



Cohort Leaders

Training Manual

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Introduction

Pastoral preaching is our craft, the one task ministers of the Gospel must fulfill every week. No matter what else we must do – and there are many pastoral tasks – our week culminates on Sunday, whether we are ready or not. This is because ours is a Word-centered faith. Most of us learned to preach in a college or seminary classroom with some measure of practice in a local church. We may have modeled our preaching after our favorite national speakers, but often we do not continue to hone our preaching skills through continuing education. Celebrity preachers are often not pastoral preachers. Pastoral preaching is rooted in the soil of a local church, and the only way to sharpen our skills at pastoral preaching is to preach in the context of a local church. I believe that continuing education for pastoral preaching must be rooted in the local soil to be effective.

How can preachers hone these skills in pastoral preaching? Many professions require “Continuing Education Units” (CEUs) to stay fresh and pastoral preaching needs a similar discipline. The best education for preaching in the local church is preaching in the local church, but is there a way to enhance the practicum of the local church with input from other pastoral preachers to sharpen our skills? How do we avoid falling into the rut of familiar patterns which leads to the deadening satisfaction of sameness in our sermons? How do we make progress in our preaching?

Dietrich Bonhoeffer developed a model for educating the confessing church in Germany when Nazi-dissenting pastors were no longer allowed to gather in seminaries. From 1935–1940, Bonhoeffer led ten separate groups of pastoral students through a process of theological education in small communal gatherings at places like Finkenwalde. They used a model of “collective pastorates” to train church leaders. Bonhoeffer wrote his two most famous books, *The Cost of Discipleship* and *Life Together*, as training manuals for these collective pastorates.

Bonhoeffer wrote:

*Brotherhood is the essential living beginning of “church.” ... Thus the knowledge is growing in us that things can only go forward in the individual congregations if there is at least a beginning of a brotherhood around the minister. ... Thus in clergy circles it has long been felt that a renewal of the ministry can succeed only when the secularized forms of separation from one another in the official church are overcome by a brotherly with-one-another. (Cited by Paul House, *Bonhoeffer’s Seminary Vision: A Case for Costly Discipleship and Life Together*, Crossway, 2015, p. 58)*

A Brotherhood Model for Continuing Education

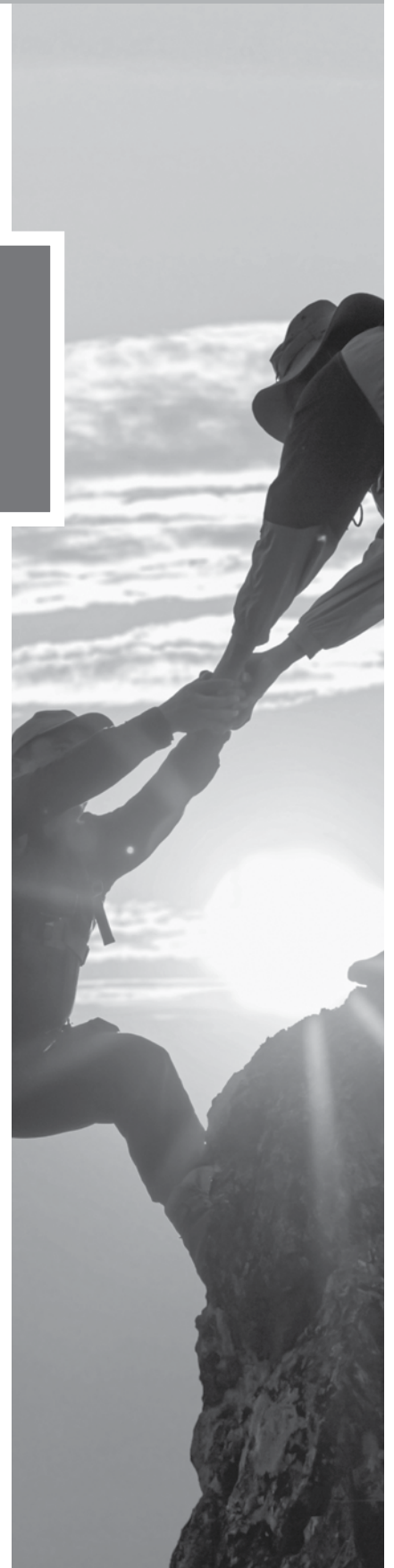
Serve God with such education as you have, and thank Him for blowing through you if you are ram's horn, but if there be the possibility of your becoming a silver trumpet, choose it rather.

(C. H. Spurgeon, "The Necessity of Ministerial Progress" in *Lectures to My Students*.)

Preaching cohorts adopt a brotherhood model for continuing education. A preaching cohort is a group of six to eight pastors in a geographical area who covenant together for their continuing education as pastoral preachers. The initial commitment is for eight gatherings in twenty-four months. Cohorts are group-directed learning experiences designed to help pastors become more effective in their local settings. Pastors learn from one another and encourage one another as they hone their skills in pastoral preaching. Cohorts are collaborative education. The classroom lecture has its place in our learning, but collaborative learning from other practitioners is far more effective for continuing education. We learn better from other pastors in our area than from national models drawn from other cultural settings. Urban pastors in New York City know better how to reach their sub-culture, and rural pastors in northern New England know better how to reach their sub-culture. Pastoral preachers can grow best through a brotherhood model for continuing education.

We have designed this manual to equip cohort leaders to lead preaching cohorts more effectively. If you are reading this manual, we believe you are an excellent candidate to lead a preaching cohort, and we want to give you the tools to lead. We do not expect you to be an expert on preaching, but we expect you to be passionate about preaching. Even more importantly, you will need to love preachers and want them to join you in the journey of becoming more effective expositors of God's Word. The goal of the preaching cohort is for everyone, including the cohort leader, to make progress in their preaching (1 Timothy 4:13).

We should never be content with where we are in our Christian journey. . . . Nor should we who preach be satisfied in our preaching. All preachers, young and old, need to make sermon improvement, both in content and in delivery. The people who listen to us should see we are growing in our Christian life, our calling, and our preaching. . . . We pray we're not like the pastor who had a member say to him after his message, "Oh, pastor, every sermon you preach is better than the next one!" (Jerry Vines and Jim Shaddix, *Progress in the Pulpit: How to Grow in your Preaching*, Moody Publishers, 2017, 14)



The Apostle Paul: The Ultimate Model for a Preaching Cohort Leader

You cannot at the same time give the impression that you are a great preacher and that Jesus Christ is a great Savior.

(James Denney, quoted by John Stott, *Between Two Worlds*, 325)

The apostle Paul was one of the most devoted, passionate, and effective followers of Jesus Christ that has ever lived. It could be argued that what he modeled in his life and ministry is the supreme example of what pastoral ministry and preaching are all about in any period of church history. His identity as a man was defined in light of His union with Jesus Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection (Rom. 6:1-5; Col. 3:1-4), which is why he continually cried out, “Christ lives in me” (Gal. 2:20) in both his personal life and ministry. He defined the essence of the Christian life and pastoral ministry in the words, “For to me to live is Christ” (Phil. 1:21). His supreme goal and highest purpose in life was to cultivate an intimate love relationship with Christ by purposing to “know Christ and the power of His resurrection” (Phil. 3:10). He was a Christ-centered preacher, who resolved to preach “Jesus Christ and Him crucified” (1Cor. 2:2), and “Christ Jesus as Lord” (2Cor. 4:5). The purpose of this material is to allow the apostle Paul to challenge us to build our ministries upon the centrality of Jesus Christ leading us to live, minister, and preach with a burning passion for Jesus Christ. This is one of the major objectives of the Rephidim Project pastoral cohort team process.

DESPERATION FOR CHRIST

The starting point of living with a burning passion for Christ is placing Christ at the center of our existence in light of our inability to overcome indwelling sin in our own strength. Pastoral ministry does not deliver us from our own ongoing struggles with sin that Paul described in the following words, “For what I am doing, I don’t understand; for I am not practicing what I would like to do, but I am doing the very thing I hate” (Rom. 7:15). His inability to overcome his own battles with sin in his own strength led him to cry out, “Wretched man that I am!” (Rom. 7:24). This cry was a combination of mental anguish, spiritual brokenness, and emotional and physical exhaustion. It was a cry of desperation that highlighted the futility of any Christian attempting to overcome their struggles with sin, apart from the power of Jesus Christ through the indwelling Holy Spirit.

The inability to overcome sin in his own strength and power led Paul to ask the question, “Who will set me free from the body of this death?” (Rom. 7:24). In a spirit of thanksgiving, he celebrates where his deliverance is found in the words, “But thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom. 7:25). Christ remains central to Paul’s existence because he recognizes that Christ rescues him from the “power of sin” in the present in terms of his sanctification and that Christ will rescue him at some future time from the “presence” of sin in terms of his glorification. As those who give our lives to Christ in pastoral ministry, we must never lose sight of the fact that moment by moment, hour by hour, and day by day, we are to be as desperate for Christ for our sanctification as we were at the moment of our conversion when He saved us. Our passion to preach God’s Word increases when our view of the gospel acknowledges that the Lord Jesus Christ saved, rescued, and delivered us from the penalty of sin in the past, the power of sin in the present, and the presence of sin in the future!

FINDING OUR IDENTITY IN OUR UNION WITH CHRIST

It is obvious from his epistles that the apostle Paul found his identity primarily in his union and participation with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection (Rom. 6:1-11; Col. 3:1-4). This is the primary place every pastor is to find their identity so that we will minister and preach in the fear of God rather than in the fear of man. One of the clearest statements of his union with Christ in his Savior’s liberating death, risen life, and perfect love is, “I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.” The centrality of Christ in Paul’s life is found in his deep awareness of the reality that “Christ lives in me” continually, and at all times, with the purpose of living His resurrected life in and through me.

As pastors and preachers, we must be living, ministering, and preaching beyond ourselves in the strength, power, energy, and resources of Jesus Christ. In light of our union with Jesus Christ and His indwelling presence in our lives through the Holy Spirit, we should be purposing to experience the “resurrection power” of Jesus Christ every day of our lives (Phil. 3:10; Phil. 4:13). As we run the race of our Christian life we are to be “fixing our eyes upon Christ” (Heb. 12:2) at all times. This will fuel our passion for Christ and empower us to lead, teach, and preach supernaturally in the resurrection power of Jesus Christ. The centrality of Christ, and Paul’s partnership with Christ, in light of his union with Christ, governs his proclamation of biblical truth, “And we proclaim Him (Christ), admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, that we may present every man complete in Christ. And for this purpose also I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me” (Col. 1:28-29). Those who consistently live, minister, and preach in light of their union with Christ, will ultimately live with a passion for Christ.

THE SUPREMACY OF CHRIST

As pastors, we live, minister, and preach in an unstable world marked by volatility, uncertainty, and insecurity. In the midst of the chaos of this world, we must exalt and proclaim the supremacy of our Lord Jesus Christ. He is the Lord who sovereignly reigns over this world, His church, and our lives. After establishing His supremacy as the sovereign creator and sustainer of the universe (Col. 1:16-17) and as the sovereign head of the church (Col. 1:18), Paul establishes the supremacy of Christ in the words, “So that Christ Himself would have first place in everything.” Giving Christ first place in everything affirms the centrality of Christ in the life of every Christian, especially in the lives of those who are called to pastoral ministry.

On a practical level, do our values, priorities, and pursuits indicate that we are giving Christ the supremacy in our personal lives and churches? When we stand in our pulpits, are we preaching with divine authority, as men whom God has commissioned (2 Tim. 4:1-5), to speak His words as His ambassadors? (2 Cor. 5:2-21). As shepherds in the church of Jesus Christ, we are called to “feed and protect” His sheep (1 Pet. 5:2). This requires us to faithfully proclaim the fact that the Lord Jesus Christ is the risen, ascended, and glorified Christ who has placed “all things under his feet” (Eph. 1:22). The supremacy of Christ clearly fueled Paul’s passion for Christ. It should also be fueling our passion as we lead and preach on behalf of our sovereign King.

THE LORDSHIP OF CHRIST

The apostle Paul most frequently referred to himself as a slave of Jesus Christ ((Rom. 1:1; Phil. 1:1; Tit. 1:1; 2:14; Acts 20:28). He never lost sight of the Lordship of Jesus Christ in his life. In light of the cross of Jesus Christ, he recognized that his life was “not his own” (1 Cor. 6:19) because Christ “bought and purchased” his life (1 Cor. 6:20) on the cross by shedding His “precious blood” (1 Pet. 1:18-19) to redeem Paul’s life. Paul never recovered from the sacrifice of Christ upon the cross on his behalf and was “held in the grip” of that love (2 Cor. 5:14-15), motivating Him to offer His life as a “living sacrifice” (Rom. 12:1), and as a willing slave of Christ (Rom. 1:1) for the rest of his life.

