

HOW SERMONS WORK

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Dedicated to my Dad and Mum.

Thanks for preaching and practising Christ.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank David Woollin for inviting me to write for EP Books and also to Erroll Hulse for his advice and encouragement. Big thanks to Jackie Friston for her super-efficient editing and typesetting.

As you will soon see, I lean heavily on many past and present preachers both for my own formation and for training others to preach. In some ways, I'm teaching nothing original. However, I do hope that this book presents the accumulated wisdom of many gifted men in a clear, simple and useable way.

Finally, a very special thanks to Dr Joel Beeke for asking me to join him in team-teaching the preaching classes at Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary. There is no better teacher than teaching.

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Introduction

HOW DO THEY DO THAT?

One of my favourite childhood books was *How do they do that?* The Discovery Channel took the same idea and made it into a TV programme called *How do they do it?* The Internet has its own howstuffworks.com. These and other similar books, programmes, and web sites tap into our natural human curiosity. We want to know what lies behind the surface, what led up to the discovery, what makes what.

This book is a ‘How do they do that?’ about preaching. If it was a web site, we would call it howsermonswork.com. I’ve written it for four audiences. First, it is for seminary students who want a short practical guide on how to prepare and preach a sermon. They will read the classic books on preaching theory and practice as they continue their studies, but their ‘practise preaching’ class is looming and they desperately need a helping hand to get started. Here it is.

Second, the book is for elders. The material was originally prepared to help elders who were being asked to preach in various settings. I wanted to give these men a simple step-by-step guide to help them to prepare sermons in an

efficient, enjoyable and edifying way. I've expanded the material since then to help more elders become more 'able to teach' (1 Timothy 3:2).

Third, I hope that even experienced preachers might pick up a crumb or two by reading this brief 'refresher'.

Fourth, although the book is about 'How sermons work', I've written it so that the vast majority of the material will be relevant and helpful to anyone who has to prepare a Bible message (e.g. for Sunday schools, Bible studies, etc.).

So it is not just for preachers. In fact, maybe above all I want non-preachers to read this book. Given that the most important hours in a Christian's week are the one or two hours they spend listening to their pastor's sermons, I find it surprising how few Christians are interested in 'How do they do that?'

Some people seem to think that pastors 'receive' their messages direct from God. They imagine some mysterious process by which the pastor just 'gets' a sermon. That is too high a view of preaching. It views preachers more like angels than ordinary mortals. I want to show that, just like any other work, there is a reasonable and logical method and system to follow.

Others think that a pastor just spends the week relaxing, gets up on a Sunday, and says the first thing that comes into his mind with little or no forethought or planning. That is too low a view of preaching. Anyone with a bit of verbal fluency could do it. I want to demonstrate that behind the thirty to forty-five minutes you see and hear on a Sunday morning are many hours of mental, spiritual and practical

labour. Like all pastoral labour, it involves head, heart and hand.

If you want to increase respect for your pastor and his preaching, ask, 'How do they do that?' Then read this book and find out the answer.