

# PREACHING COHORTS

## A BROTHERHOOD MODEL FOR COACHING PREACHERS



**THE REPHIDIM Project**

*Lifting up those who spread God's Word*

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## **THE REPHIDIM PROJECT**

### **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.

### **VISION**

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.

### **CORE VALUES**

- Expository preaching is essential for growing spiritually vibrant and healthy churches.
- The crying need of the church is for God-centered, Word explaining messages.
- All Scripture is intentionally useful to equip Christ's disciples for effective service.
- The goal of pastoral preaching is to produce Christlike believers who are being transformed by God's Spirit.
- Expositional preaching is unit of thought preaching which applies the exegetical thrust of each passage to people today.
- The Bible is the authoritative and sufficient source for expositional preaching, not merely a resource for the preacher to use.
- Effective preaching is God-dependent, Spirit-directed transformational preaching.

## COHORT COMMITMENTS

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.

### COHORT TEAM LEADER COMMITMENT:

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 up to \$200 per member for cohorts in New England.

### COHORT MEMBER COMMITMENT:

- ✓ Cohort members commit to work with each other in prayer and mutual encouragement on a regular basis for eighteen to twenty-four months. The Rephidim Project will be available for encouragement and prayer via phone as needed.
- ✓ Cohort members with the coaching of the Team Leaders will 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.

- ✓ A cohort agrees to attend a larger EPI-Center Institute or workshop in their geographical area whenever possible. The Rephidim Project will organize and schedule institutes and workshops as desired in any given region.

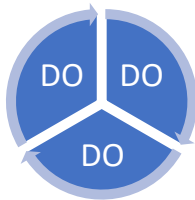
### COHORT METHODOLOGY

*Serve God with such education as you have and thank Him for blowing through you if you are a 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," *Lectures to My Students*, London: Marshall, Morgan and Scott, 1973, p.209).

Every preacher should return to the fundamentals of preaching on a regular basis to maintain his skills in preaching and to break out of the ruts we all fall into as preachers. The Simeon Trust uses the analogy of spring training in baseball. Each spring, even the stars on the team get back to the fundamentals of batting and fielding to hone their skills. Preachers should do the same by getting back to the basics on a regular basis. 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.

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 freely 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 provide free online courses that can be used to supplement the learning process. Here is a list of current courses available on our website.

- Pastoral Preaching: God's Word for God's People in One Place
- What on Earth is God Doing? A Survey of Bible Theology
- Preaching Through the Upper Room Discourse

DO:

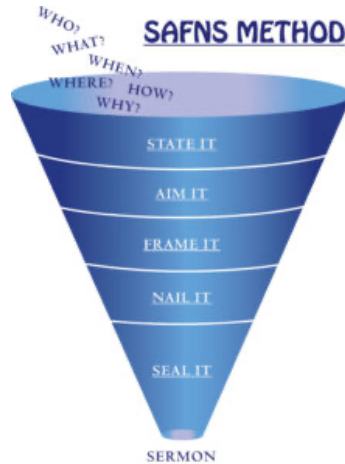
Submitting sermons for peer review is an essential part of the cohort model. Each cohort meeting should include a sermon by one of the members. The sermons may be live or may be a recorded video. It can be intimidating for all of us to submit our sermons for review by our peers, but it is a healthy part of the growth process.

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.



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. Here, in summary, is the SAFNS method, along with suggested resources cohort leaders can use for the cohort meetings.

STATE IT – AIM IT – FRAME IT – NAIL IT – SEAL IT!

## STATE IT

### RESOURCES:

Abraham Kuruvilla, *Privilege the Text! A Theological Hermeneutic for Preaching*, Moody Publishers, 2013.

Dale Ralph Davis, *The Word Became Fresh: How To Preach From Old Testament Narrative Texts*, Christian Focus Publications Ltd., Scotland, 2012.

Randal E. Pelton, *Preaching with Accuracy: Finding Christ-Centered Big Ideas for Biblical Preaching*, Kregel Publication, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2014.

Scott Gibson and Matthew Kim, *Homiletics and Hermeneutics: Four Views on Preaching Today*, Baker Academic, 2018.

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**

### RESOURCES:

Haddon W. Robinson, *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition, Baker Academic, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2014.

Phillip D. Jensen and Paul Grimond, *The Archer and the Arrow: Preaching the Very Words of God*, Matthias Media, Australia, 2010.

