarity around his definition of GDM. The problem is that the phrase itself carries a first thought, an intuitive sense, of what he means. But that first thought sense isn’t always what is meant. The first thought is that he is simply talking about having a goal and pursuing it – the sense in which I’ve discussed it in the first section. But Lionel deliberately defines GDM more narrowly, which then confuses and complicates the discussion.

In the second paragraph of his article, he defines GDM as ‘the kind of ministry thinking that tends to borrow heavily from the worldly wisdom of things like systems theory – inputs, processes, measurement, outputs – strategic planning, leadership, statistical analysis, quality control, business management, etc’. Now of course, an author has considerable authority over their own definitions. But the difficulties in this case are twofold.

First, the phrase is intuitively simpler and broader than the meaning he gives to it. The language of GDM most naturally suggests simply being focused on achieving a goal – something, as I have argued, we can’t not do, and something we must do if we are to be faithful to God’s purposes. But Lionel’s paper shifts between this more natural meaning and his narrower, more culturally-conditioned meaning. Personally, I found it confusing. And I believe these discussions progress further when we sharpen our thinking around definitions.

The second difficulty is that the definition as given joins together two things that are best kept separated: the goal, and the means by which that goal is pursued. In other words, according to Lionel’s definition, being goal-driven means not only being committed to achieving a goal; it also means being committed to achieving it *by certain kinds of means* – namely, ‘worldly wisdom’ and modern business prac-



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tices. True, Lionel also returns to a simpler description, speaking of ‘the goal of the salvation of many’ (twice) – but only after introducing his controlling definition early in the article.

If GDM is as Lionel defines it, it is hard to see how anyone could argue that it is either necessary or good. If this is GDM, I’m not a fan. Give me the ministry that ‘seems aimless and weak’ over that which is ‘goal-driven and measurably effective’. Paul’s ministry isn’t a form of GDM; it is something of a whole different species! And in terms of ‘means’, Paul’s ministry is also very different.

Many readers will intuitively flip between Lionel’s given definition and the more natural meaning of GDM. And so, we can largely follow the flow of his argument and grasp the point he is making. But not always. Is he saying that GDM in its most natural sense is a necessary and logical implication of the gospel? Or is he saying this about GDM *as he has defined it*? I suspect it’s the former, but it isn’t clear. Is he saying that adopting ‘worldly wisdom’ and business practice is necessary and good as long as it is critiqued by the gospel? Or is he saying that business practice by its very nature is bad? It seems to be both/and. Sometimes he wants to endorse a wise use of business practice, but sometimes he ties this so closely to a modern iteration of ‘worldly wisdom’ that it is inherently tainted by Paul’s condemnation of ‘wisdom’ in 1 Corinthians 1–4. I kind of get where he is going, but greater clarity would help.

Our problem is that we are ministering in a context where confusion over exactly this issue is creating unhelpful and unnecessary battles. Many are rejecting the idea of goal-driven ministry, in its most natural sense, because they attach to it all that is bad about Lionel’s very particular definition. At best, they might allow that some high-achieving leaders can pursue it, but they see it as dangerous – living right on the edge. Most just view the whole idea of being goal-driven with the greatest suspicion, and then commit themselves to drifting along with the sense that the most faithful ministry is the kind that appears ‘aimless and weak’. In this, they end up ministering in a way that *is* aimless and weak, all the while believing they are the most faithful because of they don’t have goals that they’re driving towards. Or at least these are ministries where the true aims are hidden beneath layers of unclear human motivations that have never been explored. These ministries ought never be compared to Paul. He was *never* aimless. And I can’t see how an unbiased reading of his ministry could ever think he ‘appeared’ aimless.³



Our problem is that we are ministering in a context where confusion over exactly this issue is creating unhelpful and unnecessary battles.



3 2 Cor 1:15-2:1 proves the point. An enemy might find reason to accuse him of being fickle, but his response demonstrates just how far from being aimless he was.

Much of this, then, ties into one of our greatest cultural challenges: what some people call ‘the British fondness for failure’. We tie our lack of fruit to the promise of Scripture that Jesus commended the ‘narrow road’, and only a few are on it (Matt 7:13–14). Some even go so far as to embrace Lionel’s rhetorical language as literal (in a way that I don’t believe Lionel intends): that Paul wants us to minister in a way that ‘deliberately avoid[s] anything that look[s] like skill and human effectiveness’, lest we become ‘Corinthian’, and that we ought to appear ‘stupid’.