As those who are called to make disciples of Jesus Christ by means of going, baptizing, and teaching (Matt. 28:19-20), one of our primary tasks in the disciple-making process is to help people to live in submission to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. The expression, “teaching them to observe all that I have commanded them” (v.20), is a call from the lips of Christ for his disciples to live out His Sovereign Lordship in every area of their lives. One of the realities that should ignite our passion for Christ and our passion to preach is our responsibility to invite those we preach to respond to the radical call of biblical discipleship. That timeless call is a call to self-denial, cross-bearing, and followership (Matt. 16:24; Luke 9:23-24). Biblical preachers who preach with divine authority refuse to preach to “itching ears” (2 Tim. 4:3) but choose rather to challenge their hearers to submit their lives to the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

THE POWER OF CHRIST RELEASED IN HUMAN WEAKNESS

Divine strength is released in human weakness. The apostle Paul embraced this paradigm in his approach to ministry. Even though this principle is fundamentally counterintuitive to human beings, it is the only principle God has ever used to accomplish His will and purposes on this earth through His servants. Ultimately, this has been the timeless principle God has used in order for Him to receive the glory for what He accomplishes in ministry rather than man. In light of God's refusal to remove Paul's thorn in the flesh in 2 Corinthians 12, God promised that His grace would be sufficient in Paul's life because "God's power is released in human weakness" (2 Cor. 12:9). In response to God's promise, Paul learned to "rejoice in his weaknesses" (2 Cor. 12:9), so that the resurrection power of Christ could empower his life. The combination of divine strength and human weakness caused Paul to conclude, "for when I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Cor. 12:10).

Throughout his epistles, Paul models that in his human weaknesses, Christ released His divine power, which is why he asserts, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens him" (Phil. 4:13). The principle of divine strength being released in human weakness is why Paul prayed so intensely that God would "strengthen those he ministered to with power through His Spirit" (Eph. 3:16), and why he prayed for others "to be strengthened with all power according to His glorious might" (Col. 1:11). As we minister, we must acknowledge, "Not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as coming from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God, who makes us able ministers of the new covenant" (2Cor. 3:5-6). Knowing that the power of Christ is released in human weakness brings hope to our weaknesses and fuels our passion for Christ.

THE MIND OF CHRIST

Those of us who find ourselves in pastoral ministry are on the front lines of a spiritual battle for the hearts, minds, and souls of human beings. The apostle Paul lived his life focused upon the centrality of Christ, with a burning passion for Christ, because he lived with a wartime rather than a peacetime mentality. He encourages us to live with a warfare mentality by commanding us "to put on the armor of light" (Rom. 13:12), "to pick up the weapons of righteousness" (2 Cor. 6:7), "to put on the whole armor of God" (Eph. 6:11;13), and "to endure hardship as good soldiers of Jesus Christ" (2 Tim. 2:3). In 2 Corinthians 10 he reminds us that our minds are the battlefields upon which our spiritual battles are fought (2 Cor. 10:2-5). He challenges us to grasp that the key to victory in our spiritual battles is to "take every one of our thoughts captive to the obedience of Christ" (v.5). This means that every one of our thoughts is to be brought into submission and subjection to Christ to determine whether they are pleasing to Christ.

One of the major objectives of our preaching is to lead to Christ-like transformation in the lives of those we preach to on a regular basis (2 Cor. 3:18). Our preaching should contribute to our people developing the "mind of Christ" (1 Cor. 2:16), which should contribute to them living with a Christian worldview that enables them to think biblically, and to live with biblical discernment. With the goal of helping our people cultivate "the mind of Christ," we must preach with the conviction that the truth of God sanctifies human beings (John 17:17), renews their minds (Rom. 12:2), and promotes spiritual growth in their lives (1Pet. 2:2). Nothing will keep Christ more central in our lives, than a life that is immersed in the Word of God. Nothing will fuel our passion for Christ like a preacher who delights in and mediates upon the Word of God continually (Psalm 1:1-3), as he cultivates the "mind of Christ" in his own life.

INTIMACY WITH CHRIST

A famous Scottish preacher from the 1800s once expressed, “The greatest need for my people is my personal holiness.” This was not a statement of pride but rather a statement of profound humility. He recognized that the quality and depth of his relationship with Jesus Christ would determine the quality of His life and the effectiveness of his ministry, including his preaching. The supreme goal and highest priority in any pastor’s life is their decision to cultivate an intimate and personal love relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. In Philippians 3:10, the apostle Paul shares his credo in life and ministry, “I want to know Christ, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death.”

Paul was not purposing to know Christ intellectually, but rather experientially. He longed and purposed to experience Christ intimately, affectionately, and emotionally in his life and ministry. There is no higher pursuit in the life of any pastor that will have a greater impact upon their life or ministry. Philippians 3:10 is an expression of the centrality of Jesus Christ in Paul’s life. In the immediate context of this verse, he made a choice to consider everything else in his life as “loss” in comparison to knowing Christ Jesus as Lord (Phil. 3:7-8). Philippians 3:10 is also an expression of Paul’s burning passion to love, serve, and exalt Christ in his life. When Philippians 3:10 becomes the grid and the filter that we pour all of the events, people, and circumstances of our lives through, we will maintain a “first-love” (Rev. 2:4) relationship with our Savior that will place us in a position to bring Him maximum glory through our lives and ministries.

THE JUDGMENT SEAT OF CHRIST

One of the most sobering texts for every man who has responded to God’s call for pastoral ministry is 2Corinthians 5:10, “For we must all appear before the Judgment Seat of Christ, that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body according to what he has done, whether good or bad.” The Judgment Seat of Christ ignited Paul’s passion to please Christ at all times, in light of his future accountability to Christ for His life and ministry. The Judgment Seat of Christ is not a judgment that raises the possibility of eternal condemnation or damnation in the life of a believer or pastor because we have been justified (Rom. 5:1) and removed from ever experiencing eternal condemnation (Rom. 8:1; 35-39). The Judgment Seat of Christ is a future reality for all true believers and pastors where our lives will be examined, reviewed, and evaluated, leading to either future reward or future loss (1 Cor. 3:14-15).

The reality of future judgment and accountability in our lives as pastors should fuel a burning passion in our hearts to please Christ (2Cor. 5:9). In addition, it should fuel a sobering sense of accountability for us to be faithful stewards of all that God has entrusted to us for His glory. The Judgment Seat of Christ brings an almost incomprehensible sense of purpose and significance to our lives. We are called to make an eternal difference in this world! Jonathan Edwards once cried out to God in prayer, “Oh God, stamp eternity on my eyes, that I might see this world with an eternal perspective.” That is our awesome privilege and responsibility as pastors, especially in those times when we stand in a pulpit to preach God’s holy, inerrant, and all-sufficient Word. All of our “right now’s” count forever. Living for eternity will stoke our passion for Christ and will help us to persevere in the struggles and challenges that will always be associated with life, this side of eternity, and in pastoral ministry.

THE GLORY AND EXALTATION OF JESUS CHRIST

Paul lived his life for the glory and exaltation of Jesus Christ. This was his “true north” that governed his entire existence. His courageous and resilient spirit in the face of opposition, hardship, and physical persecution was rooted in his passion to see Christ glorified, exalted, magnified, and honored. Even when facing potential martyrdom while in prison, his major preoccupation remained the exaltation and glory of Jesus Christ, “According to my earnest expectation and hope, that I shall not be put to shame in anything, but that with all boldness, Christ shall even now, as always, be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain” (Phil. 1:20-21). The expression “as always” indicates this was an unceasing priority in his life. The reputation of Christ trumped everything in his life.

The glory and exaltation of Jesus Christ must become a motivating factor in our lives to keep Christ, His glory, and His reputation central in all that we do. In light of the fact that God has reminded us that He “does not share His glory with anyone” (Isaiah 42:8), we have all of the incentive that is necessary to keep Christ at the center of our lives, ministries, and pulpits. As those who have been called to pastoral ministry, we must remind ourselves on a regular basis that we exist for Christ, His purposes, and His glory. He does not exist for us, our purposes, and our glory. May this material allow every cohort team leader to celebrate the centrality of Jesus Christ in their cohort groups while igniting a burning passion for Jesus Christ in their own hearts and in the hearts of each of the members in their cohort group.

Cohort Leader: His Philosophy of Ministry

God's purpose on the earth will advance through Bible-saturated, Christ-exalting, God-centered churches, where the gravity and gladness of eternal worship is awakened and rehearsed each week in the presence and power of expository exultation.

(John Piper, *Expository Exultation*, 21.)

In the early 1700s, a lady attended an interchurch celebration of the Lord's Supper, where Ebenezer Erskine delivered an exposition of Scripture that moved her heart. She discovered who he was and decided to attend the church he led the following Sunday. The lady was in Erskine's church and listened to him preach again. However, this time she was not stirred as before. The sermon seemed flat to her, and she was disappointed. She went to talk to Ebenezer Erskine to ask about the difference. Why was there such a difference in her feelings? Erskine replied, "Madam, the reason is this — last Sabbath you went to hear Jesus Christ; but today, you have come to hear Ebenezer Erskine." (Dale Davis, *The Word Became Fresh*, 133)

The Word of God incarnated speaks to us today through the Word of God inscripturated. The only way to hear Jesus today is to hear him in and through the words of the Bible. Too much evangelical preaching today is built around the verbal skills of the preacher, the conversational chattiness of the sermon, the charismatic style of the message, or the cleverness of contemporary connections. Too many come to church to hear a preacher, not Jesus.

Our burden is to call the church to hear the words of Jesus in the words of the Bible. Our passion is to mobilize and equip preachers to show people how the words of the Bible are the words of God. People do not need the preacher to talk about the newspaper headlines or the hot-button topics of television talk shows. They can read and watch these on their own. What people need most is to hear God's word exposed. Sermons should not merely talk about the Bible but must show people how the message comes from the actual words of the Bible. Preachers should demonstrate the connection between what God says in the Bible and what we need today.

Many today consider expository preaching archaic and anachronistic – a relic from the past that is irrelevant to the present. Others think of expository preaching as merely a style of sermon that is one of many styles available to the preacher. However, expository preaching is first a philosophy, a mental approach to the Bible, not a style or a relic. Expository preaching systematically explores, exposes, and explains the Bible so that people hear and see the text as the very words of God. Our conviction about preaching God's Word is that sermons must expose the words of the Bible rather than impose our words on the Bible. Exposition exposes the text so that people hear Jesus as they listen to the preacher.

We sometimes feel like dinosaurs in the modern world, but we are not alone. There are many who hold these convictions as we do, and we are glad to partner with any churches and organizations that believe as we do. You are reading this because you are part of a movement back to expositional preaching and desire to help equip other pastors to become more effective expositors.

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All true Christian preaching is expository preaching. ... Properly speaking, 'exposition' ... refers to the content of the sermon (biblical truth) rather than its style (a running commentary). To expound Scripture is to bring out of the text what is there and expose it to view. The expositor pries open what appears to be closed, makes plain what is obscure, unravels what is knotted, and unfolds what is tightly packed.

(John Stott, *Between Two Worlds*, 125-126)

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OUR MISSION

The Rephidim Project exists to mobilize, equip and encourage pastors worldwide with a blueprint for expositional preaching that produces Christlike believers by the power of the Holy Spirit to the glory of God.

OUR VISION

To develop a team of experienced expositors to equip pastors globally through workshops, cohorts and online resources while partnering with other like-minded organizations to stimulate a movement of the church back to the expositional preaching of God's Word.

Core Values

1. Expository preaching is essential for growing spiritually vibrant and healthy churches.

Bible exposition exposes God's ideas in ways that equip our people to be and do all that God wants them to be and do. Preachers are to equip the saints for ministry to build up the unity and stability of the church (Eph. 4:11-14). Preaching was central to the Christian gatherings in the New Testament (Acts 2:42, 20:7-12, Col. 1:28-29, 2 Tim. 4:2). The sequential and continuous reading and explaining of Scripture is the oldest form of preaching in the Bible (Neh. 7:73-8:12). The evidence from the early church and the first few centuries of church history is that preaching was primarily expository. The church followed the pattern of the synagogues in preaching sequentially, as both Jesus and Paul demonstrated in the synagogues (Luke 4:16-22; Acts 13:14-15). Paul commands the same pattern for Timothy in the church (1 Tim. 4:13, cf. Neh. 8:1-8).

One of the reasons why expository preaching – the sequential reading and explaining of the Bible – is vital to the health of the church is because, in expositional preaching, we model good hermeneutics. People need to see and hear how we interpret Scripture so they can do the same in their personal lives. One reason why so much of the church today is biblically illiterate is that they do not understand how to interpret the Bible. They see a Bible study model that demonstrates a spiritualized emphasis on what the Bible means to me instead of what the Bible means.

2. The crying need of the church is for God-centered, Word-explaining messages.

Evangelical preaching today is generally man-centered. The average person thinks, "I go to church to hear messages for me and about me." Preachers oblige to attract the crowds. The worship service becomes a transactional event where the preacher delivers what the people want, and the people support the work of the church. Christ is a need fulfiller, so the sermon is all about felt needs and life apps. No wonder we have so much consumer Christianity in our churches. God exists to meet our needs, and if our needs are not met in this church, we will find another one. There is a desperate need for a return to God-centered preaching in our churches. The Bible is God's story from start to finish. It is all about Him, not about us. The most relevant preaching is God-centered preaching. This does not mean that we ignore the needs of our people. God-centered preaching trusts that God made us, so He knows us better than we know ourselves. God knows what we most need, and we most need God. If we explain God's Word, we will address the needs of our people. Pastoral preaching seeks to explain how God wants His people to live in their everyday lives because of what God has done for them in Christ.

