

A
MANUAL
FOR
PREACHING

THE JOURNEY
FROM TEXT TO SERMON

ABRAHAM KURUVILLA

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Contents

Acknowledgments	xi
Introduction	xiii
1. Getting Ready	1
2. Discerning Theology	27
3. Deriving Application	57
4. Creating Maps	87
5. Fleshing Moves	113
6. Illustrating Ideas	147
7. Crafting Introductions and Conclusions	175
8. Producing Manuscripts	207
9. Delivering Sermons	235
Conclusion	257
Appendix A: Big Idea versus Theological Focus	263
Appendix B: Preaching—Argumentation versus Demonstration	269
Appendix C: Annotated Sermon Manuscript—Ephesians 1:1–14	275
Appendix D: Annotated Sermon Manuscript—Genesis 26:1–33	289
Bibliography	301
Index	311

Introduction

The notion of putting everything I know about barbecue into a book is a daunting one. Not because I know so much—I’m still learning—but because of the nature of barbecue itself. It’s because the printed word—definitive, exacting, permanent—is in many ways antithetical to the process of cooking barbecue, which is, for lack of a better word, loosey-goosey. So many people want to have a recipe, but with all of the variables in barbecue . . . there is no “magic” recipe.¹

Those words by the pit maestro Aaron Franklin² I echo fervently, except that I’m dealing with preaching, not with a Texas culinary institution. As the first-century classical rhetorician Quintilian warns, “No one however should expect from me the sort of rules that most writers of textbooks have handed down, or ask me to lay down for students a set of laws, as it were, bound by immutable necessity . . . , as if to do otherwise was a sin. Rhetoric would be a very easy and trivial affair if it could be comprised in a single short set of precepts.” Instead, he says, everything depends on exigency and expediency that call for adjustment on the part of the speaker in many ways.³ So at the outset, I admit, with Franklin, that there is no magic recipe—for either barbecue or preaching. Therefore, there really is no right and wrong in these endeavors, only wise and unwise (or good, bad, and ugly).

1. Franklin and Mackay, *Franklin Barbecue*, 1.
2. Of Franklin Barbecue fame, 900 E. 11th St., Austin, TX 78702 (hours: Tuesday–Sunday, 11:00 a.m. until sold out).
3. Quintilian, *Orator’s Education*, 341 (2.13.1–3).

I will also confess that my intimate knowledge of preaching relates almost exclusively to my own ponderings and practices. In the decades that I've been engaged in the discipline of homiletics, I have heard, read, and examined a lot of sermons, spoken and scripted, delivered across eras and beyond oceans, in churches various and in classrooms galore. But I know myself and my preaching best (or at least I think I do). "In most books, the *I*, or first person, is omitted; in this it will be retained. . . . I should not talk so much about myself if there were anybody else whom I knew as well."⁴ But I don't. So what you are about to read is my conception of how preaching should be undertaken (the practice). And that conception is based solidly on my understanding of what preaching ought to be (the vision). I had the chance to expound on this latter aspect of homiletics in *A Manual for Preaching*: "Biblical preaching, by a leader of the church, in a gathering of Christians for worship, is the communication of the thrust of a pericope of Scripture discerned by theological exegesis, and of its application to that specific body of believers, that they may be conformed to the image of Christ, for the glory of God—all in the power of the Holy Spirit."⁵

There I reflected on preaching as being biblical, pastoral, ecclesial, communicational, theological, applicational, conformational, doxological, and spiritual. But at the core of that vision was a hermeneutic, a way of reading Scripture, that influenced how I saw preaching. That same hermeneutic also informs my conception of how preaching ought to be undertaken. In other words, *A Manual for Preaching* continues what was begun in *A Vision for Preaching*.

Here is a summary of what readers will find in this book's chapters. Chapter 1 ("Getting Ready") will deal with preliminaries, setting the stage with sequential long- and short-term plans for preaching. The long-term plan directs the structure of the remainder of the book. Chapter 2 ("Discerning Theology") lays out the core of my preaching philosophy—its hermeneutic: how the text of Scripture is to be read and interpreted. Readers will be guided with examples to discern the thrust of various texts (the theology of those pericopes). Chapter 3 ("Deriving Application") defines and describes application and the move from pericopal theology to application; it discusses the main characteristics and types of application and how to derive application for sermons on particular pericopes. Chapter 4 ("Creating Maps") delineates the process for mapping a sermon into a number of moves, and Chapter 5 ("Fleshing Moves") explains how one can expand those moves—put flesh on

4. Thoreau, *Walden*, 1.

5. Kuruvilla, *Vision for Preaching*, 1.

skeletons, as it were—attending to both revelation (aspects of the text) and relevance (aspects of the audience). Chapter 6 (“Illustrating Ideas”) considers the functions and types of illustrations and how to find, organize, and use them in sermons. Chapter 7 (“Crafting Introductions and Conclusions”) dissects the structures of those elements that commence and conclude a sermon and provides tips on how best to compose and deploy them. Chapter 8 (“Producing Manuscripts”) emphasizes the utility of producing a sermon manuscript, weighs the different kinds of sermons—with and without notes—and gives suggestions for producing and using manuscripts, considering also the employment of electronic devices to manage notes/manuscripts during preaching. This chapter also debates sermon borrowing. The final chapter (“Delivering Sermons”) addresses matters pertaining to delivery as well as rehearsing, nervousness, and how to manage one’s immediate pre- and post-sermon routines.

Over the course of these nine chapters, readers will also find short commentaries on some of the pericopes of the Letter to the Ephesians and the Jacob Story (Gen. 25:19–36:43), interpretations that derive the statement of each text’s thrust and force—its Theological Focus. (Chapter 1 will provide an introduction to Ephesians and the Jacob Story; chapters 2–9 will consider several of their individual pericopes.)⁶ Other examples will necessarily be from brief portions of Scripture (and elsewhere), some of them not even complete pericopes, many from Proverbs. The constraint of book size and the desire to depict easily graspable examples dictated those choices. Besides, didactic and narrative genres, as represented by Ephesians and the Jacob Story, compose half the Old Testament and almost all the New Testament.

Most of the examples and preaching tips herein are drawn from real life—tried in class and proven from pulpits, submitted by students and shared by colleagues. I have learned from many, both dead and living, and continue to do so. In turn, I encourage readers also to be avid learners, never ceasing to grow and improve in their preaching. “We’ll be at this craft for a lifetime. There’s no rush. Slowly, step-by-step, working on one thing at a time—that’s how to build a solid preaching style.”⁷ That is, no doubt, because learning to preach, and learning to preach better, is a commitment for life—and never easy. The French Dominican friar Humbert of Romans, a leader among preachers in the twelfth century, began his *Treatise on Preaching* with these words: “The

6. These interpretations of some of the Ephesians and Jacob Story pericopes, along with interpretations of those pericopes not dealt with in this work, can be found at <http://www.homiletix.com/preaching2019/commentaries>. For more exhaustive curations of these pericopes, I recommend my full-fledged commentaries: *Ephesians* and *Genesis*.

