

## Focus and Tone of the Sermon

### Focus of Hope

- Am I presenting what the Biblical author wrote in a manner that is hopeful? What does this pericope tell us about our loving God, about our hope in God? Through Scripture, you can facilitate an encounter with God. Preaching should include the proclamation of who God is and who we are in Christ.
- Did I attempt to expand the imaginations of my listeners for how God is at work today, renewing, redeeming, recreating? How did the author of the pericope understand God moving in their world? Preaching should include the proclamation of the inbreaking of a new world, God's kingdom, right here in our world.
- Did I include an invitation to participate in what God is doing? Is there a call to live more fully into the liberation of the kingdom? Can I inspire formation? Preaching should include the proclamation of God's mission through the church.

### Tone and Posture of Empowerment

In *Positively Irritating*, Jon Ritner said this about the Sunday sermon, "God's word is essential in the life of a disciple, and the church has a biblical mandate to proclaim it as part of our corporate worship. But we are equally responsible to equip and encourage God's people to study it for themselves and to be able to teach it to others."

- Is my posture and tone communicating that I am an expert and somehow possess the secret key to unlock the Bible's meaning? Preachers haven't downloaded the interpretation directly from heaven, after all. So, let's not imply it; it's disempowering to our listeners and it's pastor-centric.
- Am I presenting what I *believe* is the meaning of the passage as a certainty, where certainty doesn't exist? Saying things like, "It's clear that what Jesus meant by this is xyz," feeds, as Ritner says, "... the notion," that the professional teacher has special insight into God's word that the average congregant cannot possibly access in their own study." When necessary, be willing to humbly admit that we don't know for certain, but most scholars agree that it likely means xyz. Allow the text to speak for itself.
- Does my language give my listeners permission to wrestle and engage with the text on their own and with those they are discipling? We don't want to be creating passive receivers; we want to be equipping disciples who make disciples. Preachers should be encouraging and empowering others that they have the capacity to study and understand God's word and to be guided by the Spirit.

By Elizabeth Mullins