3. All Scripture is intentionally useful to equip Christ's disciples for effective service.

God intends His Word to do something whenever we preach it (Isaiah 55:11). There is a transformative power in expository preaching because God's Spirit inhabits His Word and empowers His preachers (1 Cor. 2:12-13; 2 Cor. 3:4-6; Col. 1:29). We must always be ready to preach His Word – to reprove, rebuke, and exhort in our sermons (2 Tim. 4:2). The purpose of expository preaching is that “the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work” (2 Tim. 3:17). The goal of preaching is to “present every man complete in Christ” (Col. 1:28-29). Every sermon on every passage should be intentionally purposeful. We must know what we want to do with each message because we have prayerfully and carefully studied what God wants to do with each passage. All Scripture is useful. It is utilitarian. God has a purpose for every unit of thought He has revealed in the Bible (2 Tim. 3:16). Our job is to figure out what that purpose is for our people and then deliver it to them.

What about topical preaching? We all can and sometimes must preach topical messages. Topical preaching can be expository if we expose God's ideas from each text and not impose our ideas on each text. Thematic preaching becomes expository when the preacher exegetes each text and shows the people how the topic being addressed rises out of that text. Eisegesis, the flaw in much topical preaching, reads into the text what God is not saying in the text. Topical expository preaching – topical preaching – can be very effective to supplement the regular diet of the church as long as we make sure to be expository in our use of Scripture.

4. The goal of pastoral preaching is to produce Christlike believers who are being transformed by God's Spirit.

The purpose of the Bible is to make us like Christ (2 Cor. 3:18). God wants His children to look, think, feel, and act like Jesus Christ. God is in the business through His Word of restoring the image of God in man (Rom. 8:29; Eph. 3:19; 4:13-16). God created us perfect in His image (Gen. 1:26-27). Sin marred that image by the fall of man into sin. The image is still there, but it is defaced. God planned in eternity past for this eventuality, and the whole Bible is God's story of restoring His image in His children. Jesus is the perfect model for God's image in humanity (Mt. 20:26-28; John 13:15; Rom. 15:1-3; 1 Thess. 1:6; Eph. 5:2; Phil. 2:5; 1 Peter 2:21; 1 John 2:6; 3:16).

Since the purpose of the Bible is to remake us in the image of Christ, pastoral preaching intends to present our people “complete in Christ” (Col. 1:28). Paul wrote that we proclaim, “Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Col. 1:27). The message Paul preached was Christ in you, not just Christ on the cross. Christ on the cross is the foundation for Christ in you, but Christ in you is more than Christ on the cross. Justification must lead to sanctification. Christ in you is a sanctification message. We must not just preach to get people saved. We must preach to get people sanctified, which Paul makes clear later in the verse when he says that his goal is to present people “complete in Christ.” Christ in you is about you becoming complete in Christ; that is a sanctification message, not a justification-only message. It is the big gospel, not the small gospel.

5. Expository preaching is unit of thought preaching which applies the exegetical thrust of each passage to people today.

Every Bible passage has only one meaning but many applications. Exegesis is reading God's meaning out of that text. The text means what the author meant by the words he used in their context. Preaching loses its God-intended purpose when divorced from the God-inspired text. God breathed His Word through His writers to do something, to accomplish something (2 Tim. 3:16-17; Isaiah 55:11). Every sermon should do what God intended to do through the passage being explained. We must preach what the original author intended to say. It is not; what does this mean to me, but what did the author intend to communicate? Whenever we, as preachers, select the text we will use to preach in church, we are implicitly telling our congregation that this is a segment of Scripture that can stand on its own and has something to say to us today. Expository preaching is unit of thought preaching. Every unit of thought has a theological thrust. Every biblical author intends to do something by what He is saying. So, every Scripture passage is, on some level, a call to action. We must ask what the thrust of this passage is and apply that thrust to our people.

6. The Bible is the authoritative and sufficient source for expository preaching, not merely a resource for the preacher to use.

The presence of God is in the preaching of His Word. The power of God is found in the Word of God (2 Tim. 3:16, 4:2). The Word of God is the scalpel that slices into the heart of man, revealing our thoughts and intentions (Heb. 4:12). Many modern preachers have lost faith in the Word of God, which is why they rarely read that Word or preach it in context. Preachers today use the Word as a resource to sanctify their ideas and methods rather than as a source to define His doctrine and His solutions. In our quest for modern relevance, we have lost sight of the presence of God in His Word. We pay lip service to it, but our hearts are not in it. If I am using the Bible as a resource, I use the Bible to support what I want to say. The Bible sanctifies my ideas with God's authority. If I use the Bible as a source, I seek to preach what the text says. I expose the text to the people. The thrust of the passage becomes the thrust of my sermon. The structure of the passage becomes the structure of the sermon. Expository preaching exposes the Word of God for people to see and hear. We need to trust the presence of God in the Word of God to transform the hearts of humans through our preaching. We need to be Isaiah 55:11 preachers.

7. Effective preaching is God-dependent, Spirit-directed transformational preaching.

The power for transformational preaching comes from the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 2:4-5). We prepare, but He empowers. Paul explains that process a few verses later when he writes that we speak the things of God “not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual ideas with spiritual words” (1 Cor. 2:13). A convergence takes place in preaching between spiritual ideas and the words used to convey those ideas. It is a convergence of form (words) and content (ideas) so that the Spirit is directing the message being preached. The spiritual truth and the spiritual speech converge into a transformational message from God in the sermon of the preacher. Our sermons become Spirit-directed and Spirit-empowered when our words are aligned with his will so that our message is his message. Transformational preaching is God-dependent preaching (2 Cor. 3:5-6).

“

The preaching of Scripture is not for the purpose of imparting information, but for transforming people by the power of the Holy Spirit – the changing of lives to conform to the image of Christ, by the instrumentality of God’s Word.

(Abraham Kuruvilla, *Privilege the Word!* 268)

”

Educational Presuppositions

Learning models are built on presuppositions – assumptions that undergird the framework of the educational system and are foundational to the learning process. The Rephidim Project is built on the following presuppositions. Sometimes these will become explicit in our seminars and cohorts, but often they are implicit in the way we do things.

1. Progress is more important than perfection (1 Tim. 4:15)

We are commanded to practice or cultivate our preaching ministry (1 Tim. 4:13) so as to make progress that will be evident to others. The goal is progress, not perfection. The noun was used to refer to advancement in a professional career. The Stoics used it as a philosophical term for progress toward wisdom. All preachers should be lifelong learners of preaching, always arriving but never arrived. We must avoid the temptation to think that we are good enough preachers that we don't need to learn or change our preaching.

2. Expository preaching is more caught than taught.

The truth is that we learn to preach by listening to and watching preachers who shape our approach to preaching. If you have never sat under an expositor, you will find it difficult to preach expositionally. Everyone needs a model (or two or three!). This is one reason why we include the exposition of Scripture in our seminars. You need to see it and hear it to do it.

3. We learn to preach by preaching.

No one learns to preach by sitting in a classroom or attending a seminar. The lecture notes are stuck on a shelf and eventually forgotten. Classes on Homiletics in seminaries and Bible colleges impart information and attempt to simulate preaching through labs, but they are fake sermons in clinical settings. The only way to learn to preach is by preaching to a church full of people who need to hear the Word of God. The only way to learn to preach sequential exposition of the Bible is to do it week in and week out with a local church.

4. We never improve what we never measure.

Many professionals must be regularly re-certified by passing tests to determine their competence. Runners measure their improvement with a stopwatch. How do preachers measure their preaching? Without a yardstick, how do we measure growth? Many preachers take a class on Homiletics in school where they have to pass tests and submit sermons for evaluation but make no progress in their preaching after seminary. Why? There is no measurement process. Preaching cohorts are designed to offer a way to measure progress as preachers through collaborative learning and peer review.

5. Peer review is necessary for professional growth.

Peer review is humbling and intimidating. One of the foundational components of continuing education in many careers is peer review. Peer-reviewed articles and peer-reviewed practices are standard requirements in many professions. They should be standard practices for the continuing education of preachers as well. Without peer review, we are left with the gushing superlatives of our church members that leave us with a false impression of success.

6. Lasting learning involves a process of self-discovery.

We learn best what we discover ourselves. Lectures are intended to tell us information. Seminars and workshops unload information on us that may not work in our local context. The dump truck fallacy of much higher education doesn't lead to lasting learning. The information is soon forgotten. The notebooks are put aside. We retain the lessons we discover for ourselves. Guided self-discovery is the key to unlocking learning that lasts. Skills are developed through repetitive practice. What we do reinforces what we know. What we try teaches us where we need to grow.

7. Effective learning requires time and space.

Competency-based learning is not static but dynamic. In a classroom, time and space are fixed to the hour and place of learning, but the amount of learning is variable according to the abilities of the students to absorb and regurgitate information. This is synchronous learning. Competency-based learning requires learning over time and in various spaces. This is asynchronous learning. Preaching is a skill best learned in asynchronous ways. The preacher learns some new information and puts it into practice over time and in various places. Then the preacher returns to evaluate and process what has been learned and to learn more skills to practice.

8. Small groups create the best learning environments.

Jesus practiced discipleship mostly in small groups. He taught his three and his twelve. He preached to the crowds and mobilized the seventy but taught in small groups. The small group is the best learning environment. Learning becomes cumbersome and often superficial in groups beyond twelve. We have found that groups of six to eight provide the optimum forum for learning to take place. The small group allows for deep interaction and helps everyone explore new information more effectively. Collaborative learning requires high levels of interaction because each individual processes information differently. Over time, trust develops among the group members, leading to deeper levels of personal growth.

Training Levels: Ministry Strategy

Our training takes place on three levels. Level 1 is the seminars, workshops, and think tanks. Level 2 is the preaching cohorts. Level 3 is leadership training. Cohort leaders are the heart of our ministry. You are reading this manual because you are engaged in cohort leader training. Cohort leaders are trained to lead cohorts. The preaching cohort is the focus of our ministry. The cohort leader is the heart of our ministry.

Seminars are at the introductory level. Seminars are designed to mobilize pastors to seek more training. Our seminars are designed to seed the preaching cohorts with new members. We want to persuade preachers at our seminars to join a preaching cohort because it is in the preaching cohort that real learning takes place. The preaching cohort is the center of the Rephidim Project.

LEVEL 1: SEMINARS AND THINK TANKS

PURPOSE: To inspire and instruct

Our seminars are one-day events designed to mobilize and equip preachers for expository preaching. Our goal is to mobilize preachers who will grow Christlike believers through expository preaching. To achieve that goal, we seek to equip preachers with the skills to improve their own expository preaching. Usually, seminars are team-taught and involve four teaching sessions. Typically, the seminar includes two preaching sessions to begin and end the day. The messages are intended to inspire and model expositional preaching. The middle of the day includes two teaching sessions that focus on the mechanics of expository preaching. We have five seminars built around the SAFNS Funnel.

LEVEL 2: PREACHING COHORTS

PURPOSE: To equip and encourage

VISION: To establish cohorts of pastors who covenant together to develop and improve their skills in expository preaching through collaborative learning, mutual encouragement, and personal accountability.

COHORT: A cohort is a group of 6-8 preachers who commit to meet quarterly for twenty-four months.

LEVEL 3: LEADERSHIP TRAINING

OBJECTIVE: To develop a team of experienced expositors to equip pastors who will stimulate a movement of the church back to the expositional preaching of God's Word.

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THINK TANKS

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LEVEL 2
PREACHING
COHORTS

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LEVEL 3
LEADERSHIP
TRAINING

Cohort Leader: His Methodology

What is preaching? Logic on fire! ... It is theology on fire. And a theology which does not take fire, I maintain, is a defective theology; or at least the man's understanding of it is defective. Preaching is theology coming through a man who is on fire.

(D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching and Preachers-Back from the Dead*, 97)

Bill Walton had dreamed of playing basketball for John Wooden at UCLA since he was twelve. Now he had arrived. It was the first day of practice. Wooden, the legendary coach who would eventually win ten NCAA national championships in a twelve-year span, including seven in a row, gathered the team for his first instructions. The coach sat on a stool to begin teaching.

His first words were: "Men, this is how you put your shoes and socks on."

Walton was shocked. He thought, "What? We're all high school All-American basketball players. We don't need this. Is he kidding?" The players looked at each other in amazement as they watched Wooden take off his shoes and socks and teach them how to correctly put on their socks and lace up their shoes so they wouldn't get blisters. As time went on, they often rolled their eyes at the Wooden lessons like "the pyramid of success," "seven-point creed," "two sets of threes," and "four laws of learning." He was meticulous in his training methods. They would return regularly to the basics because they were foundational to the success of the team and the players. From the stars to the bench warmers, every player learned the same lessons repeated at the first practice of every year. (Bill Walton, *Back from the Dead*)

Success in anything begins with the basics.

Preaching is no different. We need to return regularly to the basics so that we maintain a strong foundation for our ministries. Why? Because we fall into ruts, develop bad habits, get sloppy, and lose our focus. It is easy to do in the busyness of pastoral ministry. There are so many responsibilities to complete, and people have overwhelming needs. Pastoral care consumes our time and energy. Conflicts and criticisms steal our spirits. We have to preach on Sunday, so we grab what we can find. "This will preach!" Most of us have the gift of gab, so we can put thoughts together that sound good and perhaps even inspire people. We know what works, so we fall into the "do-do-do" cycle of preaching. What we most need is to get back to the basic disciplines of preaching so that we learn in fresh ways, dig deeper into God's Word, and feed our people nutritious feasts instead of junk food.