We face at least two challenges. One is the rampant pragmatism that fails to heed the warnings of 1 Corinthians 1–4. Adopting business practices that are truly born of Western pragmatism is rightly critiqued. We need Lionel’s warnings. But our second challenge is that we are conducting futile, stupid, foolish and manifestly ineffective ministries that are dishonouring to Christ and leaving many headed to hell. As we critique the first problem, as we seek to cut out that cancer, we need to do so with great care and clarity, lest we also cut out much that is good and so drive ourselves towards the other danger.

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As we seek to cut out that cancer, we need to do so with great care and clarity, lest we also cut out much that is good.

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Clarity comes when we separate the two things: the goal, and the means. We are then better able to tackle each in turn. With respect to the goals of our ministry (keeping any thought of the means as a separate and secondary issue), what should they be? What outcomes are we seeking? It is never just mere conversion. We pursue what we

might call ‘full salvation’, where a person is saved from the penalty *and* the power of sin – what Lionel very helpfully calls ‘a one-eighty-degree revolution in the meaning of life, the universe, and everything’. We seek *disciples* – mature, fully formed disciples. We seek people saved from hell to live totally transformed lives in honour of our Lord. This is the goal – or at least one expression of the goal, because there is surely more that can be said.

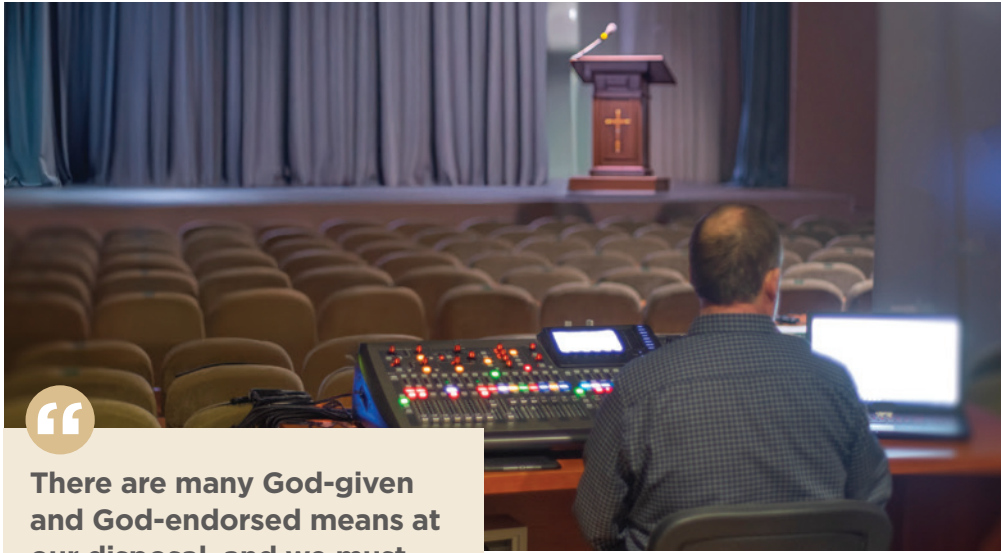
Further to this, we pursue the outcome that God be glorified by how we minister *and* by the fruit of our ministry. Another outcome is that we seek to build communities of love where people don’t treat each other as resources to be used, but as members of Christ’s body to be loved and cherished.

My point is that each of these statements express the goal or goals of our ministry. Being ‘goal-driven’ isn’t the same as embracing modern business practices; it is embracing the biblical goals that God himself gives us. Paul worked towards an outcome (or outcomes). We are fellow workers, ruled by the pattern of his work. Yes, we have as our goal the salvation of the world, but this is salvation conceived in its fullest sense. Anything less than this must be critiqued and condemned.

Further to this, when we properly separate goal from means, we are able to consider with greater care what means are appropriate to the goal. But we don’t



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There are many God-given and God-endorsed means at our disposal, and we must learn to use them all.

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and God-endorsed means at our disposal, and we must learn to use them all. We must bring our best self to the task as we pursue the proper goals that are not only necessary, but good. We aren't doing something as trivial as brain surgery. By comparison, the work of gospel ministry is more important – but also complex, deep, and difficult. It needs our best thought and our best efforts.

