



# THE BASICS OF PASTORAL MINISTRY

VOLUME 3

Preaching God's Word

STUDY GUIDE

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“The Gospel was not preached in order that the culture of Ephesus might be changed. The Gospel was not preached so that the Temple of Diana would be pulled down. The Gospel was not preached so that Christian people could have a kind of better lifestyle for themselves as a result of the benefits of the Gospel message spilling out into the culture. No, the Gospel was preached for no other reason than that men and women might be saved. And as a result of the transformation of individual lives, families, communities, and cultures were radically altered.”

**ALISTAIR BEGG**

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*The Basics of Pastoral Ministry: Preaching God's Word (Study Guide)*  
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# INTRODUCTION

The sermons in this volume are intended to help current pastors, aspiring pastors, and lay leaders to have a greater understanding of their calling and work. These sermons and lectures were not originally delivered together in one cohesive series. There is therefore some overlap in content between sermons. The messages in this volume were selected and arranged in order to provide the most help to those who are training for ministry. We hope and pray that they will greatly benefit you as you seek to glorify God wherever He has set you.

Each lesson includes four main parts:

**1) Key Scriptures:** important Bible verses that were referenced in the message and are flagged for further meditation and memorization

**2) Notes:** space (and outlines, when relevant) for you to jot down your key takeaways, thoughts, and questions from each message

**3) Going Deeper:** quotes and questions to help you process each message's main ideas

**4) Ways to Pray:** prompts that are meant to help guide your petitions to and your affections for God

## Learning Objectives

- Examine common preaching pitfalls and how they can be overcome.
- Discover how your belief in the sufficiency of Scripture, the centrality of the cross, and the transforming power of God's grace will enable you to nourish God's people so that they grow in maturity.
- Learn how to become more natural, fluid, persuasive, and clear in your preaching.

## Getting Started

1. Why is it essential for pastors to be firm in their belief in the sufficiency of Scripture? What consequences might result from surrendering this doctrine?

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2. What is the difference between moralistic and grace-based preaching? How can you avoid moralism while still encouraging obedience to God's Word?

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# LESSON ONE

## Sufficiency of the Word

Paul wrote his final letter to Timothy at a time when the church was suffering from intense persecution and confusion about belief and behavior. In it, he reminds the young pastor of the clarity, authority, and sufficiency of the Scriptures. In a culture that often mistakes conviction for intolerance, Alistair Begg exhorts Christians to hold tightly to the sufficiency of God's Word for salvation, transformation, and proclamation. The Bible's authority and Christ's finished work, not man's approval, are what give clarity and meaning to the Christian's life and testimony.

### Notes

#### **Introduction**

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#### **Sufficiency for Salvation**

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#### **Sufficient for Transformation**

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#### **Sufficient for Proclamation**

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## KEY SCRIPTURES

“Continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work. 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, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths. As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.” (2 Timothy 3:14-4:5)

## Going Deeper

1. *“When the church is tempted to take on board anything other than the simplicity of the Gospel and the sufficiency of Scripture, then it will always be in danger of capitulation, and its missionary zeal will diminish.”*

The simplicity of the Gospel and the sufficiency of Scripture are essential convictions for a faithful ministry. Why might a pastor or ministry leader be tempted to lose confidence in the Gospel and the Scriptures? What substitutes might they be tempted to “take on board”?

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2. *“How do men and women get cut to their hearts? What cuts to the hearts? Oh, you can have a sharp tongue and cut people. You can cut to people’s hearts as a result of emotional manipulation; there’s a way to tell stories and induce tears. That will produce no lasting benefit at all.”*

We easily embrace the idea that people will be more likely to believe if we have a little bit more force to our voice or if we add some emotional appeal. How can these subtle beliefs and practices undermine the message of the Gospel?

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3. *“If we believe in the sufficiency of Scripture, then we will proclaim the Scripture in such a way that it teaches the faith and it rebukes error.”*

The Bible exposes error and teaches the truth. A ministry that focuses on preaching the Bible will do the same. If we primarily rebuke error to the exclusion of positive instruction or primarily teach the truth while also refusing to confront sin, our preaching will fail to have the balance that the Bible itself has. Which side of the pendulum swing are you more likely to find yourself moving toward? How can you overcome this propensity in your teaching?