The preaching cohort focuses on the basics of preaching.





Effective preaching is biblical content preached with clarity and conviction out of a life deeply committed to the Lord with a heartfelt concern for the needs of people.

Classical rhetoric in the first century emphasized the resources that a speaker used to prove his argument to the audience. The resources were called “proofs,” and they divided those proofs into three categories. The three kinds of proofs were ethos, logos, and pathos. The Greek term the rhetors used for “proof” was the word the New Testament used for faith (pistis). In classical rhetoric, proof resulted from a demonstration (apodeixis) of power. The goal of a speaker was to prove his argument by a demonstration of logos, ethos, and pathos – the proofs. Demonstrations of logos, ethos, and pathos show us what we should believe. Paul used these terms in his argument for preaching in 1 Corinthians 2:4-5, but he argued that it was the power of the Holy Spirit that made these proofs persuasive. (For a fuller discussion, see David Christensen, *The Persuasive Preacher*, 22-26)

My message (logos) and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration (apodeixis) of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith (pistis) would not be on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God. (1 Corinthians 2:4-5)

- Pathos: the world to which preachers speak. (Audience)
- Ethos: The character with which preachers speak. (Preacher)
- Logos: the message that preachers speak. (Message)

The proofs, logos + ethos + pathos, are multiplied by the power of the Holy Spirit to produce transformational learning. The preacher’s equation looks like this:

H.S. x (Message + Preacher + Hearer) = Learning!

However, the three proofs are not equal in biblical preaching. They work in concert with one another, but there is an order of priority in Pauline theology. Logos must always be the priority. Ethos is next, and pathos must always be last in order of importance. This is a snapshot of Paul’s argument in 1 Corinthians 2. Pathetic preaching is audience-driven preaching. The ethical danger for preachers is to emphasize the wants of the audience over the truth of the message, which becomes sophistic preaching – the very preaching Paul is arguing against. “The apostolic model for preaching stressed message over method, the Spirit over emotions, and so avoided pathetic preaching.” (Christensen, *The Persuasive Preacher*, 25.)

Cohort Leader: Qualifications

The biblical qualifications for providing pastoral oversight and leadership within the local church are clearly presented in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9. In light of the fact that The Rephidim Project is primarily a ministry to mobilize, equip, and encourage pastors, the qualifications for a cohort team leader are the same spiritual, moral, and character qualities that are found in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1. In light of the mission of The Rephidim Project, which is to produce Christlike believers by the power of the Holy Spirit to the glory of God, there is no higher priority in this ministry than to enlist cohort team leaders who are experiencing Christlike transformation in their own lives and ministries (Rom. 8:29; 2 Cor. 3:18; 1 Pet. 2:21 and 1 Jn. 2:6). In addition to the foundational character qualities of 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1, the purpose of this document is to highlight a number of vital qualifications, that from a practical standpoint, are critical to successfully leading a cohort group as a cohort team leader.

Qualification #1: A cohort team leader must be committed to the mission and vision of The Rephidim Project.

The mission of The Rephidim Project is to mobilize, equip and encourage pastors worldwide with a blueprint for expositional preaching that produces Christlike believers by the power of the Holy Spirit to the glory of God. Our vision is to develop a team of experienced expositors to equip pastors globally through workshops, cohorts, and online resources while partnering with other like-minded organizations to stimulate a movement of the church back to the expositional preaching of God's Word.

Qualification #2: A cohort team leader must fully affirm and strongly declare that the Scriptures are the holy, inerrant, authoritative, and all-sufficient Word of God.

Our vision for expository preaching is rooted in our uncompromising commitment to the absolute trustworthiness of Scripture in light of the fact that God's Word is without error or fault in all of its teaching (Psalm 19:7; Psalm 119:160; John 10:35; 17:17; 2 Pet. 1:20-21). We believe in the sufficiency of the Word of God because the Scriptures address in a comprehensive manner everything we need to know related to the salvation and sanctification of human beings (2 Tim. 3:16-17). This fuels our conviction that all preaching must be "text-driven" preaching that determines the contextual meaning of every passage that is preached, with the goal of applying the sermon to our lives today.



Qualification #3: A cohort team leader must be a competent expositor of the Word who is able to model the art of expository preaching as he seeks to promote expository preaching in the lives of others.

Effective leadership in every realm of life requires the ability to lead by example. This includes a cohort team leader who possesses the ability to “rightly divide the word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:15). Cohort team leaders can influence others to improve their preaching skills through their years of disciplined sermon preparation, as they have sought to proclaim “the whole counsel of God” (Acts 20:27) throughout their ministries.

Qualification #4: A cohort team leader must possess a love for pastors and a passion to see them grow spiritually, interpersonally, emotionally, and in their preaching skills.

Cohort team leaders are in a unique place to “shepherd” the shepherds in their cohort groups in light of their love for pastors and their understanding of the unique challenges of pastoral ministry. In the spirit of the apostle Paul, cohort team leaders intentionally share the truth of God, their past experiences in ministry, and their lives out of their love for their team members (1 Thess. 2:8; 1 Cor. 13:1-3).

Qualification #5: A cohort team leader must possess leadership skills that empower their team members and the group as a whole to improve their preaching skills through the cohort team process.

As leaders, cohort team leaders seek to inspire, motivate, influence, and encourage their team members to pursue Christlike transformation in their lives (2 Cor. 3:18) and increased proficiency in effectively preaching the Word of God (2 Tim. 4:1-5). Every cohort team leader must possess strong one-on-one coaching skills with the ability to give appropriate feedback for those who are participating together in their group (Proverbs 18:13; James 1:19).

Qualification #6: A cohort team leader must pray faithfully for their team members while acknowledging that a successful cohort group is the direct result of the ministry of the Holy Spirit rather than the work of man.

The timeless principle of God building a strong house in Psalm 127 is applicable to building a strong cohort group, “Unless the LORD builds the cohort group, they labor in vain that build it” (Psalm 127:1; Eph. 6:18-19; Col. 4:3; 1Thess. 5:25). A cohort team leader must lead their cohort group prayerfully, and with their dependence upon the Holy Spirit, with Paul’s philosophy of ministry as it is found in 2 Corinthians 3:5-6, “Not that we are sufficient in ourselves to claim anything as coming from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God, who has made us sufficient to be ministers of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit. For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life” (2 Cor. 3:5-6; 12:9-10).

Qualification #7: A cohort leader must be a lifelong learner who is making progress, not perfection, in his preaching ministry (1 Timothy 4:15).

None of us will ever arrive as preachers! We will always be in the process of “pressing on” (Phil. 3:14) as we spend the rest of our lives growing as disciples of Jesus Christ and as preachers. The brotherhood model of The Rephidim Project is an opportunity for us to make progress in both our spiritual lives and our preaching skills as we live out the New Testament “one another” passages within our groups.

Cohort Leader Responsibilities

Each Cohort Team Leader should have proven leadership skills. He should be an able expository preacher in his own right, but wanting to encourage expository preaching in others while sharing, guiding, and personally growing.

- Cohort Team Leaders shall establish regular meetings of their cohort. At the minimum, meetings should be once a quarter to facilitate the follow-through and encouragement for all participants in the Cohort group.
- Cohort Team Leaders are coaches who guide the group in determining the needs and interests of the pastors and who lead the group in prayer and discussion.
- Cohort Team Leaders should facilitate the discussion of various preaching topics, book reviews, and other sermon resources as they coach the cohort members to become more effective expository preachers.
- At each cohort meeting, the preaching of one or two group members will be analyzed in a collaborative fashion for the purpose of peer review.
- The Cohort Team leaders will determine the best means to accomplish effective peer review. (e.g., video, audio, or live preaching)
- The Cohort Team leaders will provide preaching tools and resources to fellow team members supplied through our resource partners. The Rephidim Project will cover the cost of these materials.

Cohort Member Responsibilities

- Cohort members commit to work with each other in prayer and mutual encouragement on a regular basis for twenty-four months.
- Cohort members are encouraged to share suggestions with the Team Leaders as they construct the individualized educational plan for what topics and resources to discuss in the cohort meetings.
- Cohort members agree to share sermons with each other for constructive criticism and personal accountability, understanding that if we never measure our preaching, we will never improve our preaching. Peer review is an essential component of the preaching cohorts.
- Cohort members agree to read and study preaching resources and share insights with each other on a regular basis. The Rephidim Project will develop, provide and suggest resources for personal growth to the members of the cohort. Many resources are available on our website.
- Cohort members agree to attend a seminar or workshop in their geographical area whenever possible. The Rephidim Project will organize and schedule seminars and workshops as desired in any given region.

Cohort Methodology

I wonder if a good chunk of our hermeneutical problem may simply be a heart problem. Maybe we get off the track in our interpretation because our eyes are fastened on the wrong object. ... Maybe we are seeking sermons and not him.

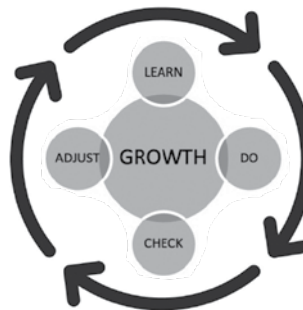
(Dale Davis, *The Word Became Fresh*, 133)

Every preacher should return to the fundamentals of preaching regularly to maintain his skills in preaching and to break out of the ruts we all fall into as preachers. As John Wooden taught Hall of Fame players like Bill Walton, even the stars must return to the basics every year. Preachers should do the same by getting back to the basics regularly. We believe that continuing education in preaching is vital for ministry to avoid the doing cycle that simply repeats whatever we have done in the past. It is too easy in the busyness of pastoral ministry to fall into the do-do-do cycle. We need to:

DUMP THE DO-DO-DO CYCLE



GO FOR THE GROWTH CYCLE



LEARN:

One of the core elements of preaching cohorts is the study and discussion of homiletics. The Rephidim Project suggests many books and topics for ongoing discussion. Each preaching cohort can select from these suggestions to develop the learning component of the meeting. In addition, we have instructional videos that can be used to hone the basic preaching skills of the group. Here is a list of the SAFNS teaching videos available on our website.

- Interrogating the Text
- Creating a Structural Diagram
- The Big Idea
- Aiming the Sermon
- Framing the Message
- Application: The Heart of the Message
- The Conclusion: Sealing the Deal
- The Introduction: Awakening the Need

We also have longer, more in-depth videos as well as numerous articles on preaching. You will find many resources for learning on our website.

DO:

Submitting sermons for peer review is an essential part of the cohort model. Each cohort meeting should include a sermon by one of the members. The sermons may be presented live or in a video recording. We discourage the use of audio recordings since these do not give adequate information for evaluation. Visual information is vital to effective communication.

It can be intimidating for all of us to submit our sermons for review by our peers, but it is a healthy part of the growth process. Presenting our sermons for peer review makes us feel vulnerable. It is humbling and can even be scary. The cohort needs to develop a level of trust that allows the members to overcome these feelings and submit their work to others for evaluation. Members need to learn to give and receive constructive criticism from one another.

CHECK:

We never improve what we never measure. Constructive criticism is valuable for improvement in our preaching. The group may use two different tools on our website for peer review. The “Sermon Feedback Guide” and “The Expositor’s Grid” are both available on the website, and either may be used as a tool for peer review. All constructive criticism includes both positive and negative observations. The goal must be to help one another improve. Preachers are not competing with one another in the cohort. We must all develop a Christlike humility as we submit to the review process as brothers in Christ.

ADJUST:

Preachers should make adjustments in their preaching as a result of the cohort process. Sometimes those adjustments will be minor, and sometimes they will be major, but all growth involves some change. We cannot grow without change. We cannot improve without adjustments.

The preaching cohort is not a class where an instructor seeks to impart information. Information is needed, but knowledge is not the goal. The goal of a preaching cohort is to get beyond information to develop and practice new skills. Habits and skills are not established quickly, nor are they developed by processing and regurgitating information. Skills must be practiced to become established. It all starts with the proper attitude – a teachable attitude that wants to grow.

The Attitude, Knowledge, Practice, and Skill Development Model:



- Quadrant 1: A preacher acknowledges their need to improve their preaching skills and with a positive attitude and a strong reliance upon God's Spirit, believes he can and will improve his preaching.
- Quadrant 2: A preacher gains the necessary knowledge, information, ideas, concepts, and principles that are designed to improve his preaching skills.
- Quadrant 3: A preacher is challenged to go beyond the knowledge trap to intentionally practice and apply the knowledge, information, ideas, concepts, and principles that are designed to strengthen his preaching skills.
- Quadrant 4: A preacher achieves the ultimate objective of the cohort model, which is the development of skills, habits, and practices that will lead to continuous improvement in his preaching skills.

