

# **A Study on Effective Preaching Styles: Focused on Four Pages Sermon, Preaching from Conflict to Resolution, and Plot and Moves Preaching**

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## **I. Introduction: Why Do We Focus on Preaching Styles?**

God is a speaking God (Genesis 1:3). Through His Word, all things were created and gained life. This Word of God is specially revealed to us through the written Word, the Bible. From the past to the present, the eternal, unchanging Word of God has led countless individuals to see the light of salvation, guided them on the path of sanctification, and instilled an eschatological hope in life.

As we listen to the living Word of God through the Bible, one noteworthy aspect emerges: the Bible, God's Word, communicates to its audience through various forms and genres. The message of God is not confined to a single mode of delivery. Instead, it utilizes a variety of forms and genres—such as the Law, poetry, prophecy, Gospels, and epistles—to effectively and diversely communicate with its readers. For example, the Book of Leviticus delivers doctrinal content deductively and propositionally, while Nathan's prophetic rebuke employs an inductive approach to heighten the message's impact. Similarly, certain sermons in the Gospels use parables and imagery to deeply impress the audience, while narratives bring biblical events vividly to life. The Psalms, by expressing profound human emotions toward God in poetic form, create a dramatic collision of earthly voices and heavenly realms.

Despite the Bible's use of diverse forms to communicate effectively, it is unfortunate that preachers—those entrusted with delivering God's Word to contemporary audiences—often insist on traditional preaching styles or fail to reflect on more effective, diverse styles of preaching. In

the context of Korean Protestantism, this may have originated from the preaching styles introduced by early missionaries, which were considered orthodox and preserved rigidly. For instance, Charles Allen Clark, Korea's first homiletics professor, taught preaching styles limited to textual sermons, topical sermons, and expository sermons. His textbook *Homiletics* highlights this perspective:

“A general method of classifying sermons involves textual sermons, topical sermons, and expository sermons. A topical sermon derives its theme solely from the text, a textual sermon includes the theme and main points from the text, and an expository sermon derives nearly all its themes, points, and subpoints from the text.”

This narrow focus on specific styles, at the expense of exploring richer and more effective methods for communicating God's will to diverse audiences, may have constrained modern homiletic efforts.

This study seeks to address this gap by exploring effective, diverse preaching efforts for today's messengers of God—pastors, missionaries, seminarians, and educators—from a formal perspective. It begins by briefly reviewing the history of Christian preaching, from its early traditions to contemporary forms. The study then examines the strengths and weaknesses of both traditional and modern preaching paradigms. Finally, from a practical standpoint, it introduces three effective contemporary preaching styles—Four Pages Sermon, Preaching from Conflict to Resolution, and Sermon as Plot and Moves—providing concrete examples for practical application.

## **II. An Overview of the History of Christian Preaching: Centered on Preaching Styles**

According to several scholars, *The Second Epistle of Clement* (AD 95–140) is not merely a letter but a sermon, making it the earliest extant Christian preaching manuscript. The structure of this sermon reveals a pattern of exhorting and admonishing the audience for their spiritual growth, using various Scripture passages. This method, which involved rereading (exegesis), interpreting (exposition), and applying Scripture, resembles synagogue preaching yet diverged by incorporating texts from the Law, Prophets, and Gospels.

The sermons of early Christian theologian Origen of Alexandria also followed this pattern. With his exceptional grammatical knowledge, Origen employed a verse-by-verse or phrase-by-phrase interpretive style, often using allegorical interpretation to provide moral and spiritual applications for his audience. Some scholars argue that this method significantly influenced medieval Christian preaching.

Additionally, Cyril of Jerusalem and Ambrose of Milan used catechetical sermons to teach Christian doctrine and mysteries. John Chrysostom ("Golden-Mouthed") primarily explained Scripture and doctrine in his sermons, while Augustine of Hippo followed an expository approach, as evident in his sermons on the Gospel of John, Psalms, and First Epistle of John.