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## Ways to Pray

- In this sermon, Alistair says, “Get down on your knees and ask God to fill your heart with a love for Christ through His Word. Let’s stay on our knees till He fills us with a passion concerning the absolute sufficiency of this book.” Take this exhortation to heart, and make this prayer your own.
- Pray that your preaching will have the proper balance that the Bible itself has. Pray that the Lord will help your preaching to be driven by the text of Scripture, not just your natural tendencies and preferences.
- Think of other evangelical churches in your region, and pray that they will be unwavering in their commitment to the sufficiency of Scripture.

# LESSON TWO

## Practical Pointers on Preaching

Pastoral ministry often raises practical questions about preaching: How does a preacher properly prepare a sermon? What methods should he use to make the text relevant? What delivery strategies make a sermon spiritually effective? While answers to these questions vary, Alistair Begg points us to one central truth: it is God's Word, not the preacher's ability to "market" the Gospel, that opens the ears of the hearers and brings them to an awareness of His grace.

### Notes

#### Responses to Criticism of Preaching

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#### Framework and Text

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#### Finding the Melodic Line in the Text

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#### From Corinth to Chicago

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#### Stay on the Line of Scripture

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## KEY SCRIPTURES

“Listen! Behold, a sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seed fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured it. Other seed fell on rocky ground, where it did not have much soil, and immediately it sprang up, since it had no depth of soil. And when the sun rose, it was scorched, and since it had no root, it withered away. Other seed fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no grain. And other seeds fell into good soil and produced grain, growing up and increasing and yielding thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold.” (Mark 4:3-8)

### Instruction, Illustration, and Application

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### Study and Preparation for Preaching

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### Going Deeper

1. *“It’s simply not true to say that people will not listen to preaching. ... They will! If people are being awakened spiritually to their need of God, they’re going to listen. And if they’re not, no amount of Gospel entertainment or evangelistic gimmickry will make them listen.”*

Why should preachers prioritize the clarity of the Gospel in their preaching? In what ways does a biblical perspective on conversion help you to focus on Gospel clarity in your preaching, rather than “Gospel entertainment” or “evangelistic gimmickry”?

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2. Speaking on when to include teaching, illustration, and application in a sermon, Alistair says, “My approach to it has always been in the interweaving of all three elements, rather than having the thing in a truncated fashion where you have information section ... followed by illustration section, followed by application section.”

What are the benefits of interweaving these three elements together in a sermon rather than separating them out as distinct parts?

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3. *“I think it’s very important for us to be prepared to lean back on the text, to trust the text. Let it establish the framework and the outline.”*

Why should one’s framework for a passage of Scripture be subservient to the text? What problems might arise from forcing the text into a framework rather than making the framework the servant of the text?

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## Ways to Pray

- Pray that God will prepare the hearts of those who hear your preaching so that the Word will land on good soil and bear fruit thirty-, sixty-, and a hundredfold.
- Ask the Lord to increase your confidence in the power of His Word to convert sinners.
- As Paul asked others to pray that his preaching of the Gospel would be clear (Colossians 4:3-4), likewise pray that God will enable you to proclaim the Gospel with great boldness and clarity.

# LESSON THREE

## Preaching of the Cross

John Stott once wrote that what dominated Christ's mind was not the living of His life but the giving of His life. This timeless truth is one that churches today still need to hear and learn. In this message from 1 Corinthians, Alistair Begg challenges us to see the Gospel's unique claims about Christ's identity. Jesus, the Bible tells us, was not merely a great teacher or moral example; He was the sacrificial Lamb that made atonement for sin on our behalf.