7. Galli and Larson, *Preaching That Connects*, 144.

first thing to note is how excellent the office [of preaching] is, how necessary, how acceptable to God, how profitable to the preacher himself, how useful to men, [and] *how difficult it is to do well*.”⁸ But hang in there; there is no communication genre as enthralling, no Christian service as exciting, and no edifying ministry as rewarding as preaching. For the preacher to be used by God in the transformation of lives into Christlikeness, pericope by pericope, sermon by sermon, is an incredible privilege. Revel in it!

In sum, this work is an attempt to describe my own praxis of preaching and share what I have learned over the decades. I wish I could say that I preach what I teach. Alas! “It is a good divine that follows his own instructions. I can easier teach twenty what were good to be done than be one of the twenty to follow mine own teaching.”⁹ But here it is anyway. Please take whatever is offered as suggestions that I consider reasonable and expedient for the attainment of the goals propounded in my vision for preaching. The counsels in this book are, therefore, intended to function as guidelines and not as rules (unless they are rules of thumb) and, as such, may be contravened as readers grow in preaching experience and skill. That is to say, *break the rules!* Ferdinand Ries, a friend and pupil of Beethoven, recalled the genius doing exactly that:

During a walk, I spoke to [Beethoven] of two perfect fifths . . . in his Violin Quartet in C minor [Op. 18, No. 4; such parallel intervallic progressions were taboo in classical harmony]. . . .

He asked: “Well, who has forbidden them?” . . .

Since I did not know how to take the question, he repeated it several times until I finally answered in amazement: “After all, these are fundamental rules.”

The question was repeated again, and I answered: “[Friedrich] Marpurg, [Johann] Kirnberger, [Johann] Fux, etc., etc.—all [music] theorists.”

[Beethoven] answered: “And I allow them.”¹⁰

Lesser mortals may slavishly abide by rules of theorists, but you, preacher, feel free to break them. This book will hopefully help you find your own voice like a Beethoven while sustaining you until then with avuncular comments and beneficent glances over your shoulder.

And now, a final word from that blackbelt of barbecue, Aaron Franklin, before you fire up your grill:

8. Humbert of Romans, “Treatise on Preaching,” 375 (my translation and emphasis).

9. Shakespeare, *Merchant of Venice*, act 1, scene 2.

10. Wegeler and Ries, *Biographische Notizen über Ludwig van Beethoven*, 104–5 (my translation and emphasis).

Hopefully, while you read this book, you'll find yourself chomping at the bit to get out there and throw a few racks of ribs or a big, honking brisket onto your smoker. And all I can say is, Go for it! The key to my own development—and it will be to yours—is repetition. Just as with anything, the more you do it, the better you'll get. . . . Ultimately, that's the best advice I can give. Do, and do some more. Drink beer, but not so much that you lose track of what you're doing. And pay attention. Sweat the details and you'll end up producing barbecue that would make the most seasoned of pitmasters proud.¹¹

Ditto for preaching, *mutatis mutandis*.

11. Franklin and Mackay, *Franklin Barbecue*, 3.

1

Getting Ready

Ants shape each other's behavior by exchanging chemicals. We do it by standing in front of each other, peering into each other's eyes, waving our hands and emitting strange sounds from our mouths. Human-to-human communication is a true wonder of the world. We do it unconsciously every day. And it reaches its most intense form on the public stage.¹

Yes, belonging to the family *Hominidae* puts our interpersonal communication on a different plane from that engaged in by members of the family *Formicidae*. But for us who are children of God, the form of communication we call preaching is located in an even more unique dimension and is different from every other kind of public speech, formal or informal: it is the parade event wherein the word of God is expounded by a shepherd of God for the people of God to conform them into the image of the Son of God by the power of the Spirit of God for the glory of God. An incomparable and momentous occasion, indeed! And for us who have chosen the vocation of preaching, this form of communication is critically important: we are handling Scripture to facilitate listeners' conformation to Christlikeness.² Preaching is a crucial responsibility, and one fraught with dignity and distinction. It is undoubtedly a noble task: preachers speak, "as it were, the

1. Anderson, *TED Talks*, ix.

2. For more on these crucial elements of the preaching endeavor, see Kuruvilla, *Vision for Preaching*.

words of God” (1 Pet. 4:11).³ Those in Ephesus who “labor in the word and in teaching,” Paul declares, are “worthy of double honor” (1 Tim. 5:17); the task of an elder—one who was also required to be “able to teach” (3:2)—was commended as “a good work” (3:1). By fulfilling the preaching duty allotted to him, Timothy is reminded that he would be “a good servant of Christ Jesus” (4:6). So as Colossians 1:28 declares, “We proclaim him, instructing all people and teaching all people with all wisdom, that we may present all people mature in Christ.” God is glorified as his people thus manifest his holiness (Christlikeness) and represent him to the world, “filled with the fruit of righteousness through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God” (Phil. 1:11).⁴ What a privilege it is to partner with God in the execution of his grand plan to consummate all things in Jesus Christ (Eph. 1:9–10)!⁵

Preliminaries

Let me address a few important matters before we begin our journey from text to sermon.

Edification versus Evangelism

Preaching is for those already in relationship with God.⁶ There is an important corollary to this assertion that preachers must bear in mind.

Because the goal of preaching is to conform humankind to the image of Christ, and because the first step of such conformation is the placing of one’s trust in Christ as one’s only God and Savior, the proclamation of the good news of salvation has also generally been considered preaching. But in the Bible, evangelistic proclamation is never a formal exposition of a specific biblical text that contextually interprets the authorial thrust/force in that pericope⁷ and that draws out relevant application from that particular text. Rather, evangelistic proclamation deals with the announcement to non-

3. All translations of Scripture are my own unless otherwise noted.

4. Also see Matt. 5:16; 1 Pet. 2:12.

5. For this critical partnership with God, the preacher must be a certain kind of person. See Kuruvilla, “Preaching Is Pastoral,” in *Vision for Preaching*, 31–49; Kuruvilla, “Preaching Is Spiritual,” in *Vision for Preaching*, 167–85. And for the ultimate end of preaching, see Kuruvilla, “Preaching Is Doxological,” in *Vision for Preaching*, 149–66.

6. See Kuruvilla, “Preaching Is Ecclesial,” in *Vision for Preaching*, 51–69. The issue of where preaching is to be conducted is also addressed there.