In the medieval period, Thomas Aquinas emphasized reason in his sermons, developing the "university sermon" style. This deductive method began with a central theme or text, expanded it using supporting passages, and conveyed doctrinal insights. Franciscan and Dominican preachers further refined this style, incorporating classic elements such as three points, humor, and poetry, forming a distinct medieval sermon framework.

During the Reformation, Martin Luther's sermons, while expository or thematic, did not adhere to rigid patterns. Luther emphasized Christ-centered interpretation without fixed structures. In contrast, John Calvin exemplified expository preaching, focusing on theological education through Scripture interpretation. Calvin's sermons typically followed a pattern: prayer, a summary of the previous sermon, exegesis of a new text, application and exhortation, and a concluding prayer. William Perkins, influenced by Calvin, simplified this into three components: exposition, doctrine, and application, which became foundational for Puritan sermons.

From the late 19th to mid-20th centuries, traditional sermon styles—deductive, propositional, and logical—dominated Western preaching. For instance, John A. Broadus's *On the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons* (1870) became a seminal text, emphasizing clarity and logical structure.

However, by the 20th century, concerns arose about the relevance of traditional preaching styles in addressing modern existential realities. Renowned preacher Harry E. Fosdick critiqued rigid, formulaic approaches in his 1928 essay *What Is the Matter with Preaching?*, urging preachers to address contemporary social, moral, and existential issues. Similarly, R.E.C. Browne and Henry G. Davis advocated for more flexible, content-driven preaching styles, highlighting the need for varied forms to match sermon content.

In this context, the "New Homiletic" emerged in the 1960s, emphasizing the audience's experience over the preacher's authority. David J. Randolph introduced this term to describe a paradigm shift in preaching. Key features of the New Homiletic include:

1. Greater focus on engaging the audience through their language, consciousness, and experiences.
2. Adoption of diverse, engaging methods—such as inductive, narrative, and plot-driven approaches.
3. Use of figurative language, metaphors, and imagery to vividly convey the Gospel.

### **III. Advantages and Disadvantages of Preaching Styles: Traditional and New Paradigms**

Woon-Yong Kim categorizes preaching styles into two broad paradigms based on their purpose and approach: traditional and new preaching paradigms. Traditional styles include expository, thematic, and topical preaching, while modern approaches encompass inductive, narrative, and "Four Pages" sermons. He describes the distinctive characteristics of these paradigms as follows:

"The former (traditional styles) are logical, propositional, argumentative, and deductive in structure, focusing on teaching and conveying truths through explanation and reasoning. The latter (new styles) create movements leading to a focal point where the audience and preacher journey together, employing imagination, narrative, metaphor, and imagery to help listeners experience the core message inductively."

### **Strengths and Weaknesses of Traditional Styles**

Traditional preaching styles, with their deductive structures and clear logical frameworks, excel in articulating theological themes and doctrines. They provide clarity, coherence, and detailed arguments that help congregants grasp scriptural truths. This makes them particularly effective for educating large audiences within limited timeframes.

However, these approaches also have notable drawbacks. Repeated patterns can bore the audience, and the overly rational and propositional delivery may neglect emotional, imaginative, and artistic dimensions. As a result, traditional preaching risks reducing sermons to dry informational exchanges. Furthermore, the emphasis on the preacher's authority can sometimes overshadow the Bible's authority, leading to an authoritarian, prescriptive communication style.

### **Strengths and Weaknesses of New Paradigms**

New preaching paradigms emphasize engaging the audience emotionally and imaginatively. They focus on how listeners experience God's Word rather than on how preachers convey it. Using storytelling, inductive reasoning, and open-ended conclusions, these approaches make sermons more relatable and dynamic. They also encourage a more collaborative, less hierarchical preacher-audience relationship.