Cohort Leader: His Framework

The preacher creates the sermon, he does not create the message.
(Sinclair Ferguson, *The Preacher and Preaching*, 192)

Preaching should be God centered because God is God centered and wants us to be God centered in everything we do.
(Kenneth Langley, *Homiletics and Hermeneutics*, 81)

A 2017 Gallup poll revealed the two major reasons why Americans attend church:¹

- 1) Sermons teaching Scripture – 76%
- 2) Sermons relevant to life – 75%

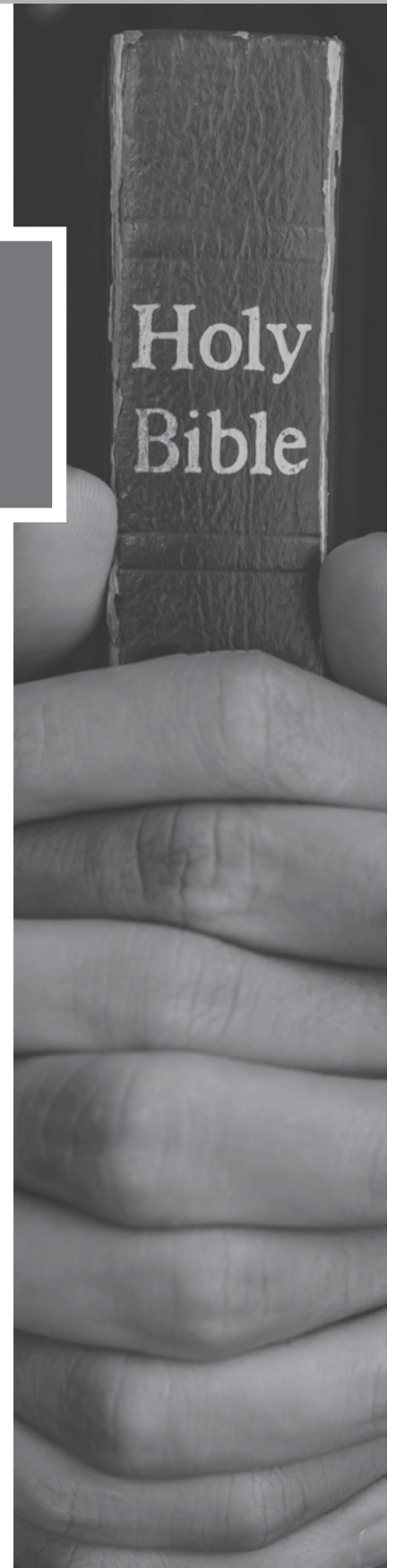
Bible content and practical application are essential for effective preaching. People want to know what the Bible says and how it relates to their everyday lives. The American Bible Society released its 10th annual “State of the Bible” survey in July 2020 and noted that almost 68% of Americans wanted to learn more about the Bible. However, 57% of Protestants find it difficult to understand the Bible on their own. The Willow Creek Community Church REVEAL study in 2007 found that the core people in their church were the most likely to leave the church because the church was not “taking them deep enough into the Scriptures.” Willow Creek, the pioneer of attractional Christianity, found that seeker-oriented preaching was good at attracting crowds but failed to teach people the Bible.

The love affair with attractional Christianity is not producing disciples of Jesus Christ. Churches are increasingly filled with Christians who are biblically and theologically shallow at best and illiterate at worst. Ligonier Ministries and LifeWay Research partnered in releasing the State of Theology in 2022. The findings are shocking. Here are some statistics about evangelicals.

- 48% believe that “God learns and adapts to different circumstances.”
- 65% say that “everyone is born innocent in the eyes of God.”
- 56% say that “God accepts the worship of all religions, including Christianity, Judaism, and Islam.”
- 43% agree that “Jesus was a great teacher, but he was not God.”²

¹<https://news.gallup.com/poll/208529/sermon-content-appeals-churchgoers.aspx>

²https://thestateoftheology.com/?utm_medium=instagram&utm_source=linktree&utm_campaign=2022+results+now+available%3A+the+state+of+theology



WHAT IS EXPOSITORY PREACHING?

Expository preaching is the explanation of a biblical passage in its context that forms a complete unit of thought shaped by the intent of the original author, and the structure of the passage, which the Holy Spirit applies to the preacher and through the personality of the preacher makes the message relevant to people today.

(Adapted from Haddon Robinson, *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages*, Baker Academic, 2001, p.20).

WHAT EXPOSITORY PREACHING IS NOT

It is not motivational speaking.

It is not a topical talk.

It is not verse-by-verse commentary.

It is not a theological lecture.

Expository Preaching

Expository preaching ought to be the primary focus of the preaching ministry in the church. Why? Expository preaching allows the Word of God to speak for itself with minimal human interference. It exposes the text. In other words, it is the method that balances the exegetical with the practical, seeking to understand the text as the author intended it to be understood and apply the text as the listeners need it applied. Expository preaching points people to trust in the authority of the Bible, not the genius of the preacher. Expository preaching helps people understand the Bible and models for people how to study the Bible and apply it to their daily lives.

The crying need of the church is for God-centered, Word-explaining messages. Regular, systematic, and sequential exposition of the Bible is the solution. Christ commissioned us to make disciples (Mt. 28:19-20), not attract crowds. Missional preaching is needed to evangelize non-Christians, but expository preaching is needed to train disciples.

There are five key characteristics of an expository sermon.

1. The central idea of the passage as it stands in its context is the central idea of the sermon.

The preacher's objective is first to understand what the biblical author was trying to communicate with that unit of thought. The preacher must begin with what it meant to them in their day to determine what it means to us in our day. We are often tempted to bypass what it means to get to how it applies to our lives. This temptation is always dangerous for preaching because it divorces our message from the authority of God's Word and marries the message to the cleverness of the preacher. Preaching can degenerate into form without substance and style without content.

Every expository sermon is preached on a unit of thought. The central idea of that unit of thought becomes the central idea of the sermon. The preacher must encapsulate the unit of thought into a single sentence with a subject and complement. Identifying the central idea may well be one of the most difficult parts of the process of preaching. The better the preacher can state the single main idea of the passage, the easier the sermon will be to preach. The weaker the central idea, the more problems the preacher will have in organizing the sermon.

2. The sermon focuses the message on meeting the needs of the people.

The preacher must move beyond biblical content to the needs of the people. There is a tendency to preach on our interests instead of the people's needs. There is a tendency to preach to our peers in the theological world rather than the people in the factory. Many preachers enjoy learning – digging into the facts, words, grammar, history, and culture of the Bible – so there is a real temptation to focus on the information we have dug up from our study. It is easy to forget that the average person in the church is not as excited about those same facts as we are. They come to church with needs that they expect the sermon to address.

Every sermon should be preached for a specific purpose. The preacher focuses the biblical content on the specific needs of the people, like a good photographer uses his camera settings to narrow his depth of field to focus the lens on the subject in the picture. Every sermon should be designed to do something in the hearts of the hearers. Vague purposes produce worthless sermons. How do we develop a specific purpose for a specific sermon? We must learn to identify the needs of the people to whom we are speaking. If we do not know those needs, then we must discover them. The preacher exegetes the Bible and the people. The intersection of those two exegetical disciplines forms the purpose of the sermon.

3. The structure of the passage determines the organization of the sermon.

Good expository preaching is not a hit-or-miss, trial-and-error methodology. Many expository sermons are organized like a running commentary of spiritual insights. The preacher often has many good things to say but no organization to focus the message. The sermon follows a stream of consciousness flowing from the mind of the preacher and meandering from thought to thought. People leave this kind of sermon saying, “there were great things there, but I had a hard time following him.” People need order and structure for good communication to take place. Minds wander when the sermon meanders!

Expository preaching exposes the ideas in the biblical unit of thought, so the sermon follows the flow of the passage being exposed. The hearers should be able to think their way through the passage after the sermon has been preached. The sermon derives the main points from the structure of the passage. The way the author developed his thoughts is the way we must try to develop them in the sermon. In structural analysis, we seek to trace the arrangement of the passage by following the textual clues the original author has provided. The objective is to see the flow of thought through the relationships of the words in the passage. We want to see what the author was trying to emphasize rather than what we want to emphasize. The preacher seeks to visualize the flow of thought – to picture the structure of the passage. The sermon should expose the hinges on which the passage swings by developing an outline based on the structure but written in contemporary language.

4. The sermon explains the Scriptures as a coherent and coordinated body of truth.

All Scripture is brought together to teach and explain the passage but not imposed on that passage. The sermon explains the passage in a way that is theologically consistent with the rest of Scripture. Scripture must relate to Scripture. This principle is often called “the analogy of faith” or, as Grant Osborne calls it more accurately, “the analogy of Scripture.” (*The Hermeneutical Spiral*, InterVarsity Press, 1991, p.11) There is a bigger context for every sermon because, ultimately, the Bible has one author communicating His truth through many human personalities. Every sermon must fit the bigger picture of the Bible. If we end up merely describing the text in its historical context, our sermons will be anemic, irrelevant, or worse – heretical. Theological analysis forces us to think theologically about the text in the context of all Scripture.

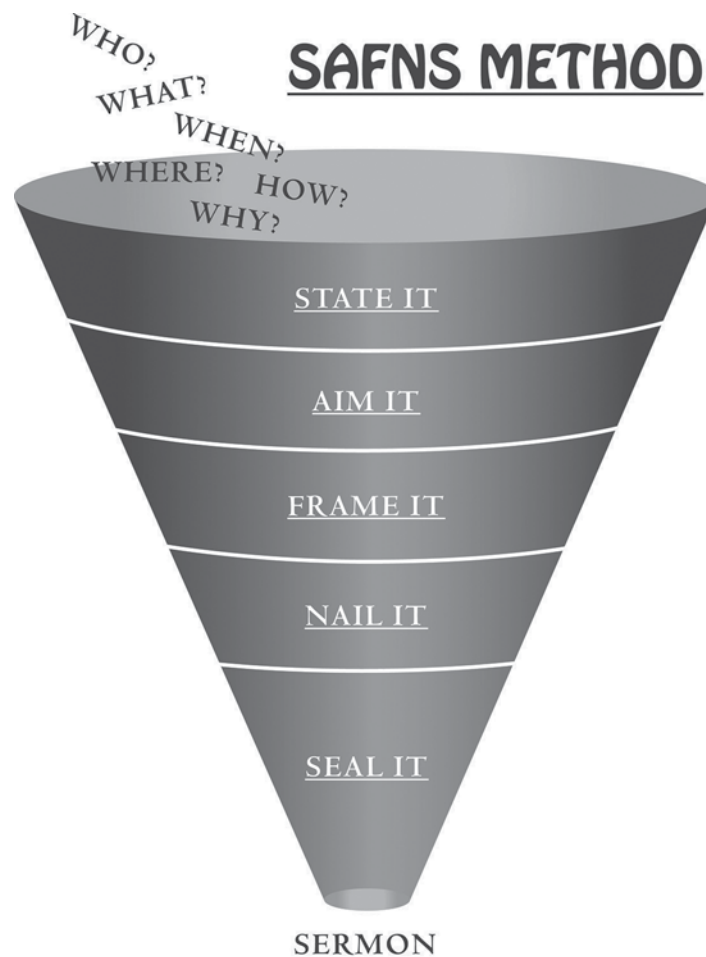
Utilize the method of biblical or exegetical theology. Antecedent information is the foundation for Biblical theology. What did the writer of the sermon text know about that doctrine at the time he wrote the passage? What theological knowledge preceded him? Be careful about “parallelomania” – grabbing a similar passage or word and assuming it informs the meaning of the text being studied. The author did not have access to later revelation, so the preacher must be careful not to read back into the text doctrine derived from later revelation unless there is good reason to do so. Transferring the meaning of one passage to another without regard to context is illegitimate. Parallel passages must be used with care.

5. The passage is applied first to the preacher and then to the listeners.

The Word of God must relate to people so that the power of the Holy Spirit changes lives. It must be practical, or it is worthless. It must have a bearing on the lives of people in the pews because it is changing us as preachers. We must always preach with the needs of the listener in mind, not merely the felt needs but the real needs. Diagnosing the real needs of people in the audience requires an understanding of their felt needs, married to an understanding of their spiritual needs. The felt needs are the symptoms that lead to a proper diagnosis.

The preacher must make sure that the passage says it before he applies it. Application without exegesis is like a bowl of plastic fruit. It looks pretty but doesn’t satisfy. Application without exegesis is like a mirage. It looks beautiful but isn’t real. The preacher must not divorce what it means to us from what it means to them. The preacher must look for contemporary life parallels between the situations people faced in the Bible and the situations that people face today. The contemporary life parallel (CLP) should be as specific and concrete as possible so that people grasp the relevance of Scripture to their situational needs.

The SAFNS Funnel



Preaching is disciple-making. Our purpose in preaching is to grow fully developed followers of Jesus Christ. We must not neglect the often-forgotten word in the Great Commission given to us by Jesus when he called us to teach the people “to observe ALL that I commanded you” (Mt. 28:20). As Paul told the Ephesian elders, “I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God” (Acts 20:27). Expository preaching is the best way to achieve the purpose of disciple-making in corporate worship.

Every preacher follows a method. The SAFNS Funnel represents the method The Rephidim Project recommends. Following is a summary of the SAFNS method.

State it - Aim it - Frame it - Nail it - Seal it!

STATE IT

The great temptation we face as preachers is to start our preparation by asking two pragmatic questions. 1) What does this verse mean to me? 2) How can I make it relevant to the audience? In other words, as busy pragmatists, we want to know what will preach. What can I get out of this verse that will make people want to come and hear what I have to say? We are putting the cart before the proverbial horse. The result is often the misuse and even abuse of Scripture in our quest for relevancy. The first question we must ask is not what does this verse mean to us but what did this verse mean to the original author and audience. Our goal is to state it accurately and clearly.