### Notes

#### Introduction

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#### Challenges to the Centrality of the Cross

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#### The Plain and Obvious Emphasis of the Bible

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#### Living with the Cross at the Center

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## KEY SCRIPTURES

“I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve.”  
(1 Corinthians 15:3-5)

“We preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.”  
(1 Corinthians 1:23-24)

## Going Deeper

1. *“If evangelicalism has been good about one thing in the last fifty years, it has surely been good about this—namely, taking what is central and making it peripheral, and thereby allowing what is peripheral to take the central place.”*

There will always be the temptation to make that which is central peripheral and that which is peripheral central. However, this may not look the same for everyone. What are the peripheral areas of Christian belief and practice that you are most likely to allow to take the central place in your own heart and ministry? How can you prevent this from happening?

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2. *“The cross confronts sin and humbles the proud.”*

Do you find it difficult to address sin in your preaching? How can you faithfully do so without being judgmental or legalistic?

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3. *"If you do not have a central place for the cross, every theological structure eventually crumbles into dust."*

Alistair teaches that the cross is central in Scripture and that all of the Bible's instruction must be understood in relation to the cross. Why is this so? How can teaching the Bible actually be spiritually harmful to others when the cross is not central?

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## Ways to Pray

- Pray that your heart will be so gripped by Christ's finished work on the cross that it overflows in all that you do and say in your ministry.
- Ask the Lord to help you identify the peripheral areas of the Christian life that you might be tempted to overemphasize. Pray that the Lord will help you to keep the cross central and that which is peripheral in its proper place.
- Pray that the members of your church will be humbled by the cross and that they will make the finished work of Christ on their behalf their only boast.

# LESSON FOUR

## Preaching God's Grace

The effective preaching of God's grace can only be accomplished when pastors truly understand what grace is—and what it is not. Will we seek security in spiritual self-sufficiency, legalism, or relativism? Or will we take refuge in the true Gospel? Alistair Begg helps us understand how the beauty of Christ's work produces joyful service for His name's sake.

### Notes

#### Introduction

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#### What Preaching Grace Means

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#### Why Preaching Grace Matters

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#### Marks of Grace-Filled Preaching

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## KEY SCRIPTURES

“For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works. Declare these things; exhort and rebuke with all authority. Let no one disregard you.” (Titus 2:11-15)

## Going Deeper

1. *“Grace, when it’s understood, changes not only how we view ourselves but also how we view other people.”*

Pastors and ministry leaders, if they are not careful, may forget that they are in need of the same grace that they preach to others. How should an understanding of God’s grace influence the way that you view yourself and others?

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2. *“We do not see the Gospel as the ABC. We see the gospel as the A to Z of Christian living.”*

What does Alistair mean when he says that the Gospel is “the A to Z of Christian living” rather than the ABC? How does this mindset encourage a grace-based, rather than moralistic, approach to the Christian life?

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3. *“If we are judgmental and arrogant, our people will go into the community as judgmental and arrogant. If we are genuinely struck by God’s grace towards us and it humbles us and makes us generous with it, then that will begin to bleed into our structures of leadership, and our congregation too.”*

Pastors may preach grace while also having attitudes and behaviors that are inconsistent with the message they preach. Why is preaching grace not enough? Why must pastors and ministry leaders also live in a manner that reflects the transforming power of God’s grace?

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## Ways to Pray

- Alistair says, “I always pray three things for myself .... I pray that the Lord would help me to have conviction, that He would help me to have clarity, and that He would help me to have a genuine compassion in speaking the truth of the Gospel.” Pray that the Lord will give you conviction, clarity, and compassion in your own preaching as well.
- Pray that God’s grace will produce a deep humility within you that enables you to be gracious and kind to others.
- Think of members of your church who struggle with resting in God’s grace, and ask the Lord to give them greater growth in grace.

# LESSON FIVE

## Persuasive Preaching – Part One

Personal, cultural, and theological challenges often impede a preacher from being an effective ambassador of God. Alistair Begg explains that persuading spiritually blind men and women to believe and repent must take precedence over all other agendas. A passionate love for the Gospel will enable pastors to speak with clarity, authority, and a sense of urgency.