7. “Pericope” (pronounced pə-ri-kə-pē, from the Greek *perikopē* = section, passage) refers to a portion of the biblical text that is of manageable size for homiletical and liturgical use in an ecclesial setting. More on pericopes below.

believers of an accomplished act—the atoning work of Christ. Thus the *text* in evangelistic proclamation plays only a supportive role in such proclamation: it simply serves as a springboard to raise an existential angst, to validate the veracity of the resurrection, to depict the benefits of a relationship with God, to delineate the negative consequences of not being in such a relationship, and so on. The core *message* of evangelistic proclamation is identical in every iteration: Jesus Christ, God incarnate, died and rose again, paying the full, final price for the sins of humanity. *Application* in these proclamations also remains the same, no matter what the text used, no matter who the audience is: *Trust Jesus Christ as your only God and Savior*.⁸ Of course, the *audience* for evangelistic proclamations is exclusively unbelievers.

Edifying preaching, on the other hand, involves the exposition of a particular biblical pericope, with the *text* playing the major role, all else being subordinate. The sermon discerns the text's thrust/force (i.e., the theology of that particular pericope), making the *message* of such preaching unique in every sermonic event.⁹ The derived *application* is also specific for the theology of that text; besides, such application is tailored for a particular audience. The *audience*, which is being conformed to the image of Christ, comprises those already in relationship with God (i.e., believers).

In light of these differences in text use, message thrust, application specificity, and audience identity, it is best to distinguish evangelistic proclamation and edifying preaching. For the rest of this work, such a distinction will be maintained, and our focus will be exclusively on preaching—the pericope-specific, believer-edifying species of Christian communication.

I contend that there is no *hermeneutical* constraint arising from every text of Scripture to mention the gospel of salvation in every sermon.¹⁰ However, there is a *pragmatic* constraint to do so, for one does not know if every listener in one's audience is saved. Therefore, even though the sermon is primarily for the people of God, the gospel *should* be presented in every worship service, though there is no imperative that such a proclamation be confined to the sermon. It is far more appropriate and prudent to think in terms of presenting the good news *somewhere* in the worship service (not necessarily in the sermon), by *someone* (not necessarily by the preacher), *somehow* (not

8. In this work, application will always be in italics and end with an exclamation mark.

9. For more on the theology of pericopes, see Kuruvilla, "Preaching Is Communicational," in *Vision for Preaching*, 71–89; Kuruvilla, "Preaching Is Theological," in *Vision for Preaching*, 91–109; and also chap. 2 below, "Discerning Theology."

10. See Kuruvilla, *Privilege the Text!*, 238–69; Kuruvilla, *Vision for Preaching*, 42–52; and my contribution, "Christiconic View," as well as my responses to other contributors in *Homiletics and Hermeneutics*.

necessarily in any set format). Discussing the inclusion of this critical element of worship with your team is helpful—be creative.

Choosing a Text: Book and Pericope

Now that you have decided to preach, the first item on the agenda is the selection of a text to preach from. Again, let's assume you are in this for the long run. In that case, my strong recommendation is that you "read continuously" (i.e., *lectio continua*), going from pericope to pericope in a given book, respecting the trajectory of its author's thought and the progression of his ideas. This I shall simply refer to as "preaching," without any qualifying adjectives like textual, topical, expository, and so on.¹¹ Such preaching alone gives listeners the sense of what the author is *doing* in each pericope and how these *doings* are sequenced and linked together in a given book to further the author's theological agenda for life change unto Christlikeness.¹²

Even when you preach *lectio continua*, you'll need to figure out which book of the Bible to tackle.¹³ This will be contingent on your audience. Where are they in their spiritual walk? Are there any particular issues of concern or problems within the flock you are shepherding? Are you reorienting the momentum of the group and the trajectory of its life growth in a new direction? If so, you might consider whether a particular book of the Bible meets the need or situation of your listeners. This is perhaps the only time in *lectio continua* preaching that the need of the audience comes *before* the choice of

11. Walter C. Kaiser once recommended to his students that they "preach a topical sermon only once every five years—and then immediately to repent and ask God's forgiveness" (*Toward an Exegetical Theology*, 19). My sentiments exactly! I am not a fan at all of topical preaching that takes entailments from a variety of texts (not necessarily thrusts/forces that the author intended—e.g., the Trinity from Matt. 28:19–20) and puts them all together to create an exposition of a topic of interest: *lectio selecta* ("reading selectively"). It is "the seduction of the concordance" that produces unity that is "only apparent, not real," as Fred B. Craddock put it (*As One without Authority*, 56; also see chap. 5, "Fleshing Moves"). Though useful on occasion, topical preaching, like fast food, ought never to be the staple diet of the children of God. So here's a personal rule of thumb: try not to have more than five special days (including Easter, Thanksgiving, and Christmas) plus up to five more weeks of other kinds of topical sermons every calendar year (i.e., a series on a theological topic, a current issue, or some such, as you deem necessary for your flock). If you add another six or eight weeks when you are on vacation and/or when someone is filling in for you with assorted texts and topics that you may not have much control over, that leaves you with about thirty-six weeks a year to preach through books *lectio continua*.

12. See Kuruvilla, *Vision for Preaching*, 23–25.

13. If you are going to do a one-off sermon, as I am usually called to do since I am not on staff or on the preaching team in any church, then you need to figure out what your audience needs and what you can do reasonably well within the constraints of available preparation time, personal capacity, efficiency, etc. Pick a passage accordingly.

a text (here, book). But once a book is picked, let its A/author have his way with the audience. As we shall see later, the needs of audiences should still be considered, but only *after* the theology of the text has been discerned. Other considerations for choice of books might be your preaching calendar: What book have you just finished preaching through? What season in the church calendar are you going to be preaching in? And so on.¹⁴

For the rest of this work, I'll assume that you plan to preach through a book, or a sizable portion thereof, week by week. And for illustration purposes, let's also assume that you want to preach through the Letter to the Ephesians or the Jacob Story in Genesis 25:19–36:43; these will be the main texts we'll handle in this work. With you poring over my shoulder, I'll work out the theologies of several of the pericopes of Ephesians and the Jacob Story.¹⁵ That will give you a sense of what a “pearl necklace” looks like, one from the Old Testament (a narrative) and one from the New Testament (an epistle), the pericopal “pearls” of which were deliberately chosen and carefully strung together by the A/author into the “necklace.”

