

Recapturing the Voice of God: Shaping Sermons like Scripture. By Steven W. Smith. Nashville, TN: B & H Publishing Group, 2015, 240 pp., \$17.47, softcover, ISBN 1433682508

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A graduate of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary (M.Div.) and Regent University (Ph.D.), Steven W. Smith is vice president for Student Services and Communications and professor of Preaching at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas. In addition to this volume on preaching, Kregel Academic published Smith's 2009 work, *Dying to Preach: Embracing the Cross in the Pulpit*.

Books on preaching abound. Homiletics students and practitioners have a plethora of resources from which to choose when seeking instruction on the basics of hermeneutics, sermon preparation, genre studies, and methodological challenges for contemporary audiences. In fact, authors in the field of homiletics face a significant challenge to provide a significant work in a crowded field. Throughout this book, Smith both corrects and instructs. For these reasons, his work proves worthy of attention.

Smith believes the term *expository* has become too elastic. He asserts that expository preaching has been reduced to a style or a regimented template to structure sermons, and too often this template seems unadaptable to all the biblical genres. Throughout this helpful work, Smith seeks to correct the tendency of preachers to preach solid theological material while presenting a solid outline of a text, but missing the voice and tone of the text.

Smith understands true expository preaching focuses on a text-driven preaching model which produces a "theologically driven philosophy of preaching that gets as close to the text as possible" (1). Primarily, Smith's work benefits preachers and homiletics students as he delves deeply into the difficult sermon building issue of genre. If text driven preaching exists, then the genre of the text must produce the foundation from which the preacher crafts his message. Smith asserts that preaching is "really a re-presentation of a text of Scripture" (3). Thus, in correcting a loose understanding of exposition, he calls upon preachers to reorient themselves with a consistent technique to preach any genre while remaining faithful to the inspired word. Because of genre, the Bible does not always sound the same (or have the same "tone," to use Smith's verbiage), so sermons should not sound the same either (35). One can recapture the voice of God in the text by shaping the message to God's voice behind the text. Accomplishing this task produces true expository, text driven sermons about which Smith instructs his reader throughout this work.

Smith organizes this book by locating three major categories of Scripture: story, poem/wisdom, and letter. Within these three categories, Smith presents nine loosely defined biblical genres. Story contains Old Testament narrative, the Law, Gospels/Acts, and the Parables. Poem/Wisdom includes the Psalms, Wisdom literature, and Prophecy. The genre of Letter contains the Epistles and the book of Revelation. Readers will no doubt discover similarities between each of these chapters. Smith intentionally overlaps as he develops his genre analysis. The chapters are organized with a basic structure of investigation to encompass interpretation, communication, and sermon structure. Smith assists his readers by providing a sample sermon that reveals how he implements genre studies into his version of text driven exposition.

In addition to strengths listed above, this book has three additional strengths. One, Smith anticipates questions his readers will have, and he provides pointed, substantive answers. For example, it is not uncommon for pastors to preach Old Testament texts with a view to the cross. As Spurgeon famously stated, regardless of which text you preach, let your sermons "be full of

Christ.” How does one sufficiently preach Old Testament wisdom literature or poetry and do the text justice, while at the same time moving the message to its culmination in Christ? Smith answers this question and more through his treatment of each genre. Two, Smith’s sermon outlines within each chapter are instructive and provide readers with relevant examples of how to treat the specific genre sufficiently. Three, Smith’s section on preaching parables prove especially helpful and instructive. He wisely discusses the cultural nuances one must factor when seeking to translate a parable’s meaning to contemporary audiences.

Minor weaknesses emerge. One, printing errors occur in a few locations, and the overall presentation of the text and its headings needs revision. Each chapter presents heavily outlined major points that break down into several minor points. Readers may find it difficult, at times, to see any consistency. Two, Smith’s chapter on Revelation did not fully contend with the theological challenges to the book’s unique genres. He does not address every significant issue one must wrestle while crafting Christ-exalting and biblically sound messages. Smith never seeks to answer every question, but he does provide a substantive and informative approach to genre. Because of this accomplishment, pastors and students will benefit greatly from reading *Recapturing the Voice of God*.