### Notes

#### Introduction

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#### The Challenges of Persuasive Preaching

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#### Prerequisites for Preaching to the Stubborn Will

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## KEY SCRIPTURES

“We are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” (2 Corinthians 5:20-21)

“When they had appointed a day for him, they came to him at his lodging in greater numbers. From morning till evening he expounded to them, testifying to the kingdom of God and trying to convince them about Jesus both from the Law of Moses and from the Prophets.” (Acts 28:23)

## Going Deeper

1. *“Throughout the whole Bible, it is manifestly clear that God kicks the legs out from underneath the stools upon which his servants seek to sit comfortably—and almost always to ensure that we are brought to an end of ourselves.”*

Here, Alistair articulates a common way that God deals with His servants. God tends to privately humble those whom He intends to publicly use. Why do you think He does so? Why should you gratefully receive such humbling rather than resist it?

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2. *“If our biblical, expository teaching-preaching ministry does not emerge from a sense of divine oughtness, then I suggest to you that as soon as the battle rages before us, the temptation will be simply to fold up our tents and head home as quickly as we can.”*

A true call to ministry will enable a ministry leader to faithfully persevere even in the presence of great challenges. Would you say that your preaching ministry comes from “a sense of divine oughtness”? If so, how does this encourage you to persevere through difficulties in ministry?

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3. *“Christ commissions us to present Christ to the unsaved sinner, urging, pleading that they might commit themselves to Christ in order that they might be saved. And brethren, in this persuasive preaching there need be no restraint save the restraints of Scripture.”*

Scripture calls us to be persuasive in our preaching, but we must never be manipulative. What is the difference? How can you show “no restraint” as you plead with sinners to be saved while also avoiding emotional manipulation?

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## Ways to Pray

- Pray that the Lord will do whatever it takes to empty you of your own pride and self-will in your ministry. Ask the Lord to help you to preach Christ from a pure heart that desires His glory as your only ambition.
- Ask the Lord to give you the inner conviction that He has called you, and pray that you will be enabled by God’s grace to endure hardship for the sake of the Gospel.
- Pray that the Holy Spirit will convict and convert those who hear you preach God’s Word.

# LESSON SIX

## Persuasive Preaching – Part Two

What approach should pastors take when preaching to individuals who do not understand the Gospel? When he was called to account before the unpersuaded King Agrippa, Paul delivered his defense with great urgency, transparency, and boldness. Looking to Paul as an example, Alistair Begg reminds pastors that their confidence in proclaiming Christ doesn't rest in their notoriety or background. Instead, it is simply the result of being God's messengers.

### Notes

#### Introduction

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#### Background of Acts 26

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#### Setting the Scene

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#### Paul's Explanation

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#### Festus's Interruption

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## KEY SCRIPTURES

“As he was saying these things in his defense, Festus said with a loud voice, ‘Paul, you are out of your mind; your great learning is driving you out of your mind.’ But Paul said, ‘I am not out of my mind, most excellent Festus, but I am speaking true and rational words. For the king knows about these things, and to him I speak boldly. For I am persuaded that none of these things has escaped his notice, for this has not been done in a corner. King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know that you believe.’ And Agrippa said to Paul, ‘In a short time would you persuade me to be a Christian?’ And Paul said, ‘Whether short or long, I would to God that not only you but also all who hear me this day might become such as I am—except for these chains.’” (Acts 26:24–29)

### Paul’s Application

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### The Scene’s Conclusion

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## Going Deeper

1. *“The reason that some of us never make much of a connection with our listeners is because we do not get to the ‘So what?’ The reason why some of us never actually teach the Bible is because we start with the ‘So what?’ and we never get to the Bible.”*

In the Bible, doctrine is never separated from application, nor are commands ever divorced from instruction. We may naturally feel more comfortable with either instruction or application in our preaching, but neither should be excluded. Which of these two aspects of preaching are you most likely to neglect? Why is it important that your preaching include both?

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2. *“Unless we are prepared to do what is necessary ... to lay down, if you like, the foundation—then we never have a basis on which to make application.”*

Not only must your preaching include teaching and application, but you also must not make application before you have laid a sure foundation through biblical instruction. Why will making application before giving instruction fail to produce lasting transformation in the lives of your listeners?