The Bible is full of ideas. There are big ideas and little ideas. Many preachers get caught up in all the little ideas and neglect the big ideas. How do we preach the big ideas in a passage? We ask all the basic questions. Who? What? When? Where? How? Why? The key is what we call “context.” Every passage has many little ideas. The little ideas are interrelated, and we weave them together to preach the big ideas.

Our first step is to weave together the little ideas in our target text. The second step is to weave together the ideas as they relate to the bigger picture of the verses before and after our target text and the overall purpose and plan for the book of the Bible. This is the biblical context. The third step is to weave together the ideas with the purpose and plan for the whole Bible. This is the theological context. We must be able to state the relationship of these ideas to one another clearly before we can move forward in our preparation to preach.

AIM IT

The main idea of the sermon should follow the main idea of the biblical passage. The text should drive the sermon; otherwise, we are in danger of using the text to support our ideas instead of submitting our ideas to the authority of the text. We must first discover the exegetical big idea before we can frame the homiletical big idea. Once we correctly identify the exegetical big idea (State It), then we can frame our homiletical big idea (Aim It). The exegetical big idea informs the homiletical big idea, but it is not identical to it. The preacher must transform the exegetical big idea into the homiletical big idea to get the sermon big idea.

The big idea for the sermon is shaped not only by the meaning of the passage but by the purpose of the sermon, and the purpose of the sermon is directed by the needs of the people in the congregation. Once again, we must ask questions. So what? What difference does it make? We must exegete our people with the same fervor we exegete the passage. We must understand our purpose for preaching this particular sermon to these particular people. What difference does it make to those who are listening? By answering that question, we go beyond the explanation of information to preaching with purpose. Every sermon should be a rifle shot aimed at a target. The target is the people who are present to hear the sermon.

FRAME IT

How can I say it so people remember it? At this point in the process, we are ready to shape the material into a sermon like a sculptor shapes the clay into a figure. The material is the same, but the artistry is dependent on the skill of the artist to shape the raw material. The same is true for preaching. Different preachers can use the same raw material, yet one sermon is dull and the other exhilarating. The shape of the sermon is controlled by 1) the passage, 2) the big idea, and 3) the purpose of preaching.

The preacher must learn to summarize all of the detail in key points. This ability to generalize is difficult. Listeners don't want vague generalizations but rather significant generalizations. In this age of visual learning, we must use picture language for our points. We want to turn ears into eyes. The preacher must capture the listener's attention by what he/she hears in a way that helps the listener remember the idea,

so he/she can take it home. We need to learn the technique of stating our points in ways that are relevant to the lives of people today. How can I say it so the point focuses on the listener? State the points applicationally and in the present tense. It is not just that the big idea for the sermon must be stated in contemporary terms, but all our points should be stated in the present tense as well.

Each point is a pointer! Main ideas point to the big idea. Sub-ideas point to the main ideas. Keep the outline as simple, clear, and memorable as possible. Here is a simple but time-tested model for framing the sermon. 1) Ask a question in the introduction. 2) Answer the question with your big idea. 3) Introduce a keyword that explains your answer (Three solutions, two lessons, etc.). 4) Use your keyword for each main point in the sermon, tying it all together.

NAIL IT

The preacher must stick it to real life. If all we do is generalize, the sermon becomes vague and fuzzy. Good preaching climbs up and down the abstraction ladder between the abstract and the concrete. Some preachers remain abstract with no life “apps.” Others are all life “apps” but no big principles to guide life. Good preaching consistently moves back and forth between generals and particulars. Our preaching points are the generals. Illustrations and applications make the abstract truth concrete. They nail it to life.

The best illustrations are the ones that people relate to as part of their lives. We touch their lives in some way so that they can nail the abstract principle to their life situation. Imagination helps. Picture language is powerful. To be able to see in your mind what is not there in the physical world is a gift. When we tell a story as if we can see it, our listeners can see it too. Artists see with their minds and show us what they see with their art. Preachers do the same.

How do we connect the application to the exegesis in a way that communicates a relevant message to our listeners today? We start with what it meant to the original listeners. Then we develop a universal principle from that original meaning. A universal truth is something that is true in every age and every culture. These universals form the bridge – the connecting link – between what it meant and what it means.

The universal principle must be nailed down to a current application. Once we have a universal principle, we can look for contemporary life parallels (CLP) between the historical meaning and the current situation. Once we have identified the CLP for our text, we can nail the text to specific situations in life today. One of the key characteristics separating good sermons from poor sermons is the ability of the preacher to identify great CLPs that are true to both life and text.

SEAL IT

Every sermon leads to the point of decision. We call it the conclusion. The conclusion is the climax of the message. All roads lead to the conclusion. It is the call to action. We seal the deal! Conclusions should be short, clear, and simple. New information must be excluded because we are tying the message together like the wrapper on a gift. We are answering the question, “So what?” A good conclusion emphasizes the big idea and completes the purpose. We hit the target we aimed to hit. If we failed to establish a good target, we would never know if we hit the bull’s eye. We must not try to say everything in one sermon. When we are done, stop!

The last step in our preparation is always the introduction. Until we know how we are sealing the deal, we cannot know how to introduce the message. A good introduction gets attention, and the best way to get attention is to awaken an awareness of need in the listener. People come to church with all kinds of needs, hurts, and desires. When we touch a need, we strike a chord in the heart. People will listen. Try to touch on a need in the introduction and then use the Word of God like a spotlight to highlight the solution for that need in the passage being preached. An effective introduction makes the listener want to go with you into the message and follow you to the end.

Cohort Leader: His Core Competencies

The aim of all preaching is to quicken the conscience by the holiness of God, to feed the mind with the truth of God, to purge the imagination by the beauty of God, to open the heart to the love of God, to devote the will to the purpose of God.

(James Stewart, cited in *Homiletics and Hermeneutics*, 106)

The highest priority of a cohort team leader is to provide leadership for those who are participating in a cohort group. An effective leader in any group setting is to function as a catalyst that promotes the growth and development of the members of a group. The essence of leadership is influence. In The Rephidim Project cohort model, cohort team leaders are seeking to influence the members of their group primarily through their facilitation and coaching skills rather than through their public speaking and presentation skills.

In many secular and Christian educational settings, the traditional model of educating others has been the highly didactic approach that takes the form of a lecture. In these settings, a teacher will stand before a group of people to share information with others that is primarily limited to what the speaker has prepared to communicate to their audience. Most sermons appropriately mirror this same approach as a preacher seeks to faithfully deliver God's message to a group of people who need to clearly understand God's message and its relevancy to their lives.

Core Competency #1: Facilitation

In what may be a paradigm shift for many, a cohort team leader seeks to utilize the skill sets of a facilitator and coach in their attempts to improve the preaching skills of the members of their cohort. This approach is much more of an interactive and relational approach involving others, rather than the one-dimensional approach of a lecturer where communication flows in only one direction. A facilitator does not dominate the room but rather sets the tone, listens, and encourages and supports the participation of others. This facilitative approach fosters both self-discovery and group discovery while enabling the facilitator to use a variety of learning techniques within the group. The following chart contrasts and illustrates the differences between the traditional teaching and lecturing roles and the facilitation and coaching roles of a cohort team leader.

The Role of a Teacher & Lecturer

Format of Instruction: Lecture Style
 Communication: Flows in One Direction
 Knowledge is gained exclusively through the teacher
 The “Content Expert” with superior knowledge
 Teacher Centered
 Disseminates knowledge through lecturing
 A passion for others to understand truth
 An active communicator who informs others
 Delivers information that stimulates thought

The Role of a Facilitator & Coach

Format of Instruction: Interactive Style
 Communication: Flows in Multiple Directions
 Knowledge is gained through self-discovery & others
 The “Guide” who grows together with their team
 Group Centered
 Shapes thinking and behaviors through coaching
 A passion for others to internalize & apply truth
 An active listener who empathizes with others
 Asks questions that inspire action

The Characteristics of Outstanding Facilitators and Coaches

1. Identify and establish measurable goals and objectives with their cohort team members that are designed to improve their expository preaching skills at the beginning of this training process.
2. Prioritize the growth and development of their cohort team members as preachers.
3. Visualize the potential that exists in the lives of their cohort team members to continually improve their preaching skills.
4. Inspire and motivate their cohort team members to pursue excellence in their preaching skills for the glory of God.
5. Build authentic, supportive, encouraging, and loving relationships with their cohort team members.
6. Lead effective meetings, facilitate group discussions, provide appropriate feedback, hold others accountable, and ask Socratic questions that inspire healthy, vibrant, and focused group interaction.
7. Teach the SAFNS method of sermon preparation in a manner that fosters self-discovery, group interaction, and practical application within their group.
8. Listen actively, empathically, and without interrupting others while observing the non-verbal communication of their cohort team members.
9. Practice The Rephidim Project Coaching Model of observing, interpreting, responding, and following up with their cohort team members.
10. Model expository preaching as those opportunities present themselves with their cohort team members.

Core Competency #2: Coaching

The Rephidim Project coaching model is rooted in biblical discipleship. Our Lord Jesus Christ modeled biblical discipleship by pouring the truth of God and His life into the lives of His disciples. Our model is a brotherhood model where all of the members of a cohort group are committed to living out the one another passages of the New Testament in community with their brothers in Christ. Within this relational framework, we are seeking to improve our ability to “rightly divide the Word of God” (2 Timothy 2:15) as expository preachers. A cohort team leader acknowledges that to lead is to coach. The ability to effectively coach others as a facilitator is an indispensable skill that a cohort group leader must possess in the process of providing leadership for a cohort group. One of the highest priorities of effective coaches is helping their team members to establish both short-term and long-term goals. In addition, coaches assist their people in identifying their strengths and weaknesses while bringing clarity to where their people are at the moment and where they want to get to in the future. The aim of every cohort team leader is to encourage mutual interaction and growth through all of the members of the group, not simply through the instruction of the cohort leader. A cohort team leader lives with a passion to fulfill the purpose of this ministry which is “To mobilize, equip, and encourage pastors worldwide with a blueprint for expository preaching that produces Christlike believers by the power of the Holy Spirit to the glory of God.” Cohort team leaders seek to live out that passion by implementing The Rephidim Project Coaching Model within their groups.

THE FOUR PHASES OF COACHING

Phase #1:

OBSERVING: What do I see?

Phase #2:

INTERPRETING: What does it mean?

Phase #3:

RESPONDING: How should I respond?

Phase #4:

FOLLOWING UP: How will I monitor progress?

Phase 1: Observing (What do I see?)

The observation phase of the coaching model necessitates a cohort team leader opening their eyes as wide open as possible and asking the question, “What do I see?” Excellent coaching begins with excellent observation skills. Observing is the single most strategic phase in the coaching process because it is not possible to accurately interpret, respond, and follow up with a team member if we have not thoroughly, accurately, and precisely observed their attitudes, behaviors, and performance. A cohort team leader must consistently choose to be present, available, accessible, and fully engaged with their team members to be in a position to make accurate observations that are necessary to coach effectively. The observation phase of the coaching model necessitates a cohort team leader opening their ears as wide as possible and asking the question, “What am I hearing?” As cohort team leaders are observing their team members with their eyes and ears wide open, they need to be cultivating their questioning skills that give them the ability to probe and explore the needs of both their individual team members and the needs of the group.

Excelling in the observation phase of coaching as a cohort team leader requires the following:

1. Identifying and removing unnecessary distractions that prevent us from observing our people and the group effectively.
2. Practicing the art of being emotionally and relationally present with our team members as well as being physically present with them.
3. Disciplining ourselves through focused observation to objectively assess both the strengths and weaknesses of our team members.

Phase 2: Interpreting (What does it mean?)

Once a cohort team leader has clearly, thoroughly, adequately, and exhaustively observed the attitudes, behaviors, and performance of their team members, they are in a position to begin accurately interpreting their performance before choosing to respond to their team members. One of the most common coaching mistakes of many leaders is that they choose to respond to their people before they have prioritized observing and interpreting the attitudes, behaviors, and performance of their people. Outstanding coaches resist impulsively responding to their people by habitually pausing to ask the question, “What does what I am observing actually mean?”

Cultivating our interpretive skills as cohort team leaders necessitates learning the discipline of asking the correct questions:

1. What are the facts?

Excellent coaches refuse to respond to their people until they are convinced they objectively have all of the facts that are required to respond appropriately to their people and to make the best decisions, recommendations, and counsel for their people. Responding to a team member without appraising their performance accurately will always do more harm than good in their growth and development.

2. Is this an isolated incident or pattern?

Accurate interpretations of the behaviors of team members always demand asking the question, “Is this an isolated incident, or is it a repetitive pattern?” When coaching others for improved performance, it is critical to make a distinction between isolated incidents and repetitive patterns because, when interpreted correctly, they will require different responses.

3. What is the root cause or issue?

The most penetrating question that a cohort team leader can ask in the interpreting phase of the cohort model is, “What is the root cause or issue?” Ineffective coaches and leaders spend far too much time reacting to the symptoms of problems rather than getting to the root causes and issues of problems. Effective coaching is marked by a leader’s ability to make an accurate diagnosis of the root causes and issues that hinder the growth and development of their people.