A word about pericopes before we go any further. Though *pericope* technically refers to a portion of, or a scene in, the Gospel narratives, I use it here to designate a preaching text, irrespective of genre or size—a practical definition. In my conception, a pericope's boundaries are constrained by the preacher's need to create discrete sequential sermons from contiguous passages. So a pericope is a portion of text from which one can preach a sermon that is distinct in theological thrust/force and application from sermons preached from adjacent pericopes. As an analogy, take the spectrum of visible light, with wavelengths from 400 nm to 700 nm, violet to red. How many different reds are there in the spectrum? And how many can we distinguish? I, being somewhat opaque in these matters, can discern light red, medium red, and dark red. You, however, may find cherry, rose, merlot, crimson, ruby, brick, blood, blush, scarlet, and so on. In the same way, the slicing of your pericopes may differ from mine. You might be able to discern distinct theological thrusts/forces between pericopes divided minutely and finely and be capable of deriving equally distinct applications therefrom. I, on the other hand, might need larger slices of text to be able to discern such theological and applicational

14. For interim preachers, it is helpful to inventory what has been preached in the recent past by the regular preacher and other pulpit guests.

15. Brief commentaries on the pericopes from these texts can be found toward the end of each subsequent chapter (this chapter will introduce Ephesians and the Jacob Story). All of these, as well as commentaries on pericopes not discussed in this work, are available at <http://www.homiletix.com/preaching2019/commentaries>. We'll also go through a number of brief examples from the book of Proverbs, not to mention other assorted and diverse texts, both sacred and secular.

differences between my adjacent pericopes. But the fact is that too fine a dicing of passages will often yield similar theologies and applications (and so similar sermons) across weeks. One cannot discern a whole lot of difference between adjacent pericopes that are only a verse or two long (or between red at 680 nm and that at 681 nm). You are safer taking larger chunks of text, as I am prone to do these days after almost a quarter century of preaching. Check out the sizes of the pericopes from Ephesians and the Jacob Story that we will be dealing with in coming chapters—they are not small.

Tools and Resources

Much has been made of the preacher's library, whether in ink and on paper or in 1s and 0s. Libraries are, no doubt, important. The Spirit of God has spoken through many in the past (mostly dead) and continues to do so through many in the present (mostly [!] alive). And we preachers need to listen to what the Author has said through these others and not just proceed by the light of our personal illumination. But there is an obsession with books and electronic resources—the fancier, the better, it seems—that is not based on actual need.

As preachers, our primary task is to lay out what the biblical author is *doing* with what he is saying in each pericope—the theology of the pericope. With this primary task in mind, the most helpful resources for preachers, who facilitate listeners' discerning of theology, are those tomes that enable our own discernment of the theology of the pericope. That is what we preachers need help with—interpretation that discerns pericopal theology: *theological* interpretation. Regrettably, such text-to-theology analyses of biblical books are sorely lacking. And so we lament with Karl Barth:

My complaint is that recent commentators confine themselves to an interpretation of the text which seems to me to be no commentary at all, but merely the first step toward a commentary. Recent commentaries contain no more than a reconstruction of the text, a rendering of the Greek words and phrases by their precise equivalents, a number of additional notes in which archaeological and philological material is gathered together, and a more or less plausible arrangement of the subject-matter in such a manner that it may be made historically and psychologically intelligible from the standpoint of pure pragmatism.¹⁶

It is as if, when a patient comes to see me, a dermatologist (my other job), for a rash on the face, I begin to make a list of observations: a fifty-nine-year-old

16. Barth, "Preface to the Second Edition," 6.

gentleman, tortoise-shell-rimmed glasses, thinning hair on the frontal scalp, two ears, blue tie, 170 pounds, and so on. But these observations will not necessarily bring me closer to an accurate diagnosis. I also notice that my patient has red papules and macules on the malar cheeks, and general erythema (redness) in that area—ah, now *those* are significant observations. I am not saying that the patient’s weight and hair loss and glasses and tie have no bearing on his facial rash—they might. And so also might the various histories that I elicit from my patient: a family history (of kinship diseases and genetic predilections), a social history (of prevailing habits and unrecognized behaviors), a personal history (of occupation and demographics), and a medical history (of previous illnesses and earlier maladies). But all of these have utility only insofar as they influence the current problem: the facial rash. Histories and backgrounds and cultures and idioms are perhaps necessary but, in and of themselves, are not sufficient for arriving at a diagnosis and moving to treatment (= discerning the theology and deriving application). The immediate physical exam, current imaging, lab work, and so on are of primary importance in the diagnostic process of getting to the cause of the disorder, helped though they are—to some degree—by the assorted histories that are, again, necessary but not sufficient. Without privileging the text, without discerning what the author is *doing*, without arriving at the theology of the pericope, valid application is impossible.

Instead, we preachers are consumed with what is best labeled a “hermeneutic of excavation” and have been trained to shovel up loads of dirt, boulders, potsherds, arrowheads, and fishhooks. We dump it all on our desks. Everything in the text, it seems, is equally important and crucial, and there is hardly any discriminating inference or integration that leads to an understanding of what the author is *doing*—the theology of the pericope. Like cows at pasture, we munch on every available blade of grass, and commentaries abundantly furnish those pieces of herbage for our consumption.¹⁷ The overestimation of the values of all these bits and bytes of information that we have unearthed (or that are served to us by commentators) oft leads the interpretive enterprise astray. And so, on Saturday night we ask in desperation, “What on earth do we do with this mass of material come Sunday morning? What’s the author *doing* here? What’s important and what’s not? And how do we create a sermon and get to valid application?”

It is in the discovery of authorial *doings*—the discernment of the pericopal theology—that commentaries have let preachers down: “Commentaries often provide no theological reflection at all or do not move beyond a summation

17. Paraphrasing Medawar, *Induction and Intuition*, 29.

of the exegesis into true theological reflection.”¹⁸ Again, what we preachers need is *theological* exegesis to discern the *doings* of the author of the text (i.e., the theology of the pericope) so that we and our listeners, the people of God, can move to valid application. No wonder the sage of the twentieth century, singer Johnny Cash, after exploring numerous commentaries on Paul’s letters, quipped, “Tons of material has been written . . . but I discovered that the Bible can shed a lot of light on commentaries.”¹⁹ It can. A careful reading of the text will enlighten our minds and elucidate its theology, as we shall find.