J. Kent Edwards, *Deep Preaching: Creating Sermons That Go Beyond the Superficial*, B&H Publishing Group, Nashville, Tennessee, 2009.

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

### RESOURCES:

Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, Baker Academic, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2005.

David R. Helm, *Expositional Preaching: How We Speak God's Word Today*, Crossway, Wheaton, Illinois, 2014.

John Carrick, *The Imperative of Preaching: A Theology of Sacred Rhetoric*, The Banner of Truth Trust, 2016.

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, and 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

### RESOURCES:

Richard Caldwell, *Pastoral Preaching: Expository Preaching for Pastoral Work*, Rainer Publishing, 2016.

John Piper, *Expository Exultation: Christian Preaching as Worship*, Crossway, 2018.

Joel R. Beeke, *Reformed Preaching: Proclaiming God's Word from the Heart of the Preacher to the Heart of His People*, Crossway, 2018.

The preacher must stick it to real life. If all we do is generalize, then 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 they can nail the abstract principle to the situation they face in life. 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, then our listeners can see it too. Artists see with their minds and show us what they see with their art. Preachers do the same.

Application without exegesis is like a bowl of plastic fruit. It looks pretty but doesn't satisfy. Exegesis without application is like a mirage. It looks wonderful but isn't real. 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. The application chain has six links. 1) Biblical situation; 2) Universal principle; 3) Cement it to the text; 4) CLP; 5) Flavor it with grace; 6) Drive it home.

**SEAL IT****RESOURCES:**

R. Larry Overstreet, *Persuasive Preaching: A Biblical and Practical Guide to the Effective Use of Persuasion*, Weaver Book Company, 2014.

Conrad Mbewe, *Pastoral Preaching: Building a People for God*, Langham Preaching Resources, Carlisle, England, 2017.

David A. Christensen, *The Persuasive Preacher: Pastoral Influence in a Marketing World*, Wipf & Stock, 2020.

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.

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 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.

Using the SAFNS funnel to guide our sermon preparation will help us make disciples by our preaching.

## SEMINARS, WORKSHOPS, & THINK TANKS

The church in America is in desperate need of revitalization and revival. Nothing in all of church history has brought people closer to the Lord Jesus Christ than the faithful preaching of God's Word, line upon line, precept upon precept. Pastors need to return to the priority of expository preaching in the pulpits of our churches. We believe that a movement back to the exposition of Scripture is more effective than an event and are committed to investing in such a movement, one pastor at a time, for the glory of Christ.

The Rephidim Project is a collaborative effort to bring expository preaching resources and training to pastors, church leaders, and those who have a call to preach. We train expository preachers by providing tools, resources, encouragement, and teaching. We lead seminars, workshops, and think tanks to train preachers to be more effective expositors of God's Word.

### SEMINARS

Seminars are one-day events that can be either a good jump start on preaching for those with limited training or a refresher for those who have previously studied homiletics in the classroom. Our foundational seminars are focused on:

#### GROWING CHRISTLIKE BELIEVERS THROUGH EXPOSITORY PREACHING

- Text–Driven Preaching
- Transformational Preaching
- Pastoral Preaching
- Disciple–Making Preaching
- Persuasive Preaching

Rephidim staff also teach seminars on various other topics related to preaching. If you would like more information on hosting or attending a seminar, please email The Rephidim Project at [info@rephidimproject.org](mailto:info@rephidimproject.org), and we will work with you to implement and promote the seminar.

### WORKSHOPS

The Cecil B. Day Foundation began the EPI-Center in 2015 to train preachers in New England. They trained over 450 pastors through ministries like Cross Talk Global with Kent Edwards and the Stephen Olford Center. The EPI-Center merged with the Rephidim Project in September 2018 to continue the mission of training preachers in the Northeastern United States. Since then, we have expanded the ministry geographically while retaining the goal of training expository preachers through intensive multi-day workshops.

Workshops are two or three-day events in which we collaborate with world-class ministries for premier instruction. We partner with established preaching organizations to provide excellent instruction by experienced practitioners. We are currently working with The Charles Simeon Trust to bring their excellent training in expository preaching to southern Maine. These three-day

workshops are excellent opportunities to hone your skills in preaching. We encourage pastors in other locations to attend one of their training sessions whenever possible.