With regard to modern pragmatism, is there the danger of a ‘genetic fallacy’ operating here? Perhaps I'm projecting, but in recent years a regular refrain has suggested that, because it is possible to see various ‘how tos’ being associated with ‘worldly wisdom’, the ‘how tos’ must by definition be suspect. But we have the book of Proverbs, which shows that God has made a world that, generally speaking, operates on the basis of cause and effect. We live in a world of wisdom where it is possible to be smart without necessarily partaking of a worldly and ungodly system of thought. If the church growth movement gave rise to terrible errors and abuses, it doesn't follow that anyone who pursues growing the church by using wisdom is necessarily associated with the church growth movement.

Lionel tipped his hand to this in making mention of Paul's use of ‘wisdom’. But I found myself wanting to hear more. Perhaps it would have become unwieldy and overly complicated, as surely there is more to be said about the heart than about our practice in all of this. That is, *why* and *how* we use a piece of pragmatic wisdom will matter as much as (and maybe more than) *whether* we use it. I'm sure there is great wisdom (!) in Lionel's varied uses of ‘wisdom’, but I'm not sure the discussion took us as far as we need to go.

We need great care.

dismiss the idea of a goal by assuming it must adopt modern business practice as its means. There are many God-given

Our exegesis of 1 Corinthians 3:10

Much of what I’m saying lies buried in Paul’s use of the phrase *sophos architectōn* – translated ‘skilled master builder’ (ESV), ‘wise builder’ (NIV), or ‘expert builder’ (NLT) – in 1 Corinthians 3:10. I believe some detailed thought about this verse is important to the wider discussion.

If we follow the ESV, Paul is using this phrase to say that his ministry, despite appearing foolish to those enamoured with Greek cultural pretensions, has been done in a *skilful* way – at least in the sense that he brought to the task a practical ability that a properly insightful person would acknowledge as skilful. So, if this reading is right, amid his critique of worldly wisdom he still notes that practical skill has a place in all he has done. But if the NIV translation is better, the phrase might merely be driving forward the same thought that has been developed over the first three chapters – that is, he has built as one who dismissed any ‘wisdom’ gained from life in this world.

Which may might this phrase go? It depends in part on how much weight is given to its use outside this immediate context. This therefore raises deeper questions around what constitutes good exegesis.

On their own, both words are straightforward. *Sophos* is usually translated ‘wisdom’ in these early chapters of 1 Corinthians. *Architectōn* is also straightforward. It is a compound word that refers to the head builder in a complex project. And so, we get ‘master builder’ – the one with the greatest experience, or the one who leads a team.⁴

But when taken together, the two words create a phrase that calls to mind a use beyond the context of 1 Corinthians. It is used in this combined form in at least two places: the LXX of Isaiah 3:3; and in Philo, with respect to the directions given by ‘allegory’, which is personified as the *sophos architectōn*. In each of these places, the phrase simply intensifies the meaning of *architectōn* in a way that strengthens the sense that it refers to a person with great skill. Therefore, it is best to join with the ESV in translating *sophos* as ‘skilled’.⁵

But here is the challenge: in our verse in 1 Corinthians, is Paul using the phrase in its most usual, culturally understood sense – namely, a very skilled builder? Or is he intending that the context of the first three chapters of 1 Corinthians so flavour the meaning of *sophos* that it loses its normally received meaning (when combined with *architectōn*)? In this case, it would very largely operate to reinforce the thought that his work as a builder is not according to ‘the wisdom of the world’ (1:20).

4 Thiselton says that *architectōn* ‘brings together tektone, a worker in wood or stone... with arki, chief, or leader, here perhaps as first among equals, more probably leading in experience and skill rather than in managerial status’. See AC Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, NIGTC, Eerdmans, 2000, p 308.

5 It is often used to refer to a skilled workman (see Exod 35:10, 25; 36:1, 4, 8). Various commentators assume it means ‘skilled’.

What part does word usage external to a passage, or external to the Bible, play in translating and interpreting a text? No doubt literary context is the dominant control for language. But that context doesn’t exclusively shape the meaning of a word. That is, words are used by authors because they first have a culturally understood meaning. Authors don’t randomly employ words that have no meaning and then create meaning purely and simply by joining them together with other words packed together in a sentence. It would therefore seem critical to pay attention to the meaning of a word, or phrase, external to its immediate context, while still giving the final say on meaning to the literary context.

But the process demonstrated in Lionel’s piece (and elsewhere in recent times) seems to assume that the phrase has no history outside the immediate context – or at least no history that is worthy of attention. The assumption seems to be that this phrase has no received meaning except that given by context. And so, on this basis, *sophos* is entirely controlled by the use of this word earlier in the letter. This leads us to believe that Paul used a phrase from a wider cultural context, one where it had the sense of ‘skill’, and transformed its meaning into a word that means something different.