Cultivating our interpretive skills as cohort team leaders necessitates learning the discipline of practicing the following behaviors:

1. “Contextual listening” by paying close attention to the tone of voice, body language, and nonverbal communication of their people.
2. “Gap bridging” by clarifying the gaps between where a team member is currently and where they need to go, with the goal of closing the gap between the two.
3. “Discovery questioning” by asking open-ended questions that lead their team members to identify where they need to make appropriate adjustments.
4. Striving to carefully, objectively, and methodically analyze the facts before responding too quickly to their people.
5. Refusing to jump to conclusions too quickly by using emotional restraint before drawing conclusions, making decisions, and responding to people.
6. Becoming students of their people, acknowledging their uniqueness and the situational nature of every situation.

Phase 3: Responding (How should I respond?)

Once a cohort team leader has clearly, thoroughly, adequately, and exhaustively observed and interpreted the attitudes, behaviors, and performance of their people, they are in a position to respond adequately, appropriately, strategically, and wisely to their people. Of all the skills that a cohort team leader can possess, few skills are more necessary than the ability to respond to their team members with appropriate feedback because feedback is foundational to personal development and improvement. The delivery of feedback from the cohort team leader, along with the other members of a cohort group, promotes and fosters both continuous learning and performance improvement, which is why reviewing each other's sermons is such a vital component of The Rephidim Project cohort model.

Feedback is information that a cohort leader communicates to a team member that is specific enough to encourage the team member to repeat a desirable behavior again or to encourage a team member not to repeat an undesirable behavior again. In light of the need for specificity when a cohort team leader is offering feedback to a team member, the cohort leader must be governed by the principles of positive reinforcement and constructive redirection.

- **Positive Reinforcement:** When a team member is on track and moving in the right direction, a cohort team leader will want to use feedback that positively reinforces that behavior which confirms to the team member that they are doing the right thing.
- **Constructive Redirection:** When a team member is off track and moving in the wrong direction, a cohort team leader will want to use feedback that constructively redirects that behavior which reveals to the team members that they are doing the wrong thing.

As cohort team leaders, the more trust and credibility we build with our team members, and the more trust the team members build with one another, the more freedom we will have to deliver constructive feedback that will improve all of our preaching skills.

There are a variety of opportunities that cohort team leaders need to seize when seeking to provide leadership for their cohort groups that bring definition to the responding phase of the coaching model:

1. To create a life-on-life missional discipleship process where all group members experience Christlike transformation while seeking to improve their preaching skills together.
2. To become “iron sharpening iron” relationally as the group practices the New Testament one another passages together.
3. To facilitate group interaction as a facilitator that skillfully asks questions that stimulate thought, provoke discussion, and lead to the practical application of the principles and practices of this training process.
4. To teach and apply the various steps of the SAFNS method of sermon preparation.
5. To offer their personal belief, support, empathy, and encouragement as team members are being challenged to come outside of their comfort zones to improve their preaching skills.
6. To inspire, motivate, influence, and collaborate with them to take their preaching skills to the next level.
7. To humbly experience personal growth and transformation as he grows together with each of the team members within the brotherhood and community of the group.
8. To hold one another accountable in fulfilling our calling “to preach the Word at all times” (2Tim. 4:1-2), along with the commitment that is necessary to fulfill the requirements of a cohort team member.
9. To create a relational environment, a learning environment, and a synergistic environment together with his team members (The cohort group exists for its members to love together, to learn together, and to achieve together).
10. To be reminded that the goal of expository preaching is the transformation of lives into the image of Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit to the glory of God! (2 Corinthians 3:18).



Phase 4: Following Up: (How will I follow up and monitor progress?)

In light of the fact that our ultimate objective is to develop the preaching skills of those who participate in a cohort group, the final phase of the coaching model is following up, where we attempt to monitor the continued forward progress of those who participate in a cohort group. There is an immediate context to following up, which occurs during the cohort group experience, and there is also a long-term context to following up, which occurs after the cohort group experience is over.

In the immediate context, while cohort team members are participating in the cohort process, following up is executed in the following ways:

1. Monitoring whether the team member is achieving the specific goals and objectives that were identified at the beginning of the process.
2. Having follow-up conversations about questions a team member has raised about preaching-related topics within the cohort process.
3. Having follow-up conversations about issues a team member has raised about their personal or ministerial struggles.
4. Staying actively engaged, available, involved, and present with the individual members of our cohort group.
5. Positively reinforcing when our team members are on track and constructively redirecting them when they get off track.
6. Becoming a student of each of our team members, allowing us to make accurate assessments of the depth of their engagement and commitment to the cohort team process.
7. Praying for our cohort team members faithfully and fervently before and after every cohort team meeting.

In the long-term context, after our cohort team members have completed their cohort team experience, following up is expressed in the following ways:

1. Having a one-on-one evaluation of their experience seeking their input on what was positive in their experience and what they think could be improved.
2. Inviting them to the next Rephidim Project seminar or think tank in their area.
3. Keeping them informed and updated about the preaching resources that are available on The Rephidim Project website.
4. Keeping in touch on a personal level as is possible and by creating an occasional reunion of the group.
5. Asking them for the names of others we could contact that would profit from the ministry of The Rephidim Project through our seminars, cohort groups, think tanks, and website.
6. Assuring them that those who support this ministry through prayer will be praying for them, their families, and their ministries regularly.

Core Competency #3:

Listening

A cohort team leader is a communicator whose primary goal is to help other communicators to become more effective communicators! If the ultimate goal and objective of communication is understanding, then listening becomes the single most important skill any communicator could ever develop in their relations with others. Of all the skills that a cohort team leader must possess, it could be argued that the most necessary skill they can bring to their teams is the ability to listen effectively to others. Every single phase of The Rephidim Project coaching model requires strong listening skills. In addition, the ability to provide proper feedback to cohort team members in our attempts to guide, direct, and support them requires exceptional listening skills. Most of us have spent years learning how to read, write, and speak but very little time learning how to listen. Cohort team leaders are encouraged to diligently learn, practice, and apply the following ten principles that are designed to sharpen the listening skills of cohort team leaders.

Principle #1: Seeking First to Understand.

The attitude and agenda of every cohort team leader when interacting with their teams must be to prioritize seeking to understand others rather than demanding to be understood by others. In the spirit of the Lord Jesus Christ, who sought to serve others rather than being served by others (Mk. 10:45), we must bring a spirit of servanthood to our cohort groups that drives us to understand others through our listening skills. The Book of Proverbs encourages us to cultivate our listening skills by “listening before speaking” (Prov. 18:13), while the apostle James instructs us to be “quick to listen and slow to speak” (James 1:19). By way of application, developing exceptional listening skills is not an issue of techniques and methodologies, as much as it is an agenda that motivates us to seek first and foremost to understand others by listening intently to them.

Principle #2: Listening Actively to Others.

The reason the world is filled with so many poor listeners is because most of us equate talking with something that we do actively while equating listening with something that we do passively. Active listening is the discipline and practice of giving one’s full, complete, and undivided attention to another individual(s) with the goal of understanding the precise message they are seeking to communicate to us. Active listening requires high levels of intentionality, effort, concentration, and focus that lead the listener to pay attention to what someone else is saying verbally and non-verbally with the goal of grasping the message of the speaker. By way of application, cohort team leaders must resist their natural inclination to communicate verbally by disciplining themselves to listen actively to their team members by giving them their full, complete, total, and undivided attention on a consistent and regular basis.



Principle #3: Being Present with Others.

Cohort team leaders must overcome the temptation to become personally distracted, inattentive, or disengaged in their interactions with their team members. Someone has profoundly stated, “The most precious gift we can offer others is our presence.” The art of being present with others is an issue of focus where our objective is to be as physically, mentally, and emotionally present with them as is possible without any sense of being distracted or disengaged. By way of application, the conscious choice that a cohort team leader makes to discipline themselves to become increasingly more “present” with their team members the greater their capacity will be to listen effectively to their people.

Principle #4: Refusing to Interrupt Others.

Interrupting others is a significant blind spot in most of our lives that prevents us from becoming effective listeners. Cohort team leaders must discipline themselves to resist the natural tendency of the vast majority of people in this world to interrupt others before they have finished communicating their thoughts and ideas to others. By way of application, cohort team leaders must resist their natural tendency to interrupt their team members by working hard in their role as a facilitator as they give their team members the time and freedom they need to express themselves thoroughly and completely.

Principle #5: Empathic Listening with Others.

Cohort team leaders must strive to become empathic listeners who identify the emotions and feelings that are behind the content of the words that others speak to them. Empathic listening is a form of emotional empathy that enables a human being to make an assessment of the emotional state of other human beings as we listen for the emotions and feelings that are behind their words. By way of application, cohort team leaders must discipline themselves to take one of their ears to listen to the content of what others are saying to them while taking their other ear to listen to the emotions and feelings that are behind the content of what others are expressing to them.

Principle #6: Observing the Non-Verbal Messages of Others.

Cohort team leaders must learn to listen to their team members with both their ears and their eyes by paying close attention to the non-verbal messages their individual team members are communicating to them. In his landmark communications study, Professor Albert Mehrabian of the University of California concluded that our non-verbal communication impacts others at a rate of 55%, our tone of voice at a rate of 38%, and our words at a rate of only 7%. By way of application, we will excel as listeners in our role as cohort team leaders when we pay close attention not only to what our people are communicating verbally through their lips but also to what they are communicating non-verbally through their facial expressions, posture, gestures, and body movements.

Principle #7: Listening to Understand, Not to Respond.

One of the most influential practices that improves the listening skills of cohort team leaders is the practice of listening to understand rather than to respond. Listening to respond to others means that instead of paying close attention to what others are saying to us, we are already thinking about what we want to say to them to get our points across, even before we have understood them! By way of application, cohort team leaders who listen to understand never forget that the goal of communication is understanding, which should cause them to consistently lay aside their agendas, perspectives, ideas, and prejudices until they have first understood their team members.

Principle #8: Making Eye Contact with Others.

As facilitators, cohort team leaders recognize that making eye contact is one of the most fundamental relational practices that builds rapport, trust, and credibility with other human beings. In the realm of listening, making eye contact with others prevents us from becoming distracted in our interactions with others while significantly enhancing our ability to listen to others. By way of application, as cohort team leaders engage in the lifelong process of improving their people and communication skills, they must never underestimate the critical role that making eye contact plays in building and cultivating strong relationships.

Principle #9: Acknowledging Common Fears About Communication with Others.

Cohort team leaders acknowledge that communicating with others is a risky business that places human beings in the vulnerable position of being misunderstood and rejected by others. Through their listening skills, cohort team leaders create relational environments where the members of their teams feel the safety and freedom to communicate with others. By way of application, cohort team leaders must model exceptional listening skills that take into consideration the innumerable fears others have about communicating with other people. This is particularly relevant to providing leadership in a cohort group because a cohort team leader is going to facilitate a process where preachers will be evaluating each other's sermons.

Principle #10: Clarifying, Questioning, Restating, and Seeking Feedback.

Cohort team leaders can sharpen their listening skills by seeking clarification of what others are saying by asking probing questions, restating what they believe others have expressed, and seeking direct feedback from others about their thoughts, perspectives, and conclusions. There are times that the following clarifying questions can bring clarification to cohort team leaders about the comments their team members have made in a cohort session. How so? In what way? Could you say that in another way? There are times that a cohort team leader can receive clarification from their people by asking the question, "Could you say that in another way?" In light of the fact that people are always clearer about what they just expressed when being asked to say it a second time. There are also times that a cohort team leader can receive clarification from their people by restating in their own words what they believe someone just expressed to them, followed by the question, "Is that what you meant to say?"

Application

1. Of the ten principles that cohort team leaders need to practice to become more effective leaders, which two principles would you identify as your two most significant strengths? Why have you identified these as your two most significant strengths?

a. Strength #1: _____

b. Strength #2: _____

c. Explanation: _____

2. Of the ten principles that cohort team leaders need to practice to become more effective leaders, which two principles would you identify as your two most significant weaknesses? Why have you identified these as your two most significant weaknesses?

a. Weakness #1: _____

b. Weakness #2: _____

c. Explanation: _____

3. For the next 30 days, review the 10 principles that are designed to improve a cohort leader's listening skills. In your day-to-day interactions with others, focus on spending more time listening to others while limiting the time you spend speaking to others.

Core Competency #4:

Andragogy vs. Pedagogy

What is Andragogy?

Andragogy is the primary method of adult education. In andragogy, the leader is a facilitator more than an instructor. The cohort leader will facilitate the participants in the practice of self-directed learning or group-directed learning instead of instructor-directed learning. Andragogy is grounded in four assumptions about adults in learning environments.

1. Adults are self-directed learners, motivated by internal desires and goals.
2. Adults bring a wealth of experience that they want to use in the learning process.
3. Adults learn best when the topic has immediate value for the tasks they perform in life.
4. Adults learn experientially by doing, practicing, discussing, and problem-solving.

What is Pedagogy?

Pedagogy is the instruction of dependent personalities. It is usually associated with teaching children because children are dependent on the knowledge of the teacher. Pedagogy occurs in adult settings whenever the participants are in a dependent relationship with the instructor in knowledge or skill. Pedagogy is teacher-directed learning. Preachers are used to a pedagogical model because preaching is primarily pedagogical, meaning that it is preacher-directed learning.