### THINK TANKS

Charles Simeon (1759-1836) was a leading evangelical preacher in England and curate of Holy Trinity Church in Cambridge for 53 years. Every Friday evening for many years, he led what some have called “conversation circles” for pastors and students in his apartment on the campus of King’s College. These “tea parties” were practical discussions of various theological and pastoral topics of interest to men preparing for or in ministry. Simeon once said about these private conversation circles, “with congenial minds, and when the circle is five or six, we can be deeply solemn, and enter as it were, within the veil; but not so with all, nor with a circle of many persons” (H.C.G. Moule, *Charles Simeon*, 227).

We have adapted Simeon’s conversation circles into Preaching Think Tanks. Think Tanks are gatherings of up to twelve preachers for spiritual refreshment and personal growth. The number is limited to encourage deeper and more insightful conversations among the preachers in a collegial atmosphere. Each Think Tank aims to refill the wells, rekindle the passions, and replenish the spirits of the pastors who participate.

Preaching Think Tanks are approximately six hours in length, including a fellowship lunch, and led by a Rephidim Project facilitator. Some aspect of expository preaching, announced in advance, will be the focus of each Think Tank. The facilitator initiates the conversation by explaining the day’s topic and giving some instructions about that topic. The conversations revolve around the preaching topic as the participants share insights and observations designed to help each other become better expositors of God’s Word. A brief message from God’s Word and a time of prayer for each other conclude the day.

If you are interested in joining a Preaching Think Tank or would like more information, email [info@rephidimproject.org](mailto:info@rephidimproject.org).

**SERMON FEEDBACK GUIDE**

1. Give the preacher positive feedback on the sermon. What aspects of the sermon were well done?
  
2. How well did the sermon explain the main idea of the passage?
  
3. What was the sermon's purpose, and how well did that purpose reflect the thrust of the biblical author?
  
4. How well did the sermon follow the structure of the passage?
  
5. How well did the preacher connect his exhortations to God's enabling grace in Jesus Christ? Did the preacher explain how what Christ has done for us enables us to do what Christ calls us to do?
  
6. Were the preacher's applications practical, motivational and true to life? Did he call you to Christlikeness?
  
7. How effectively did the preacher persuade you to change in some way through his call to action? Did you experience a fresh encounter with God?
  
8. Were there any ways in which the preacher detracted or distracted from his message?

## SAFNS TEMPLATE

### CHOOSING A TEXT

1. Does the passage contain one main idea?
2. Can the passage stand alone as an independent thought?
3. Does the passage have a beginning and ending?
4. Does your translation identify your passage as a paragraph?
5. Can your passage be broken into smaller ideas?

### STATE IT

1. Where does it fit in the context of the biblical book?
2. Why did the human author write these words?
3. When does the text take place? (Historical and cultural context)
4. Who wrote it and to whom was it written?
5. What are the key words/terms and their meanings?
6. What is the kingdom connection? (Story of the Bible or meta narrative)
7. What does the text teach us about God/Christ?
8. What is the main idea in your passage? (Subject and verb)
9. How does the author structure the text? (Prepare a structural diagram of the passage)

### **AIM IT (Central Idea and Purpose)**

#### The Central Idea

Restate the main idea in contemporary terms.

1. What am I talking about?
2. What am I saying about what I am talking about?

The Purpose

1. So what? What difference does it make?
2. What are the needs of the people that this passage addresses?
3. Do I want to inform, persuade or motivate the people?
4. What do I want the sermon to do?

**FRAME IT (Outline)**

1. What are the contemporary life parallels I see in this passage? (CLP)
2. What are the main points as demonstrated by the structural diagram?
3. How do these main ideas point back to the big idea?
- 4.. How can I state the main points in contemporary life terms?
5. How can I state the main points applicationally?
6. How can I say it so people remember it?

**NAIL IT (Application and Illustration)**

1. How can I stick the biblical principles to real life situations?
2. How do I make abstract truths concrete? (Illustration)
3. How can I answer the questions people are asking?
4. How do I help people see and feel what I am saying? (Imagination)
5. How do I demonstrate that it applies to me first?
6. How do I flavor the message with grace? (Avoid mere moralism)
7. How do I show people that God will help them do it?

**SEAL IT (Conclusion and Introduction)**

Seal the deal. Call to action.

1. How will I call people to the point of decision (POD)?
2. How will I bring the sermon to a climax?
3. What do I want people to believe, be or do as a result of this sermon?
4. How can I awaken an awareness of need to start the sermon?
5. What's my hook? How can I get people's attention?

**SUMMARY**

TITLE:

TEXT:

CENTRAL IDEA:

PURPOSE:

OUTLINE: