



Introduction: For Discouraged Preachers

This book is written for preachers and aspiring preachers. It is also written for listeners. In his magnificent account of Calvin's preaching, T.H.L. Parker writes, "The preacher is only the half of the Church's activity of proclamation The assumption seems to be that, whereas the preacher is really doing something, the people have a passive role, like so many jugs waiting to be filled. ... Anyone who has regularly preached over many years but then has been a member of a congregation for some time, would (if he had strong views on preaching) be hard put to it to decide which was the more demanding, preaching well or listening properly."¹ I hope that as sermon listeners listen in to this conversation between one preacher and his fellow-preachers, they may be helped in the task of learning to listen well to sermons, and of knowing how best to encourage their preachers.

Some years ago I remember attending a large conference of ministers. At the time I was pastoring an ordinary local church, which consisted of mainly ordinary people in a very ordinary place, a village in Eastern England. Sad to say, all I can remember of the conference is impressive speakers who all seemed (to my

1. T.H.L. Parker, *Calvin's Preaching* (T & T Clark, 1992) p. 48





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jaded eyes) to be tall, handsome, successful – everything I was not. Above all, they seemed to talk a lot about doing ‘strategic’ work for the gospel of Christ. It all seemed very strategic. They were clearly strategic people in strategic places doing strategic ministry. I, however, being of a melancholic disposition, was quite sure I was not a strategic person, nor was I in a strategic place, and I was most certainly not doing strategic ministry. As I left the conference, like a dog with its tail between its legs, I wondered if it was really worth preparing for Sunday’s preaching.

At the Cornhill Training Course we get a few random applications from people who know nothing about us, but have somehow stumbled upon us on the internet. One of my favourites was from a man who said he had heard of Cornhill, ‘At Pastor Benny Hinn’s crusade in Nigeria’. Those familiar with Benny Hinn and with the Cornhill Training Course will know that this is unlikely to be true. In answer to the question of what he most wanted to do with the rest of his life, this applicant wrote, in capital letters, ‘TO BE A WORLD-RENOWNED PREACHER AND TEACHER OF THE WORD OF GOD.’ Yes, I thought, we have all dreamed of that, just as we may have wanted to ask the LORD Jesus to sit at his right hand or his left in the Kingdom. But that kind of request has already been tried and it wasn’t well received by Jesus (Matt. 20:20-28).

This little book is written for ordinary ministers who preach regularly to ordinary people in ordinary places, who may dream of being world-renowned but are going to be spared that fate. Most of us preach in gatherings that are smaller than we would wish and tougher than we might have hoped when we entered pastoral ministry. Sometimes we are jaded by opposition, or by defections, or just by the sheer unrelenting slog of church leadership. There is a voice on our shoulders who whispers as we prepare, and then as we preach, ‘Is it really worth it? Why not busk it this week? Who would notice? After all, you’re fooling yourself if you think you’re doing anything significant.’ The devil will throw at us every distraction and discouragement in his arsenal.





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The three chapters of this book were originally given as addresses at the 25th Evangelical Ministry Assembly in June 2008. I hope their effect on delegates was different from the effect on me of the conference I remembered from an earlier year. The addresses were given, and the book is written, from the conviction that the sermons you and I preach week by week in ordinary local churches are more significant than most conference addresses even if they were to be recorded and played back all over the world. My task is to persuade (or at least unsettle) those doubtful about preaching, and to deepen the conviction of those already converted to the priority of preaching. Above all, I want to encourage us to our desks, our prayer, our preparation, and our love for people, with a new spring in our steps as we labour at loving people by preaching to them week by week. My prayer is that this book will encourage the discouraged preacher to persevere with fresh zeal and enthusiasm, because I have convinced you that this Sunday men and women can hear the voice of the living God from your mouth.

The main influences that have fed into this book have been of two kinds. In terms of books, my studies of Deuteronomy owe much to Gordon McConville's outstandingly clear and perceptively theological commentary² and I have also gained much by reading or re-reading the various books on preaching noted in footnotes, especially John Stott's *I believe in Preaching*.³ Pastorally, I owe a great debt to the fellowship of faithful pastor-teachers and preachers whom The Proclamation Trust seeks to serve, and in particular to Dick Lucas, whose expository ministry was the inspiration for The Proclamation Trust and to David Jackman, my predecessor and the founder-director of the Cornhill Training Course, to whose work in equipping expository preachers we all owe so much.

2. J.G. McConville, *Deuteronomy* (IVP Apollos, 2002)

3. John Stott, *I believe in Preaching* (Hodder and Stoughton, 1982)