I, therefore, cast a dim eye on the plethora of resources currently available to preachers. I would caution that you be discerning too. Carefully pick a commentary or two on a given book, especially those that seek to clarify what the author of the book is *doing* with what he is saying, pericope by pericope.²⁰ Needless to say, Bible scholars who write commentaries are rarely ever preachers, and so you are probably going to have to search long and hard to find commentaries suitable for helping you preach in the fashion I recommend.²¹ But all is not lost. We can accomplish a great deal ourselves by learning to read better. More on that in the next chapter (“Discerning Theology”), but for now, let me just say this: don’t get carried away with books and the accumulation of massive libraries. Save your hard-earned money. Pick a few good tomes, checking them constantly against Scripture as you study them, and learn to do your own work.²²

18. Watson, “Why We Need Socio-Rhetorical Commentary,” 138.

19. Cash, *Man in White*, xvi.

20. For over a decade now, I have been attempting to produce commentaries for this purpose, curating the text for preachers, pericope by pericope. The commentaries on Genesis, Judges, Mark, and Ephesians are in print. Another hundred-odd years and I will be done with the remaining sixty-two books! In the meantime, check out free chapter downloads from every book I’ve written at <http://www.homiletix.com>. A quick note if you use my commentaries: they are written for you, the sermon preparer, not the sermon listener. In other words, 80 to 85 percent of what is in those books ought not to show up in the sermon. The extra detail there is simply to validate my interpretive stance for the sermon preparer. In any case, feel free to use whatever you want from my commentaries, even verbatim—I wrote them for you (but do peruse my thoughts on plagiarism in chap. 8, “Producing Manuscripts”). As far as other traditional commentaries are concerned (that deal, for the most part, with authorial sayings and not with authorial *doings*), check out their ratings at <https://www.bestcommentaries.com/>. (Again, all the links in this book can also be found on <http://www.homiletix.com/preaching2019/links>.)

21. I’d recommend anything written by Daniel Block, Robert Chisholm, Dale Ralph Davis, Timothy Gombis, John Paul Heil, Kenneth Mathews, John Walton, and Gordon Wenham. On a more technical level, the writings of Robert Alter, Adele Berlin, Jan Fokkelman, Meir Sternberg, and Gregory Wong are among those that I’ve found useful (particularly with regard to the Old Testament).

22. One of the goals of this book, particularly its illustrative portions dealing with the pericopes of Ephesians and the Jacob Story (and indeed, the goal of all my commentaries), is to guide you through a gallery of pictures (pericopes) with me as the docent/curator. A crucial

What you *will* need is a good Bible software program that handles Hebrew and Greek well, though you don't necessarily need to be an ancient language whiz (see below). My recommendation is Logos, Accordance, or BibleWorks.²³ But watch out: bells and whistles are useful if you are a steam engine driver but not if you are a preacher. What I look for in a software program is instantaneous parsing, access to lexicons and translations (and the occasional grammars), and the ability to see other instances of word roots in the book I am studying or in the entire canon (Old Testament, New Testament, and the Septuagint). Of course, multiple English translations are integral to most common Bible software programs; an added plus are the Targums and the works of Josephus and Philo. If your Bible software package can do this much, you are well on your way. The rest is icing, and not very tasty icing at that.²⁴

How much Hebrew and Greek do you need? I am quite countercultural, and at the risk of dismaying my language colleagues, I'll declare here that a couple of semesters each of Hebrew and Greek—that enable one to handle the exceedingly good language tools available *in silico*—is sufficient. Language scholars will argue (they have, and I, in turn, have argued with them)²⁵ that computer resources, or even commentaries that provide exegesis for us, are not infallible. They try to make a case for preachers doing their own exegesis. But I reply: the chances of a computer (or of a scholar writing a commentary on a book he or she has spent decades studying) making a mistake are far, far less than my own by potentially misleading myself with a few paltry semesters of Greek and Hebrew.

way of learning how to discern the thrust/force of the text, the theology of the pericope, is by “catching” it—it is more caught than taught.

23. See <https://www.logos.com/>; <https://www.accordancebible.com/>; <https://bibleworks.com/> (BibleWorks, the company, has ceased operation as of mid-2018; the software, if you already have it, is still viable, but support will no longer be forthcoming). Logos makes it easy to procure a library of searchable books, though the value of scrolling through works of unclear value—and there are many of those in the Logos suite—is dubious. Distractions are a curse, and frequently such red herrings, goose chases, and rabbit trails are detrimental to any study of the text that attempts to discern what the author is *doing*.

24. Another worthwhile acquisition is a membership in the American Theological Library Association (ATLA; <http://www.atla.com>) and its databases of journals and articles, many of which are full text in pdf. You can search for articles by keyword, author, or Scripture passage, and these are extremely helpful, particularly for tough texts that you will, no doubt, encounter. If you are an alumnus/a of a theological institution, that school will in all likelihood provide access to ATLA for its grads (here's what my institution, Dallas Theological Seminary, provides for its alumni in terms of library resources: http://library.dts.edu/Pages/ER/alum_menu.shtml). Getting your employers to pay for it is a good perk too, if you can persuade them to do so. Don't forget the obvious Google searches or even Google Scholar searches (<https://scholar.google.com/>).

25. See Kuruvilla, “What Is the Author *Doing* with What He Is *Saying*?” This article and a response by one of my New Testament colleagues, along with my rejoinder, are available for download at <http://www.homiletix.com/KuruvillaJETS2017>.

Having said that and offended all the Greek and Hebrew scholars on this planet and elsewhere, let me delineate three areas in which standard commentaries are useful.

Textual Criticism. This is not a major issue for preachers, but getting the opinion of experts on possible variant manuscript readings and why one should/could/may choose a reading that differs from the accepted composite version of Greek and Hebrew documents (Nestle-Aland and *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*, respectively) might be helpful on occasion (though not always). But keep in mind that it is easy to get lost in the weeds of textual criticism. And let us preachers not be cavalier in throwing shade on the English translations that God's people utilize, lest we diminish their faith in their own ability to study Scripture sans the original languages.

Background Material. The better commentaries will give preachers enough (and more) background—histories, biographical details of characters, cultural factors, idioms, and so on—that may be necessary to catch what an author is *doing* with what he is saying. Such elements could therefore aid one in discerning the theology of the pericope (though not always), just as personal and social and familial histories may help a physician arrive at a diagnosis (though not always). However, it is easy to get lost in the forest of background material. For the most part, the overdone detail offered by standard commentaries on these matters is unnecessary for preachers.²⁶

Exegetical Detail. Good commentaries will provide enough exegetical detail to validate the conclusions of their authors as to what the biblical writers are *doing* with what they are saying. But since that species of commentary hardly exists, preachers must be careful with the ones commonly available. A random, unselective, and indiscriminating exegesis of every word and sentence (a hermeneutic of excavation), as is usually found in these works, is fruitless. Therefore, it is easy to get lost in the tares and chaff of such analyses. Preachers must learn to be selective, employing a *theological* exegesis that yields clues to the author's *doing* in the text (the theology of the pericope). It is detective work: not everything in the crime scene is significant. We gumshoes must teach ourselves the art of theological detection, and the best way to learn is probably by apprenticing ourselves to those who do it well—either in person or through their writings. Remember, learning to discern the theology of the pericope is more caught than taught.

In any case, establish, sufficiently early on, the translation you want to use in the pulpit. Personally, I use the New American Standard Bible

26. I claim that the introductions to Ephesians and the Jacob Story in my commentaries, both in my books and in this chapter, provide sufficient background material for preaching purposes.

(NASB). Occasionally I find that standard translations do not do justice to particular wordplays in the original text, and so I tweak the NASB as I see fit and print out the product for the congregation. I prefer to preach with as close to a literal translation as I can find. Remember, you are not preaching an event behind the text or something abstracted from the text but *the text itself*. To catch what the author is *doing*, one must attend carefully to the way the text is written, the way the story is told, the way the poem is constructed, and so on. For this, a literal translation is invaluable. Interlinears may help you out here: the Blue Letter Bible is an excellent one that also parses (and pronounces) each Hebrew/Greek word; the Lumina Bible, with a click, will highlight all the roots of the word that occur in the passage. Both are free.²⁷

Now that you have, hopefully, been persuaded to preach through Ephesians or the Jacob Story, how do you divide your time for sermon preparation?

Managing Time: Long-Term and Short-Term Sermon Preparation

Sermon preparation is hard work, but the word of God and the fruit God produces through preaching are worthy of the labor invested. Therefore, prioritize time spent in preparation and guard quality time whenever that may be for you.²⁸ It is probably advisable to block off regular times for study, when you are not seeing any walk-ins for counseling or consultation and when you are not attending any committee meetings. Sit down to work and put your humming, chirping, and buzzing devices on airplane mode. You may also want to find a regular place to work, be it office or coffee shop, where you have everything necessary within reach.²⁹ Someone once said that the three best friends of a sermon preparer are custom, habit, and routine. Indeed! Develop and cultivate the customs, habits, and routines of long-term sermon preparation (what you do long before you preach) and short-term sermon preparation (what you do the week of your preaching), and I guarantee that the majority of your homiletical problems will be solved.

27. See <https://www.blueletterbible.org/> and <https://lumina.bible.org/>. Also be sure to glance at the excellent notes of the NET Bible in Lumina (its notes are of greater value than its translation).

28. For me, this is whenever I can find an available time slot of at least an hour.

29. Home, sweet home, works best for me. I need absolute quiet and a couple of large monitors hooked up to my laptop (Bible software on one; Microsoft Word on the other). I don't have more than one book open on my desk at any given time. Check out the practices of a number of preachers at <http://homiletix.com/how-i-preach-archives/> in a series of interviews titled "How I Preach."

If you are a full-time preacher in a church setting, it is fair to assume that you have a number of things to do other than preach and prepare to preach. The demands of pastoral ministry are many and variegated, and I hope you are giving adequate time for all that God calls you to do. In addition, there are family responsibilities. And the cultivation of hobbies. And personal development. Preaching is only one of several plates you are juggling. Don't drop any, please, and the way to keep them all successfully spinning in the air is this: plan ahead in long-term preparation for preaching. If you fail to plan, you are, without a doubt, planning to fail. Starting early keeps you unhurried and unfrazzled and obviates the necessity of taking shortcuts with the text at the last minute. Long-term preparation also gives you sufficient time to live with the text and its message for maximal internalization and, importantly, optimal personal involvement, giving you the time to apply its thrust/force into your own life before preaching it to others. "Time *with* a message is as important as time *for* a message."³⁰ Simmering sermons are the stock of creativity. Let them brew. Give your inchoate sermons plenty of time to mature. Needless to say, planning ahead will also help you enjoy the preparation process, reduce your stress, and probably keep you from burning out.³¹

For a twelve-sermon series, like the one on Ephesians (or the Jacob Story), begin to work at least three months in advance. A good rule of thumb is this: do one week of long-term preparation for every week of preaching. So long-term preparation for twelve sermons means twelve weeks of preparation *before* you commence the preaching of that twelve-sermon series.³² Let me

30. Olford and Olford, *Anointed Expository Preaching*, 106 (emphasis in original).

31. A well-thought-out calendar created in advance helps you with an overview of biblical books (and topics) you'd like to cover over a long period of time, lists vacations and conference trips, reminds you of special days and ordinance Sundays, demarcates space for guest preachers, and so on. Planning ahead also aids the development of meaningful, intentional, and cohesive worship services—the worship team can collaborate with you only if you give them sufficient notice of your designs. See Rummage, *Planning Your Preaching*, 25–32.

32. A word about the length of a sermon series. The late James Montgomery Boice, erstwhile minister of the Tenth Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia, confessed it took him eight years to preach through Romans—in 239 sermons (see the various prefaces in his anthology of sermons, *Romans*). John F. MacArthur preached through the Gospel of Matthew over an eight-year period and "rarely felt the need to take a break" ("Frequently Asked Questions about Expository Preaching," 340). I wouldn't recommend following in their footsteps. Over the years I have found that dealing with larger chunks is the best way to catch and reflect the overall trajectory of a given book (the "necklace"), pericope by pericope ("pearl by pearl"). Of course, if there are natural breaks within a book, between, say, the major sections of Genesis (Gen. 1:1–11:26 [primeval history]; 11:27–25:18 [the Abraham story]; 25:19–36:43 [the Jacob Story]; and 37:1–50:26 [the Joseph story]), doing another series or a few topical sermons at these seams is not a bad idea.

show you *a* method of long-term preparation, one that has worked for me and the one I know best.³³

If you are planning ahead, here is what you need to do in terms of managing time: set aside twelve hours a week for long-term preparation. That's it—that's all you need to do each week: twelve hours. For the sake of discussion, let's say you choose to spend Mondays from eight o'clock in the morning to noon and one o'clock to five o'clock in the afternoon, and Tuesdays from eight o'clock in the morning to noon (twelve hours total) on long-term preparation. You can, of course, spread those twelve hours through the week differently. In any case, plan on twelve hours of work a week for twelve weeks (for a twelve-week series of sermons).³⁴ Now let me add an extra week—we'll call it week -1 (minus one)—to those twelve weeks, a week taken up with the preliminary tasks of sermon preparation (also a twelve-hour week). Here is a breakdown.

Long-Term Preparation Week -1: Getting Ready

Week -1 happens sometime *before* you start long-term preparation, though not too far away from those twelve weeks, perhaps during a sabbatical, a retreat, or a week off. The twelve hours of week -1 may also be spread out over that week. Of course, depending on your time and inclination (and the book you plan to preach through), you could take more or fewer than twelve hours and apportion them over more than a single week.

Here's what you do in week -1:

Assemble resources (see above).