1. Pedagogy takes place when the learner is dependent on the knowledge and skill of the teacher.
2. Pedagogy takes place when specific content is needed by the learner to move to the next stage of development in an efficient manner.
3. Pedagogy assumes that the teacher is an expert and has resources not readily available to the learner.
4. Pedagogy tends to be prescriptive and subject-focused.



Most preachers follow a pedagogical model for education. We learned that way in the college and seminary classrooms. We preach and teach that way in the church. The content we are communicating through our sermons is generally prescriptive, subject-focused, and necessary for our people to grow spiritually. Furthermore, we generally operate as biblical/theological experts because our congregations lack that knowledge base. There are times when the cohort leader may need to adopt a pedagogical approach because certain information needs to be delivered to the cohort in a timely manner. However, the cohort leader should generally follow an andragogical model for the following reasons.

1. Cohort members are experienced practitioners of preaching. They are preaching regularly and have usually been doing so for a significant period of time.
2. The cohort leader is not an expert who exceeds the knowledge and resources of the cohort members by a significant margin. The cohort leader is not telling people how to preach as if he knows more than everyone else.
3. The subject matter calls for experiential learning and peer-reviewed information. The content of the cohort is not prescriptive but experiential. There is more than one way to put the information into practice.
4. The cohort members, at this point in their lives, are self-directed learners. They have enough background knowledge to be motivated by what they want to learn and don't need a teacher to control the learning process.

Cohort Leader: His Session Planning

God has not revealed his truth in a system; the Bible has no system as such. Lay aside system and fly to the Bible; receive its words with simple submission, and without any eye to system. Be Bible Christians, not system Christians.

(Charles Simeon, cited by David Helm, *Expositional Preaching*, 83).

How Does a Cohort Work?

Getting Started

First Step

The first step in creating a preaching cohort is to find 6–8 men who will commit to meeting together quarterly for two years. The cohort leader will need to meet with, talk to or email the pastors who have expressed interest. Generally, this means starting with a dozen pastors since the number will diminish as you seek commitments, and you need a minimum of 6 to start the cohort. Once you have the commitment of 6–8 preachers, you can move to the next step in the process.

Second Step

The second step in creating a preaching cohort is to prepare for your first meeting. The cohort leader will have to establish a date for the first meeting. The day and time will require the coordination of schedules since pastors are busy people. Once you have a date, you can move on to the next step.

Third Step

Prepare and send out pre-session assignments to the cohort members. These assignments can be drawn from the sample guidelines provided by Rephidim and supplemented by your own approach and the needs of the preachers in the cohort. The goal is to facilitate discussion, so the preachers will need materials to read and think about in advance of the cohort meeting. The cohort leader works to stimulate interaction among the cohort members, which requires that they be prepared to discuss the questions and topics in the cohort.

Fourth Step

Pray! The cohort leader should pray for each cohort member in advance of the cohort. The cohort leader needs to bathe the process in prayer since we are all dependent on God to bring about spiritual change. It is at this time that the cohort leader should select a textbook and order copies for each cohort member to be given out at the first meeting.

Fifth Step

The first cohort meeting sets the tone for the remaining two years. The goal of the first meeting is to establish an atmosphere of brotherhood learning among the cohort members. The cohort leader should open with a discussion designed to encourage sharing for prayer and mutual support. Honest sharing requires building trust. There is a vulnerability that everyone will feel in the cohort since exposing your sermons to peer review is intimidating. Sometimes trust among the group develops quickly if the preachers already know each other. Most times, it will be a session or two before preachers begin to open up and honestly share their struggles. The cohort leader must be patient with this process. It will be different with each cohort.

Four Elements of Each Cohort

(Times are approximate)

1. Prayer and Share (45 minutes)

Each cohort should open with a time of sharing needs and praying together. Try to avoid the tendency of preachers to share ministry success stories and engage in subtle self-promotion. Talking about church achievements will kill the spirit of brotherhood faster than anything else. The goal is to develop a band of brothers who can honestly open up to each other because they are not in a competition over who is the greatest in the kingdom. Starting with honest prayer for each other builds the bonds of brotherhood among the preachers. Praying together also reinforces the vital significance of preachers as men of prayer. E.M. Bounds wrote these convicting words.

The preaching man is to be a praying man. Prayer is the preacher's mightiest weapon. . . . The real sermon is made in the closet. The man—God's man—is made in the closet. . . . Prayer makes the man; prayer makes the preacher; prayer makes the pastor (Bounds, Power Through Prayer, 12).

2. Homiletical Discussion (60 minutes)

The cohort leader leads a discussion of the materials sent to the participants as a pre-cohort assignment. It is important that these assignments are sent out in advance so that the preachers come prepared to discuss the information. The cohort leader, then, can be a facilitator of the discussion. Each pre-cohort assignment focuses on some aspect of the SAFNS funnel. The goal is to cover all five elements in the SAFNS funnel by the end of the eight cohort sessions spread out over two years. There are instructional videos and discussion questions. The cohort leader can add reading materials to the assignment as seems appropriate. Another tool that is useful is a collective analysis of a text for sermon preparation. In the sample guides, we suggest 2 Corinthians 4:16–18. Collaborating on sermon preparation can be a useful exercise as the preachers learn from each other how to prepare a sermon more effectively. The same text is used to apply the principles of each element in the SAFNS funnel so that, by the end of the eight sessions, the group has developed a framework for a sermon on 2 Corinthians 4:16–18.

3. Sermon Review (75 minutes)

Peer review of the sermons is at the heart of the cohort. The cohort leader should assign a speaker for each cohort. The speaker can present his sermon in person but most commonly will do so by video. The cohort will watch the video and then give constructive criticism to the preacher. There are two tools available on the Rephidim website to facilitate the peer review process. The cohort can choose to use The Expositor's Grid or the Sermon Feedback Guide found on our website. Each cohort member should review the sermon and give at least one positive response and one constructive criticism. The cohort leader must make sure that the process is constructive and not destructive by guiding the feedback process in healthy ways.

4. Textbook Discussion (60 minutes)

The cohort leader will select a textbook from the recommended book list to use in the cohort. The pre-cohort assignment should include a section that all should read in advance so that they can discuss it at the cohort. The choice of the textbook should reflect the needs of those participating in the cohort.

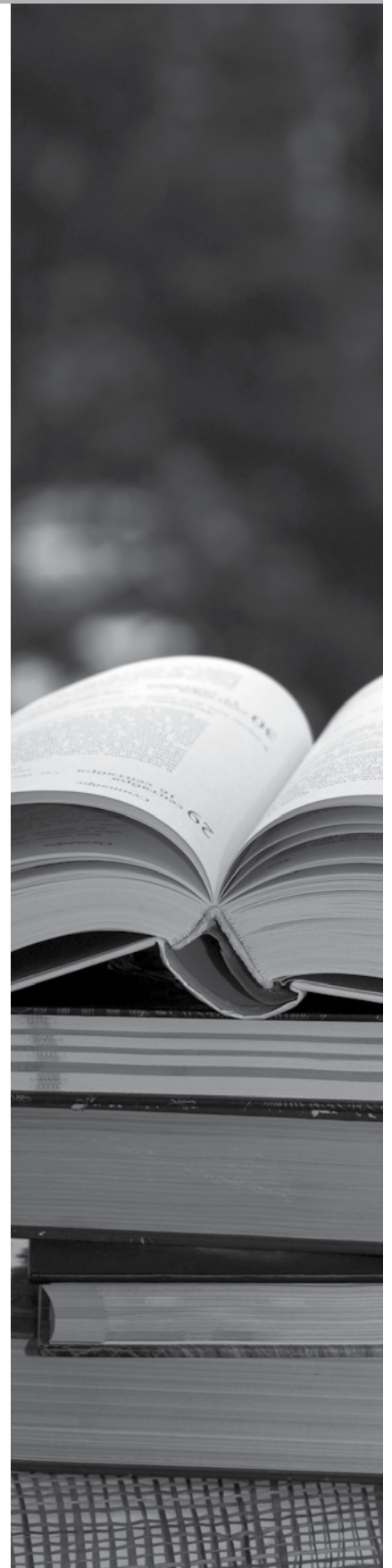
The Facilitator's Toolbox

Every cohort leader needs some tools that he can use to make the cohort effective for the participants. If the cohort becomes boring or hurtful, pastors will usually opt out. They are busy people who need to see the benefit of the cohort for them and their ministries. Here is a summary of some of the tools that a facilitator can use to lead the cohort. Some of these have been developed more fully elsewhere in the manual, so please refer back to those sections as needed.

- ✓ **Experiential connection:** The foundation for leading a group of pastors is pastoral experience. The cohort leader needs to understand the pastor's world, including the stresses and the joys of ministry. There must be a grasp of the breadth of pastoral work along with sound biblical and theological knowledge. The cohort leader does not need to be an expert in preaching but must be able to connect with pastors about all aspects of the ministry. For this reason, the cohort leader should be an experienced practitioner.
- ✓ **Safe space:** Creating a safe space for pastors to share is vital to the success of a cohort. One of the first tasks of the cohort leader is to build trust among the participants so that they can be honest and vulnerable with each other. In order to accomplish that goal, the cohort leader should be a person who is humble, transparent, and exhibits a strong self-awareness of his own strengths and weaknesses.
- ✓ **Empathy:** A cohort leader should demonstrate a strong Emotional Quotient (EQ). The ability to empathize with the cohort members will help them respond and make the cohort more effective. As the saying goes: "everyone communicates, few connect." The cohort leader needs to be able to connect to the emotions of the cohort members so that he can read the group dynamics well.
- ✓ **Coaching:** One of the most important skills is the ability to ask good questions, which is why we have an extended section in the manual on coaching. The goal is to draw people out through the questions. Cohort leadership is all about leading dialogically. The cohort leader does not need to have all the answers but needs to ask the hard questions. Then let the cohort members wrestle with the answers.
- ✓ **Active listening:** Another vital skill for leading a cohort is the ability to listen actively. That is why we have an extended section on listening skills. This takes practice and may not always come naturally. Our tendency is to listen so that we can say what we want to say. The cohort leader must resist that temptation. Be engaged with the members and be comfortable letting them express themselves. The result will be a healthy learning brotherhood of pastors.
- ✓ **Keeping the focus:** Rabbit trails are common. Pastors like to talk. As a cohort leader, you may think that 4 hours is a long time, but you will find it goes by quickly once pastors start talking. With 8 pastors in a cohort, you will sometimes find it difficult to keep the discussion on topic. Everyone likes to share their war stories. The ability to keep the group focused on what you are covering in that session is a vital skill to develop. You need to be able to end the discussion gently but firmly and pull the group back to the topic at hand.
- ✓ **Adaptability:** You can be sure that the discussion will not go exactly as you planned. Once people start sharing, you will need to adapt to keep the group dynamics moving well. The cohort leader will need patience because they may not respond as you expected. Even the best of questions can stimulate unexpected ideas. The cohort leader will need to be adaptable and patient while steering the discussion to productive ends.

Booklist for Preaching Cohorts

- Beeke, Joel R. *Reformed Preaching: Proclaiming God's Word from the Heart of the Preacher to the Heart of His People*, Crossway, 2018.
- Caldwell, Richard. *Pastoral Preaching: Expository Preaching for Pastoral Work*, Rainer Publishing, 2016.
- Carrick, John. *The Imperative of Preaching: A Theology of Sacred Rhetoric*, The Banner of Truth Trust, 2016.
- Chapell, Bryan. *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon*, 2nd edition, Baker Academic, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2005.
- Christensen, David. *A Philosophy of Pastoral Preaching: Shepherd God's People with God's Word in One Place*. Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2023.
- Christensen, David. *The Persuasive Preacher: Pastoral Influence in a Marketing World*, Wipf & Stock, 2020.
- Davis, Dale Ralph. *The Word Became Fresh: How To Preach From Old Testament Narrative Texts*, Christian Focus Publications Ltd., Scotland, 2012.
- Edwards, J. Kent. *Deep Preaching: Creating Sermons That Go Beyond the Superficial*, B&H Publishing Group, Nashville, Tennessee, 2009.
- Gibson, Scott and Kim, Matthew. *Homiletics and Hermeneutics: Four Views on Preaching Today*, Baker Academic, 2018.
- Helm, David R. *Expositional Preaching: How We Speak God's Word Today*, Crossway, Wheaton, Illinois, 2014.
- Jensen, Phillip D. and Grimond, Paul. *The Archer and the Arrow: Preaching the Very Words of God*, Matthias Media, Australia, 2010.
- Kuruvilla, Abraham. *Privilege the Text! A Theological Hermeneutic for Preaching*. Moody Publishers, 2013.
- Mbewe, Conrad. *Pastoral Preaching: Building a People for God*, Langham Preaching Resources, Carlisle, England, 2017.
- McDill, Wayne V. *The Moment of Truth: A Guide to Effective Sermon Delivery*, B&H Academic, Nashville Tennessee, 1999.
- Overstreet, R. Larry. *Persuasive Preaching: A Biblical and Practical Guide to the Effective Use of Persuasion*, Weaver Book Company, 2014.
- Pelton, Randal E. *Preaching with Accuracy: Finding Christ-Centered Big Ideas for Biblical Preaching*, Kregel Publication, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2014.
- Piper, John. *Expository Exultation: Christian Preaching as Worship*, Crossway, 2018.
- Robinson, Haddon W. *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages*, 3rd Edition, Baker Academic, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2014.





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