Despite their strengths, these styles can confuse audiences unfamiliar with inductive or narrative structures. Poor understanding of the New Homiletic can result in sermons that lack theological depth, potentially prioritizing personal experiences over scriptural authority. As Charles Campbell warns, sermons in this paradigm may overly emphasize individual experiences, risking the marginalization of biblical and theological grounding.

### **Bridging the Gap**

Encouragingly, contemporary homiletics is moving toward integrating the strengths of both paradigms. Evangelical and mainstream scholars increasingly seek to combine the logical clarity of traditional preaching with the audience-centered creativity of modern styles. This balanced approach inspires hope for more effective communication of God's Word in today's dynamic contexts.

## **IV. Toward Effective Preaching Communication: Focused on Four Pages Sermon, Preaching from Conflict to Resolution, and Plot and Moves Preaching**

## 1. The Four Pages Sermon

Homiletician Paul S. Wilson emphasizes the theological polarity within Scripture—such as law and gospel, judgment and grace, Good Friday and Easter, the cross and the empty tomb. Using John 2:1–12 (The Wedding at Cana) as an example, he outlines this preaching style in the following four stages:

1. **Trouble in the Bible:** Identifying problems or conflicts within the biblical text.
2. **Trouble in the World:** Drawing connections to contemporary existential or societal issues.
3. **God's Action in the Bible:** Highlighting God's redemptive work in Scripture.
4. **God's Action in the World:** Applying God's redemptive actions to today's context.

Each stage transitions smoothly, moving from scriptural interpretation to practical application, ensuring both theological depth and relevance to modern audiences. Wilson offers a checklist for effective preaching in this style, emphasizing clarity, audience engagement, and theological precision.

## 2. Preaching from Conflict to Resolution (Preaching from Oops to Yeah)

Eugene L. Lowry's *Homiletical Plot* proposes a narrative-driven structure where sermons resemble the progression of a story. The sermon unfolds in five stages:

1. **Oops:** Upsetting equilibrium by presenting a problem or tension.
2. **Ugh:** Analyzing the conflict in depth.
3. **Aha:** Offering a clue toward resolution.
4. **Whee:** Experiencing the Gospel solution.
5. **Yeah:** Anticipating transformative outcomes.

This approach effectively engages audiences accustomed to storytelling formats in films or novels, making biblical messages more memorable and impactful.

## 3. Sermon as Plot and Moves

David Buttrick emphasizes the phenomenological aspect of preaching, focusing on what happens within listeners' consciousness during the sermon. He advocates structuring sermons into 4–6 "moves" or dynamic scenes, each lasting approximately four minutes. These moves collectively guide listeners toward the sermon's central "Aha!" moment. Buttrick's method prioritizes engaging the audience's imagination, ensuring they vividly experience the message.

# V. Practical Steps: Homiletic Applications and Real-Life Examples

## 1. Example of a Four Pages Sermon

Following Paul S. Wilson's methodology, here is an example sermon outline based on John 2:1–12 (The Wedding at Cana):

#### **Page One: Trouble in the Bible**

The servants are given an incomprehensible command to fill jars with water.

**Sermon Body:** The wedding feast at Cana is in full swing, and the atmosphere is joyous. Jesus, His mother, and His disciples are among the guests. The servants are busy attending to the guests, ensuring food and wine are served. Suddenly, disaster strikes—the wine has run out. The host is distressed, and the servants are at a loss. Mary instructs the servants to do whatever Jesus tells them. Jesus commands them to fill jars with water, an unexpected and baffling instruction. The servants, puzzled and hesitant, wonder why they are being asked to do such an illogical task.

#### **Page Two: Trouble in the World**

We too often encounter perplexing situations where God's Word challenges our understanding.

**Sermon Body:** The servants' bewilderment at Jesus' command mirrors our struggles today when God's guidance seems to conflict with our reality. In a world where logic and self-reliance dominate, trusting God's seemingly counterintuitive directions can feel daunting. For example, in a society that prizes material success, the call to "boast in the cross" might feel irrelevant or even absurd. Yet, just as the servants obeyed, we are called to trust and act in faith, even when the outcome is unclear.