Read the entire book (or the large chunk of the book you are planning to preach on) multiple times.

Delineate pericopes.

33. A variation of this is taught in Dallas Theological Seminary's preaching curriculum. Of course, you should feel free to tweak anything to your own level of comfort, capacity, and heart's content.

34. Needless to say, every aspect of sermon preparation should be bathed in prayer, for yourself (even for wisdom in the choice of a book to preach through or a series to engage in) and your listeners. Engage in sermon preparation as a spiritual exercise and, without a doubt, it will profit your relationship with God immensely, even in the relative mundanities of poring over Hebrew and Greek, creating sermon maps, and worrying over application. And by the way, is there anyone praying regularly for you—for your preaching, your life, and your preparation? If not, find a few trusted people to do so. It's amazing what that commitment of praying friends (and the faithfulness of a God who answers their prayers) can do for you and your preaching.

Start taking notes.

Glance at introductory material in a trusted commentary (or two).

Prayerfully, slowly, and carefully read the text of Scripture or book you are planning to preach from at least four times and in a variety of translations.³⁵ If your facility in the original languages is up to snuff, make sure at least one of those readings is of the Hebrew or Greek text. Even reading out loud on occasion in whatever language you prefer, or listening to it being read, perhaps in a recording you made yourself, is profitable. In these multiple readings you are simply familiarizing yourself with the text and its contours and cadences, trying to get a feeling for the whole and a sense of the text's "center of gravity," where pericopes begin and end, and how preaching sections may be divided.³⁶ Wallow in the text. Soak in it. Absorb it. Think about it even when you are not reading it—on the treadmill, while taking a walk, in the shower, while driving. Let it incubate!

And make notes as you go along. Begin writing things down even in week -1. Start a text file on the first chapter, say Ephesians 1. (Later you will likely decide to preach 1:1-14 as the first pericope; you can break up your Ephesians 1 file then.)³⁷ I usually create a text file for each pericope, adding in

35. Try to do each iteration in a single sitting; it takes roughly thirty minutes to read Ephesians 1-6 and about sixty minutes to read Genesis 25-36 (in English).

36. Long, *Witness of Preaching*, 97. I've already broken down Ephesians and the Jacob Story for you into twelve pericopes each.

37. I use Microsoft Word 2016 on my Mac, labeling the file, e.g., "Eph 1 180101." The last six digits are integral to my idiosyncratic file naming: yymmdd. So 2018 January 1 is the date that file was created. I keep adding to that same file over my preparation period, only changing the file name (1) if I'm breaking up the file on 2018 February 1 into, say, "Eph 1_1-14 180201" and "Eph 1_15-23 180201"; or (2) if I am deleting portions of the original file on 2018 March 15 to yield a shorter document, "Eph 1 180315." The reason for this latter change of name following a significant deletion is so that I can always go back to the older and longer file if necessary to retrieve what I erased. This is a form of "versioning"—thus I never get rid of *anything* I've written. As another said long ago, *gegrapha, gegrapha*, or "What I have written, I have written!" (John 19:22). You'll appreciate that only when you are looking for something that you realize, too late, you have deleted. On that note, I hope you are making redundant backups of all your files, and even of your entire computer. CrashPlan is a worthy investment (<https://www.crashplan.com/en-us/>), as are Time Machine (<https://support.apple.com/en-us/HT201250>) and Carbon Copy Cloner for Mac (<https://bombich.com/>) or Acronis for Windows (<https://www.acronis.com/en-us/>). You will thank me one day. Did I mention redundant? I use CrashPlan and Time Machine and Carbon Copy Cloner, and all my important files get launched into the cloud via Dropbox (<https://www.dropbox.com/>). Dropbox Plus gives you 1 TB of cloud storage space at \$99 a year; there is inbuilt versioning in that app too (other options include Apple's iCloud, Amazon Cloud Drive, and Google Drive). Paranoia is healthy, for the crash cometh; it's only a matter of *when* it doth, not if.

anything I want to remember from my reading, studying, and thinking. Any insight, observation on the text, random but related thought, and potential illustration are recorded—nothing is insignificant at this moment. Any questions arise in your reading? Note them. Things that look out of place? Jot them down. Look for repetitions of words, clauses, ideas (if necessary, do a quick check of the Hebrew/Greek). You will get into more detail in subsequent weeks, so don't sweat the difficult bits.

Glancing at a good commentary at this point may be helpful, just to get an initial sense of the boundaries of the pericopes. Create a breakdown of the book/section into preachable pericopes, fine-tuning the seams as you go along.³⁸ A fair grasp of the introductory material of a biblical book—the author and audience, date and setting, and other related matters—can also be valuable, though treatments of such elements in traditional commentaries give one an overdose. Keep asking, as you read such works, whether you really need to know what those scholars are telling you in order to arrive at what the biblical author is *doing*. In most cases, you will not. (In the commentaries I have written, I've tried to be more discriminating.) At any rate, keep on writing. Making notes is an activity that ought to continue for as long as your preparation is ongoing, not just for week –1 but for the remaining twelve weeks of long-term preparation as well.

I'll deal with those twelve weeks (preparation for the twelve pericopes of Ephesians or the Jacob Story) briefly here. Each preparation routine listed will be expounded in greater detail in the following chapters.

Long-Term Preparation Weeks 1–8: Discerning Theology

During weeks 1–8,³⁹ you will continue the same schedule: twelve hours a week. In these weeks of long-term preparation, I find it most convenient to spread the twelve hours over two consecutive days (Mondays and Tuesdays, with breaks as needed), though, of course, you could choose otherwise. In those twelve hours each week, continue reading through the text of Scripture in your translation of choice (so eight weeks of twelve hours a week for the twelve pericopes of Ephesians or the Jacob Story). But now you are reading with more intent—to catch the thrust of the text, the author's *doing* (i.e., the theology of the pericope). This is arguably the most difficult part of your work with the text. Never, ever give up until the text has yielded its fruit. No

38. For bigger books, grasping the large sections and smaller subsections may be helpful as you try to narrow down a pericope. As was noted, in Genesis, for instance, one discovers four major sections: Gen. 1–11, 12–25, 25–36, and 37–50.

39. See chap. 2.

doubt, some pericopes will take more time and attention than others; it is your call how you allocate the ninety-six hours of weeks 1–8 among your twelve pericopes (roughly eight hours per pericope).