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3. *“We don’t have to constantly, in our preaching, join the dots for people. We need to credit them with some ability to process the information as it is conveyed to them.”*

Your preaching will prove to be inadequate if you fail to provide sufficient explanations and connections for your listeners. At the same time, there is a danger in erring on the other side by being too specific in the connections and applications you make. What might this look like practically in a sermon? How can you avoid being too specific without failing to provide adequate information for your listeners?

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## Ways to Pray

- Alistair said, “We do have to pray before we preach, while we preach, and after we preach, that in those tender moments, in those doors of opportunity, that people might come to trust in Christ.” Pray now that God’s anointing will be upon your preaching so that people might come to trust in Christ as they hear God’s Word expounded.
- Ask the Lord to make you bold and winsome in your proclamation of the Gospel.
- Pray that the Lord will show the members of your church the specific ways that God’s Word should be applied to their own lives and circumstances.

# LESSON SEVEN

## The Pulpit: Its Powers and Pitfalls

The pulpit is intended not as a showcase for a preacher's performance but as the place from which a pastor gives Christ-exalting, biblical instruction. Using Paul's admonition to the Corinthians as a standard, Alistair Begg identifies nine pitfalls that threaten to undermine effective pastoral ministry. When a preacher is Spirit-filled, anointed, and empowered by God, a divine encounter can occur within the listeners, awakening faith in Jesus and glorifying God through the preaching.

### Notes

#### **Introduction**

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#### **Pitfalls of Pulpit Ministry**

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#### **The Power of Pulpit Ministry**

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## KEY SCRIPTURES

“I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.” (1 Corinthians 2:1-5)

## Going Deeper

1. *“Surely the devil laughs at prayerless preaching.”*

God’s Word is powerful, and there is nothing we can do to make it more potent than it already is. This being so, why does Alistair suggest that the devil does not feel the least bit threatened by preaching that is unaccompanied by prayer?

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2. *“I have learned in the course of pastoral ministry to discount the high end and to discount the low end. There are people who just, for all the best reasons, will tell you you’re fantastic; you know it isn’t true.”*

Preachers will receive a wide array of responses to their preaching, with “the high end” being inappropriate adulation and “the low end” being harsh criticism. Alistair says that he has learned to discount both. Why is this a wise practice?

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3. *“It’s very possible to stay close to the Word of the Lord and not be close to the Lord of the Word—to become a theoretician, to become doctrinaire, to become able, to become an answerer of questions, but to become cold and refrigerated and disentangled from the loving embrace of the Christ that we serve.”*

As a ministry leader, how can you maintain a deep love for God’s Word and sound doctrine without becoming cold, rigid, and unapproachable?

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## Ways to Pray

- Pray that you will faithfully represent Christ in both word and deed, thought and action, and in spirit and truth.
- Consider the pitfalls to ministry that Alistair mentioned, and confess to the Lord the areas where you have not been faithful. Pray that the Lord will strengthen your areas of weakness and empower you to grow as a minister.
- Ask the Lord to keep you within His loving embrace so that you will continually reflect the warmth, love, and servant heart that our Lord Himself has.



# EPILOGUE

## Preaching God's Word

### Key Takeaways

*Answer the following questions based on what you learned from the sermons in this volume.*

1. What biblical principles should determine the content and structure of your sermons? How can you change your preaching to reflect these principles?

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2. How should the cross of Christ shape and influence your ministry and preaching?

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3. Identify and reflect upon the pitfalls of pulpit ministry touched on in the sermons in this volume. Which ones are particularly dangerous for you? What can you do to guard against them in your own ministry?

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### Further Reading and Study

- *Between Two Worlds: The Art of Preaching in the Twentieth Century* by John R. W. Stott
- *The Cross of Christ* by John R. W. Stott
- *The Priority of Preaching* by Christopher Ash
- *Expositional Preaching: How We Speak God's Word Today* by David Helm
- *Preaching for God's Glory* by Alistair Begg
- *The Goldsworthy Trilogy* by Graeme Goldsworthy
- *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture: The Application of Biblical Theology to Expository Preaching* by Graeme Goldsworthy
- *The Gospel as Center: Renewing Our Faith and Reforming Our Ministry Practices*, edited by D. A. Carson and Timothy Keller





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