He is contrasting what many Corinthians thought was skilful building ... and comparing it with his own genuinely skilful work.



I find this hard to believe. And I note that various other commentators share something of my conviction.⁶

Further, along the lines of the idea of ‘diagonalisation’ discussed by Christopher Watkin⁷, Paul’s readiness to now speak of ‘skill’ at 3:10 may operate as a kind of affirmation that although the gospel critiques worldly wisdom there is nonetheless a true wisdom or skill to

be found within the fallen world. It can only be properly understood and applied by those who have been ‘killed’ by the cross to the things of this world and so renewed in heart and mind.

In this he might therefore be said to be speaking ironically. That is, he is contrasting what many Corinthians *thought* was skilful building (from those who practised worldly wisdom) and comparing it with his own genuinely skilful work.

6 Paul Gardner says “‘wise’ here may simply indicate being ‘skilled’”. See P Gardner, *1 Corinthians* (CE Arnold ed), Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, HarperCollins, 2018, (8 Chapter 1 Corinthians 3:10-17 section). Thiselton (p308) quotes J Shanor from an earlier study as saying ‘in keeping with early usage and the testimony of the ancients, Greek *sophos* is better translated here in its earlier sense, skilled.’

7 Christopher Watkin, *Biblical Critical Theory: How the Bible’s Unfolding Story Makes Sense of Modern Life and Culture* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2022).

This is exactly how many commentators take it.⁸ In other words, Paul is not denying all relevance of what Lionel calls ‘little-p pragmatism’. How could he? After all, everything a person does in this world requires awareness of what to do and how to do it – even the writing of a letter! After all, the first four chapters of 1 Corinthians are brilliant from a literary point of view. Paul employed great skill in putting together his words to form a persuasive argument. Where did he learn this skill? From the death of Jesus? No. He brought to the task skills he learned from received wisdom gained through life in God’s world. Further to this, he is writing with a goal in mind. All that he says is pursuing an outcome. He is outcome-driven.

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He brought to his task the skills of smart oratory and masterful writing.

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I offer that it is unhelpfully clumsy to suggest that Paul ‘deliberately avoided anything that looked like skill and human effectiveness’, or that ‘he celebrates the stupid, the frail and the contemptible’. Paul came to the Corinthians in weakness. But did this mean he deliberately acted in the most thoughtless, foolish and stupid ways imaginable, so that if anything happened it was clearly only the miraculous work of God? What does it mean that ‘God chose what is foolish in the world’ (1:27)? Did it mean he chose that which was stupid? That which was clueless? The Corinthians may have thought Paul’s ministry was foolish, stupid and clueless, but did Paul deliberately choose *all* that was genuinely stupid as a ministry philosophy?

This seems to be Lionel’s suggestion. And this view has been explicitly stated in various contexts in recent times. It is possible we are teaching a new generation that the best form of ministry is that which is the least clever.

I think I understand the point Lionel is making, and if I’ve read him correctly his point is an important one. But his language goes beyond what Paul would say. The apostle wasn’t opposed to being skilful; he worked at being skilful. And the skill he brought to the task wasn’t simply the skill of only saying a true set of words (i.e. ‘the word of the cross’, 1:18). He brought to his task the skills of smart oratory and masterful writing. True, he rejected the sophistry of the Greeks, but he used great skill in presenting his case! He paid great attention to where he went, and when, and with whom, and how he preached to different audiences, and whom he appointed to various tasks, and how he handled sensitive situations (such as delivering politically volatile money to Jerusalem).

8 See, for example, Hays, R. (2011) *First Corinthians*. [edition unavailable]. Westminster John Knox Press. Available at: <https://www.perlego.com/book/2101040> (Accessed: 3 February 2025). ‘... the term takes on a special double sense in the present context. Paul is both the skilled artisan and the wise teacher who lays down the one foundation that is truly in accordance with God’s wisdom rather than the wisdom of the world. ... he is contrasting himself ironically to the Corinthian devotees of wisdom’.

Yes, there is a critique to be offered. But we need great care in giving it, so that we don’t use blunt instruments that kill off the good as well as the bad. There is too much at stake in world mission to be so clunky.