#### **Page Three: God's Action in the Bible**

Jesus turns the water into wine, restoring joy to the wedding feast.

**Sermon Body:** The servants obey Jesus and fill the jars with water. When they serve it to the banquet master, it has miraculously turned into wine—the best wine of the feast. This act not only resolves the immediate crisis but reveals Jesus' divine power and grace. The servants, once hesitant and doubtful, now experience firsthand the transformative work of Christ, filling them with joy and faith.

#### **Page Four: God's Action in the World**

God transforms our lives, turning our inadequacies into His abundance.

**Sermon Body:** In our lives, God works similarly. A young girl, facing challenges, prayed earnestly for solutions, much like filling her jar with water. Over time, she realized that her jar wasn't just filled with answers to her prayers but with God Himself, the ultimate source of joy and fulfillment. Similarly, when we act in faith, God turns our simple obedience into profound blessings, revealing His presence and power in our lives.

## **2. Example of Preaching from Conflict to Resolution (Oops to Yeah)**

Using Eugene L. Lowry's methodology, here's an example sermon based on Job 42:1–5, titled "Now My Eyes Have Seen You":

### **Oops: Upsetting Equilibrium**

Why does Job, a righteous man, declare, "No plan of Yours can be thwarted"? Could it be that Job's personal experience of God often seemed to contradict this belief?

### **Ugh: Analyzing the Conflict**

Despite his righteousness, Job suffered immensely and questioned God's presence and purpose. His struggles mirror our own doubts during prolonged suffering, as we wrestle with the tension between God's promises and our harsh realities.

### **Aha: Offering a Clue to Resolution**

Job's encounter with God shifts his perspective. He realizes that while he may not fully understand God's plans, he can trust in God's sovereignty and goodness.

### **Whee: Experiencing the Gospel**

Through Christ, we see God's ultimate plan of redemption—a plan that turns our pain into purpose and our trials into testimonies of His grace.

### **Yeah: Anticipating Transformation**

Like Job, we can move from merely hearing about God to truly experiencing Him, declaring, "Now my eyes have seen You." This encounter changes how we view our struggles, filling us with hope and confidence in God's plan.

## **3. Example of Plot and Moves Preaching**

Using David Buttrick's method, here's a sample sermon based on Luke 16:19–31, titled "**The Rich Man and Lazarus**":

### **Scene A: Introducing the Rich Man**

**Statement:** The rich man lives in luxury, seemingly untouched by the troubles of the world.

**Development:** He appears to have everything—wealth, comfort, and success—what many people aspire to.

**Imagery:** Picture a lavish banquet with endless indulgences.

**Closure:** Yet, his life lacks connection with God and compassion for others.

### **Scene B: Introducing Lazarus**

**Statement:** Lazarus, a poor and suffering man, contrasts sharply with the rich man.

**Development:** Despite his poverty and pain, Lazarus clings to faith and hope.

**Imagery:** Imagine a destitute figure yearning for crumbs at the rich man's gate.

**Closure:** His life on earth may be filled with struggles, but his heart seeks God.

#### **Scene C: The Reversal of Fates**

**Statement:** The afterlife reveals a dramatic role reversal between the two men.

**Development:** The rich man finds himself in torment, while Lazarus is comforted in Abraham's bosom.

**Imagery:** Contrast the rich man's anguish with Lazarus's peace.

**Closure:** This scene challenges us to consider the eternal consequences of our earthly priorities.

## **VI. Conclusion**

This study underscores the importance of exploring diverse preaching styles to communicate God's Word effectively. By integrating theological depth, creative methods, and audience-centered approaches, preachers can bridge the gap between biblical truth and contemporary realities. Whether through Four Pages Sermons, narrative plots, or dynamic moves, each method offers unique strengths to inspire, challenge, and transform listeners. The ultimate goal is to ensure that God's message resonates profoundly, guiding believers in their spiritual journeys.