Long-Term Preparation Weeks 9–12: Deriving Application, Creating Maps, Fleshing Moves

Now that you’ve discerned the theology of the text, you are beginning to ponder application and how to create sermon maps and flesh them out (see chaps. 3, 4, and 5, respectively). This is done in weeks 9–12, again for twelve hours a week. If you work on three pericopes per week, at four hours each, preferably on the same days you did your work in weeks 1–8, you will give long-term preparation a consistency of approach and inculcate a habit. You are essentially asking, Based on this theology of the pericope, where am I (and where is my flock) deficient? How can we begin the process of moving toward fulfilling the call of the text? At the same time, you will also be tentatively thinking of sermon moves (i.e., mapping the sermon) and how to flesh out those moves. Keep writing.

Here’s my scheme for the twelve weeks and week –1 (for week 0, see below).

Long-Term Sermon Preparation			
Week –1 (12 hours)	Weeks 1–8 (96 hours)	Weeks 9–12 (48 hours)	Week 0
Getting Ready (chap. 1)	Discerning Theology (chap. 2)	Deriving Application (chap. 3)	Short-Term Preparation
		Creating Maps (chap. 4)	
		Fleshing Moves (chap. 5)	

Soon, those twelve weeks of long-term gestation are up, and labor pains are upon you. You’ve arrived at week 0—the week you are beginning your series with the first pericope. The first Sunday of preaching is here: week 0—your short-term preparation week.

Short-Term Preparation Week 0: Illustrating Ideas, Crafting Introductions and Conclusions, Producing Manuscripts

Week 0, short-term preparation,⁴⁰ is when you finalize the sermon you are going to preach at the end of that week. This plan allots eight hours spread

40. See chaps. 6, 7, and 8, respectively.

throughout the final week (week 0) for those tasks. But you are also continuing long-term preparation for the future, even in week 0, with the standard twelve hours on, say, Monday and Tuesday, investing in a future series of sermons.⁴¹ This means, of course, that there is always a short-term preparation week 0 operating concurrently with long-term preparation (week -1 through week 12); each week is a week 0 for a sermon in the current series *as well as* a numbered week in the long-term preparation for an upcoming series of sermons. Here's a day-by-day breakdown of week 0.

Monday–Tuesday (Twelve Hours for the Next Series of Sermons)

You are back to long-term preparation for the next round of sermons: twelve hours allotted between Monday and Tuesday, for instance, are to be reserved for long-term preparation, as we have already seen. Don't even think about the sermon that is due the Sunday of each week as you work on long-term preparation during these sessions.

Wednesday–Friday (Six Hours for the Current Sermon)

Reserve about six hours, split however you like, between Wednesday and Friday for the short-term preparation of the sermon you have to preach this coming Sunday. These six hours will be taken up by hunting for illustrations (but you will likely have been on the lookout in past weeks and may have already discovered a few), formulating an introduction and a conclusion (again, you'll no doubt already have some idea how your introduction and conclusion should look), and finalizing the sermon manuscript that has been embryonically taking shape during its gestation. All the writing you've been doing will help here.

Saturday (Two Hours for the Current Sermon)

Between chores at home and playtime with the kids and shopping and lawn mowing and cooking and Netflix, find time for the last two hours of short-term preparation. This is when you internalize the manuscript and reduce it down to a précis of sufficient detail or otherwise format it into a preachable document—whatever makes you comfortable (see chap. 8, “Producing Manuscripts”). This should take a couple hours. Then relax. And pray a lot.⁴²

41. I'm assuming a Monday–Sunday week, with you preaching on Sunday. If otherwise, adjust accordingly.

42. Also see chap. 9, “Delivering Sermons,” for pre- and post-sermon routines.

Here is what week 0 looks like (short-term preparation):

Short-Term Sermon Preparation (Week 0)			
Monday–Tuesday (12 hours)	Wednesday–Friday (6 hours)	Saturday (2 hours)	Sunday
Long-Term Preparation	Illustrating Ideas (chap. 6)	Work. Relax. Pray.	Delivering Sermons (chap. 9)
	Crafting Introduc- tions and Conclusions (chap. 7)		
	Producing Manuscripts (chap. 8)		

Thus you will have spent twenty-one hours total on a single sermon.⁴³ Congratulations, you have worked hard! You are now on the labor and delivery floor and ready to preach!

Of course, feel free to scale things up or down as you desire. You may want to spend ten hours a week for twelve weeks (instead of twelve hours for twelve weeks). Or you may decide to break that twelve-hour weekly slot into three four-hour periods spread over three days. Of course, if your chosen text or book is of larger or smaller size, you will want to adjust everything accordingly. And as your facility grows, you will, no doubt, get more things done in less time. But the bottom line is this: plan ahead and work ahead, or you'll crash and burn.⁴⁴

Now, if you are called to do more than a single sermon a week, say, on Sunday mornings, Sunday evenings, and Wednesday evenings, let me give you

43. Here is the breakdown for a twelve-part sermon series as described above: week -1 = 12 hours; weeks 1-12 = 144 hours; week 0 = 96 hours (8 hours × 12 sermons). Twenty-one hours per sermon is above average, but you will only get more efficient with experience and be able to whittle this down. The average sermon length these days is roughly thirty minutes—I would recommend not going over that allotment. This means forty-two minutes of preparation for every minute of preaching.

44. Also, remember my counsel to preach only thirty-six weeks of *lectio continua* sermons, the rest of the year being given to a few weeks of topical sermons, vacations, guest preachers substituting for you, etc. (see note 11 above). So there is some room to be flexible, and you are likely to get a few extra weeks to catch up on sermon preparation. My recommendation assigns twenty hours a week for sermon preparation, assuming you are preaching weekly. However, I am well aware of the incessant and burdensome demands on the time of a pastor that may not afford you the luxury of such preparation time for sermons. Treat my recommendation as an ideal, a launching pad for you to take off from. I am confident that you will quickly understand your own strengths and limitations and hone your preparation skills, enabling you to become more efficient and make adjustments on the fly, series by series and book by book. Come up with a system that works for you and stick with it. Hopefully, I've given you enough ideas to spur you into action.

a word of warning: don't! It is impossible for *anyone* to sustain the level of work I am talking about to produce more than one high-quality sermon a week. Besides, listeners cannot digest more than one powerful weekly sermon with an equally potent application that is to be put into practice right away. So I'd make the Sunday morning worship the venue of *the* sermon. For Sunday evening, I'd do something in the nature of a Bible study, perhaps showcasing some exegetical work on the text for next Sunday morning's sermon, leading the congregation through some biblical history, doing a series on living the spiritual life, or addressing a topic you see appropriate for your flock (topical sermons will work here). It might even be worthwhile indulging in some Q&A about that morning's sermon with those who show up in the evening. For Wednesday evening, a compendium of systematic theology culled from your favorite textbook (for about twenty minutes, perhaps even with a handout with verses and an outline) followed by discussion and ending with prayer for shared requests should suffice.