I’d offer there is an antidote to hand (forgive the play on Lionel’s language, which was helpful at this point). It is found right there in 1 Corinthians 3:10 – in the phrase *sophos architectōn*.

Goals, means, and honouring God

Clarity about goal and means is vital if we are to make proper sense of what Paul is critiquing in 1 Corinthians 1–4. As these chapters show, he is not critiquing ministering with goals. Indeed, one of them is to help the Corinthians have a better sense of Paul’s goal for them. He isn’t interested in just winning a crowd, whatever it takes. Rather, he is pursuing the goal of complete transformation of life and heart. And he chose the style of ministry he did to ensure that this goal was

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Rather, he is pursuing the goal of complete transformation of life and heart.

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achieved, and that it would most exalt God. His ministry was done with the aim of driving people to see that their trust ought to be in God and him alone, not in Paul and his work and skill.

Yes, he tackles the question of external and obvious ‘results’ – ministry that is ‘measurably effective’, we might say. He cautions against judging him by a set of culturally defined standards; he leaves all judgement to God. But this doesn’t in any way deny that his *goal* was to see men and women saved (as per his impassioned expression in 9:19–23).

Noting all this better strengthens our conviction that we should embrace being ‘goal-driven’ in all we do. For Paul was goal-driven at every point in his ministry. Where he took great care was in pursuing the goals that were most God-honouring, and in using the best, God-appointed means to achieve those goals. **ACR**

Towards a theology of church decline



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Is it possible to be a faithful yet fruitless minister of the gospel? Can you be faithful, fruitful, and still preside over a declining church? What sort of theological reflection equips us for church decline instead of growth?

To raise these questions is to trouble ourselves, but it's a trouble worth putting ourselves through. One of the operational fallacies that many gospel workers have is that if I am spiritually faithful, then my ministry will be fruitful, and the church will grow; or that if I

(additionally) implement the best practices, then the ministry will be fruitful, and the church will grow. Those assumptions are shaky at best.

The view that lies behind both these assumptions is that if one does the right actions, one will get the right results. The difference is in what 'the right actions' are. In the first version, it is spiritual fidelity; in the second it is the application of all our best human wisdom in pragmatic efforts. They are both versions of 'do X, and Y will result'. Which is why they represent the theology of Job's friends.

Job's friends have a theology that is simplistic and mechanistic. They think, 'If you do right, then God will bless you. If you do wrong, then God will punish you.' And a very major part of the book of Job is predicated on this being wrong, because Job is an example of 'do right, and suffer bad things,' which breaks the logic of his friends. We, again, tend very strongly to have a mechanistic and magical view of how God works, and in this question of church growth we just port it over to ministry.

What is the endpoint of such a view of church growth? Without bounds or controls, the logical endpoint is a form of postmillennialism. So do we really

want to be postmillennials? After all, it's a minority position – and our experience of the history of the church undermines the position. So if we don't want to be postmillennials, we'll need to rethink this view of church growth.

Despite evidence that Christians had reached China in AD635, persecution under the Tang dynasty seems to have effectively eliminated Christianity. Despite the presence, and high influence, of Christians in the Mongol Empire in the 13th century, Christianity disappeared again afterwards; it also ceased entirely from 1924 to 1992 under the People's Republic. In Japan, from 1638 to 1853 Christianity was reduced



Despite evidence that Christians had reached China in AD635, persecution under the Tang dynasty seems to have effectively eliminated Christianity.



to almost zero. Why did God in his providence allow the church to perish in these places and times? Why did the Church of the East, a rival in number to the church in the Roman Empire, diminish so rapidly over the centuries? It is all too facile to say, 'Well, they weren't really Christians, because if they were evangelicals the gospel would never have perished like that'; if the elect only consists of a narrow group of protestant believers since the Reformation, then the question is *more* pointed: why didn't God (apparently) save anybody between the apostolic era and 1517?

What then does it take to have a theology of church decline when you sever the link between assuming that if someone is faithful, then somehow God is obliged to grow their ministry by converting people? What do you do with contexts where people appear to be faithful and yet the church slowly declines? What about the situation in Australia, Europe, and the United States, where there is steady religious decline and one can no longer take refuge in the argument 'well, that's just liberal protestants, but Bible-believing churches are growing'?

