

Cincinnati Bible Seminary
PMN 520
Fundamentals of Biblical Communication

Professor: Dr. Boltinghouse

Book Review of:
Donald R. Sunukjian
“Invitation To Biblical Preaching”

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Review of *“Invitation To Biblical Preaching”*

Summary:

Donald Sunukjian’s book *Invitation to Biblical Preaching* is a thorough reference manual, teaching its readers the fundamentals of the Sunukjian methodology of writing a sermon. Within his book, Mr. Sunukjian has placed two equally important sections; “What is God Saying?” and “What is God saying to Us?” It is within these sections that he ultimately reveals the context and content of his methodology. Though initially it may seem intimidating, his process can be summarized in 10 steps: (1) Study the passage; (2) Outline it’s flow; (3) Make it timeless; (4) Ask questions and select effective answers (5) Form and sharpen a take-home truth; (6) Shape the sermon (structurally, relevantly, etc); (7) Create the introduction and conclusion; (8) Ensure you’re writing for the Ear; (9) Plan ahead for oral clarity ; & (10) Deliver it with freedom. In addition, Mr. Sunukjian has provided his readers with a series of appendices that include: (1) Outlining procedures; (2) The dangers of alliteration, & (3) Two completely documented (all ten steps) sample sermons. By the end of the text readers should be well on their way to writing and presenting well studied, well documented, highly relevant sermons clearly and confidently without notes.

Strengths and weaknesses:

Mr. Sunukjian does a superior job of walking the reader through his proprietary sermon writing methodology. Throughout his explanation of each step of his methodology (basically broken down as chapters) he creates a seemingly effortless flow from one process step to another. In an effort to ensure that his readers retain as much knowledge as possible, he includes a number of examples along the way. These examples complemented his explanations in a way that allowed for the reader to fully visualize the process that Mr. Sunukjian’s methodology suggests. In fact, looking back on it, this book may possibly contain the most examples of any book, reference or otherwise, of similar size that I have ever read: well done! This attention to detail really helped me to foresee the amount of study/resources/time and effort it will take to prepare for a sermon or for that matter any presentation/talk. It made me think:

“How much more prepared would I or could I have been for previous presentations/talks that I have given if I would have followed his methodology”.

Based upon reading this text, I want to spend more time reflecting on how I can improve my overall ability to present, from research to delivery and every step in-between.

In so far as the above mentioned examples were helpful, they also caused the reading of this material to be painfully slow and hard to follow. As with most reference texts, this book is more digestible when used to work through specific process steps but is not as user friendly when read from cover to cover. Another criticism that I had with the text was that I felt as though Mr. Sunukjian should have followed through with one example throughout the book and then provided us with a few more “complete” samples in the appendices. This approach would have allowed for more continuity when the reader decides to read this text straight through cover to cover. One example of this confusion

Review of *“Invitation To Biblical Preaching”*

can be found within chapter 8, with the examples used to differentiate between deductive and inductive structural patterns. The examples used within this chapter would have provided more clarity if the same example(s) were used and shown in both a deductive and inductive pattern. In lieu of this, I found myself focusing more on the “when to use” sections near the end of each chapter, allowing me to see more of a side by side comparison of when to use either of these two methods.

Reflections:

This book has challenged my previous “don’t teach it unless you’re an expert in it” mentality. Reading through the material has allowed my eyes to be open to see the sheer amount of work that goes into each and every sermon. It makes me realize, maybe for the first time, that preparation makes the presenter the “expert” and is the key to his/her success. This methodology that Mr. Sunukjian has placed before me is quite intimidating; challenging my very core. While reading through the first few chapters, my honest reaction was “you’ve got to be kidding; I cannot imagine spending this amount of time preparing for the delivery of a 30 minute sermon”. As I worked through the processes outlined I eventually arrived at the point noted earlier; the realization that the only way that I would be able to consistently deliver a sermon that was truthful, clear and relevant would be to stay the course and follow his methodology.

Throughout my reading of this text I experienced many “ah ha” moments that have since affected the way that I present even within my secular role. Most of these moments, when looking back at them, occurred after reading material some might say is obvious or common sense, but I don’t know if I have ever consciously thought that I needed to:

- “Run the truth through an expanding grid of the various groups and life circumstances that are in your audience”¹.
- “Develop mental pictures that apply the biblical concept, not ones that simply illustrate it.”²

These concepts have really convicted me to ensure that no matter my interaction (conversation, presentation, etc) with the audience, I need to ensure that what I am communicating is relevant to them and their lives and delivered in a matter that provides them with practical application.

Even with the abundance of examples and samples provided within this book, Mr. Sunukjian’s methodology still seems unimaginable at times. My repeated use of his process(es) consistently and constantly will be necessary in order to make it habit. Furthermore, I very much appreciate that Mr. Sunukjian decided to write this book using a reference style of writing and organization, allowing his readers to quickly refer back to sections in order to refresh their memories of his noted process(es) during their own sermon preparation/writing time.

¹Donald Sunukjian, “Invitation to Biblical Preaching” (2007): p. 113

² Donald Sunukjian, “Invitation to Biblical Preaching” (2007): p. 120