

Lawson, Steven J. *Called to Preach: Fulfilling the High Calling of Expository Preaching*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2022. 208 pp.

The following review is intended to encourage future pastors and ministry leaders to evaluate and grow in their call to expositional preaching. Steven Lawson's *Called to Preach: Fulfilling the High Calling of Expository Preaching* includes nine chapters in which the author sequentially introduces and explores elements of a call to preach God's Word. Lawson pastored for thirty-four years, has authored thirty-three books, serves as the professor of preaching at The Master's Seminary, and trains pastors around the world in the skill of expositional preaching. In this work, Lawson's focus is the faithful and effective expositional preaching of God's Word. In it he provides a broad overview of biblical and practical suggestions, progressing from discerning a call to preach to delivering an expositional message.

In his first three chapters, Lawson provides a biblical and philosophical view of the call to preach. He shares nine indicators of a legitimate call to preach: growing desire, ability to teach, godliness, exemplary living, will of God, confirmation from others, spiritual influence, sense of urgency, and a providential open door (29). Next, Lawson explores the preacher's biblical mandate from 2 Timothy 4:1–5. He details God's specific instructions to Timothy as a "strict charge" that is "extended to every preacher called by God and is the timeless standard for all who preach" (49). Lawson elevates the preacher's responsibility to exalt God, stating that "a towering understanding of God leads to transcendent worship and holy living" (50). This third chapter is saturated with the high and lofty values of preaching the glory of God, through the gospel of the Son, in the power of the Spirit. These three ideas give the reader an elevated view of the privilege and responsibility of the preacher.

In chapters 4–8, Lawson moves from philosophy to practice, providing the reader with a thorough explanation of expository preaching. He leads the student through several stages of studying for an expositional message: the orientation stage (the tools of Bible study), the preparation stage (the steps of effective study), the evaluation stage (understanding the spiritual needs of the audience), the selection stage (choosing passages for various kinds of exposition), the observation stage (initial investigation of the text), the interpretation stage (detailed investigation of the text), and the consultation stage (referencing resources for the text) (90). Then he details the practical assembly of an expository sermon through several stages: the explanation stage (detailing the major points of the sermon), the implication stage (seeking to write out the text's implications for the modern audience), the application stage (stating what the text requires of the audience), the illustration stage (adding windows of light), the introduction stage (crafting an attention-drawing opening), the conclusion stage (the final word), the inspection stage (reviewing the message for length, accuracy, and balance), and the intercession stage (praying over the message).

Turning to sermon delivery, Lawson describes eighteen practical ideas for developing an effective communication style—supporting his insight with both Scripture and other quotations. His wisdom in connecting with a spiritually diverse audience is one of the most helpful aspects of the book. He discusses twelve different states of spiritual development that may be represented in the audience, and

he challenges the preacher to be mindful of each as Scripture addresses them all effectively. Lawson wraps up this portion of the text by sharing seventeen suggestions for improving as an expositor.

The author closes with a fitting and compelling final chapter on the personal life of the preacher, in which he challenges every preacher that “God must prepare the preacher before the preacher can prepare the message” (165). His closing words call the preacher to faithfulness and fidelity in the expositional preaching of Scripture. This is especially significant in a day when theologically light and biblically thin self-help sermons abound in many Christian churches.

This book is remarkably practicable and actionable. Every pastor or future pastor should read it. For the experienced pastor, it is a clarifying journey that will rekindle a passion for faithful exposition. For the younger pastor or student, it will establish a strong foundation and biblical perspective for effective future ministry.

Weaknesses are difficult to identify in this book, but it would have been well-served by a chapter or section on biblical theology. Giving the reader a high-altitude view of the grand narrative of Scripture (as one cohesive, redemptive, historical narrative) would help the expositor-in-training to frame the context of any biblical text within the broader redemptive story and God’s Christo-centric narrative arc. The closest that Lawson comes to this is in a one-paragraph section entitled “Bible Survey” in chapter 4 (71).

Called to Preach is both informational and inspirational. It is an excellent survey of the broad topic of expository preaching presented by a well-qualified author. This resource will motivate and equip a preacher to engage his call, grow his skills, and faithfully execute his task. The author provides a broad treatment of the vital components of effective expository preaching. Each of Lawson’s nine chapters contains wise admonitions, motivating insights, and a biblical perspective that will develop any pastor, but especially next-generation pastors. Dr. Lawson has served the church well with this new resource that God may use to help many biblical communicators to lovingly and faithfully present the life-giving truth of his Word.

Cary Schmidt

Senior Pastor | Emmanuel Baptist Church, Newington, CT