One of the problems that bedevils any discussion of church growth and decline is a doctrine of double causation and a doctrine of election. If God ultimately elects certain people to salvation, and if providentially orders the cosmos so that all he foreknows he also foreordains, and yet works out all such things through the secondary causes that exist within creation, then the ordinary believer faces a terrible conundrum in evaluating ministry. For it may be that despite every best human effort, an excellent gospel presentation, the faithful prayers of believers, and the application of all human wisdom, that a person never comes to a saving faith in Christ. Or it may be that a highly problematic gospel presentation, the absence of prayer, and an absolutely atrocious failure of human efforts, nonetheless results in a person's conversion.

In any merely human endeavour, we would run our programs, test our messaging, evaluate our results, and adjust accordingly. We should still do the same in church ministry; the above dilemma



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does not abrogate us from applying our best wisdom and efforts to reach the lost. And yet, it may be that in God's election and providence that the faithfulness of all our best efforts results in few or no conversions; it may be that despite our lack of effort, God gives growth. The assumption of a direct and measurable correlation between human efforts and church growth is difficult to sustain.

Let me suggest, then, a number of 'planks' that are necessary to build a theological framework that allows us to sustain gospel ministry in the face of decline rather than growth:

- i. God's sovereignty in electing people and effectually saving them
- ii. The necessity of using all our best human efforts to evangelise and disciple people
- iii. The efficacy of prayer.

I write this from a long-considered reformed position on election. If God elects people and draws them to himself (John 6:37, 44), and this results in effectual calling (Romans 8:30), then we ought to have supreme confidence that God will save all those he has chosen, and he does so by calling them. In this sense, the salvation of people does not ultimately rest upon our efforts.

Nonetheless, this doctrine never seems to abrogate the responsibility and calling of gospel workers to toil to bring the good news to people that they might be saved. Paul's words in Romans 10:14-15; 2 Cor 11:27; 1 Thess 2:9-12; and 2 Tim 4:7 all speak to his own personal labour and toil, either in gospel work or



in support of gospel work. Paul, and the other New Testament authors, never suggest that election is a reason to be complacent.

To put these two together, then, is to hold the conviction that God will sovereignly save whom he wills, and that he does so through our endeavours. We ought, then, to endeavour to employ all our resources to proclaim the gospel, as this is the normal God-ordained means by which he saves people. We should not thereby conclude that there are people who will not be saved because of our failure to reach them.

The third plank I propose is that prayer is effective, in ways that are non-reductively difficult to fathom. By 'non-reductive' I mean the simple answers of (i) God isn't sovereign and is making it up in response to our prayers, or (ii) prayer doesn't do anything except shape the petitioner, because God has

already decided everything; neither of these is a satisfactory response to the biblical data. How prayer can 'work', that is, God actually answering requests in a way that makes them genuine answers to petitions, while also upholding his sovereignty in election and providence, is no new problem. I have yet to hear a better answer than C. S. Lewis' echoing of Boethius in *The Screwtape Letters*, contrasting the temporal perspective that we have and the 'unbounded Now', the beyond-time, from which God views all time.

Why is this important? Because prayer is commanded by the Scriptures, is part of faithfulness, should be expected to be answered, and so is an essential component of faithfulness and fruitfulness in gospel work. Yet, for all this, the answer to our prayers for the salvation of others may return in the negative.

These three planks themselves suggest that it is possible that in God's mysterious providence you could be faithful in your obedience, diligent in your labour, persevering in your prayers, and yet see little gospel fruit. You might yet see people come to Christ, and yet due to migration, attrition, and death see numerical decline despite Kingdom growth.



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To preside over a church in such circumstances is difficult and discouraging. It requires an abiding faith, and diligent labour, with the confidence that one's efforts are not in vain, but are part of God's work to bring some to salvation, and leave none without excuse.

We have not even touched here upon the possibility that church decline may instead be a sign of God's judgment. I am loathe to draw very direct lessons from Old Testament figures about our current day being 'in exile' or 'in the wilderness' or so on. Nonetheless, that a figure like Jeremiah exists should be both a warning and a comfort; a warning, because Israel's destruction, Jerusalem's devastation, warn us against hubris in our righteousness. The book of Lamentations still speaks to us in this regard. And yet Jeremiah is a comfort to us, in providing the paradigm of a lone faithful voice, whose ministry saw no real success in his lifetime, and yet he speaks to the ages.

Nobody sets out to be a Jeremiah, nor will a conference on church decline sell any tickets. Nevertheless, an honest wrestling with the ways of God equips us to reckon soberly with its reality, which in turn makes us truly thankful for when and where the Lord is growing his church, which is just as ever his work and not ours. **ACR**

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