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# Preach: Theology Meets Practice (IX Marks)



## Synopsis

Mark Dever, senior pastor of Capitol Hill Baptist Church in Washington, DC, and president of 9Marks, is widely respected for his efforts to build biblically faithful churches in America that will impact the nations. In this book about one of the practical distinctives of that work, Dever and his former student Greg Gilbert offer a theological and practical guide emphasizing the centrality of expositional preaching -- sermons intentionally rooted in a specific Bible text. Dever and Gilbert clearly explain how God exercises His divine power through the Word, making it the basis of any relationship we have with Him. Thus, preaching directly from Scripture should be at the center of church life. Toward that goal, the authors give practical advice on how pastors can decide what texts to preach on, how to prepare and outline their sermons, and how to deliver and review those presentations. Pastors will especially appreciate the book's final section: transcripts of past sermons from Dever and Gilbert augmented by insightful conversations between them about how each sermon was planned and whether or not it was effectively implemented.

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## Customer Reviews

Mark Dever is senior pastor of Capitol Hill Baptist Church in Washington, DC and president of 9Marks. He holds degrees from Duke University (B.A.), Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary (M.Div.), The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary (M.Theol.), and Cambridge University (PH.D.). Greg Gilbert is senior pastor of Third Avenue Baptist Church in Louisville, Kentucky, and the author of *What Is the Gospel?* He holds degrees from Yale University (B.A.) and The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary (M.Div.).

I've been preaching every week for six years now. Consequently, I've read dozens of books on preaching both for my own growth and for the developing others in the church I pastor. This is easily one of my two or three favorites and the one I first give to those who want to grow as preachers. For several reasons, 1) It deals with both the theology of preaching (why we do it) and the practice of preaching (how we do it) 2) It would be very easy to address these topics in a complex manner. Dever and Gilbert do not. They write profoundly but they write simply and concisely. As such, you need not be a seminary student (or even a college graduate) to make sense of the contents. 3) They don't just tell preachers how we might improve. They model it for us. The final section includes a sample of how they critique one another's sermons in order to help each other grow. Our church has implemented a service review based on this model and we have matured significantly as a result. 4) It's funny. A lot of these sorts of books are anything but.

I first saw this book as a recommendation on an article and know the author to be pretty sound so I decided to buy it. I read it and even had a problem putting it down. Since it was such a good book I bought three more copies to give out to my friends.

What happens when two pastors tag-team to present a concise dialogue on preaching? You get a handy resource that inspires and instructs the most novice and elite pastor on bringing theology and practice together to model the theory and praxis of preaching. I encourage all students of preaching to read this book as a primer before digging into heavier textbooks such as *Christ-Centered Preaching* by Chapell, *Biblical Preaching* by Robinson, or *Invitation to Biblical Preaching* by Sunukjian. *Preach* does not approach the discipline of preaching in normal textbook fashion. Rather two skilled practitioners share gleanings from their experiences in the pulpit. One of the benefits of this resource is that the reader does not receive input from simply one vantage point. Dever and Gilbert each bring his own style to this coffee talk on preaching. This modus operandi on preaching assists readers in avoiding the proclivity to become bogged down into the dangerous philosophy that there is only one way to preach. In the first part of *Preach* Dever and Gilbert discuss the Theology of preaching. They converse about the God who speaks, the power of God's Word, the centrality of expositional preaching, and what preaching actually does. In these chapters the authors point us back to the whole point of preaching. Preaching is meant for us to know God. They write, "The God of the Bible would be known by His people not primarily by sight but by sound. They would hear His word, not see His face. They would

know Him as the God who speaks (Dever and Gilbert, 17). God's powerful Word brings life and permits relationship to exist between the creator and His creation. When we preach God's Word, people receive the gospel message that He is a relational God, who took on flesh, dwelt among us, and gave Himself up for us.

"Being in relationship with God is finally about receiving that is, believing, accepting as true, relying on the gospel preached from human lips (Dever and Gilbert, 32). Therefore, as preachers we should have every confidence in the message we proclaim. This message is built on the authority of Christ. His word is sufficient, powerful, and empowering to His people.

"Preaching is not finally a matter of giving a few thoughts here and there about God or the Bible. It is the proclamation of an authoritative message from the throne room of heaven itself: Be reconciled to God through Jesus (Dever and Gilbert, 32)!"

Dever and Gilbert in this first part offer up a sound definition for expositional preaching. Their definition leaves the room necessary to accommodate accounting for genre when preaching. So many assume that expositional preaching is preaching verse by verse. These authors remind us that expositional preaching is about dishing out the main idea of the passage to the audience. Yes, often this will be best conveyed verse by verse. However, many passages such as narrative or poetry do not lend themselves to verse by verse exposition. Any experienced preacher understands that a passage built on a chiastic structure (A, B, C, C, B, A) should not be preached verse by verse. They would handle each parallel point in its order (A:A, B:B, C:C) and then really camp out on the heart of the passage (C:C) because that is the main point. I won't give away Dever and Gilbert's definition of expositional preaching. But leading up to their definition they make this important statement: Most essentially, the term [expositional preaching] just has to do with preaching that exposes God's Word to God's people, that opens it up to them and applies it to their hearts so that they may understand it and obey it. Besides offering a perceptive definition of expositional preaching, they also provide five examples of what they are not saying concerning expositional preaching. We're not saying expositional preaching has to go verse by verse through a book of the Bible. We're not saying expositional preaching rules out topical preaching as a legitimate practice. We're not saying expositional preaching is just a series of lectures, the main goal of which is information transfer. We're not saying expositional preaching is marked by any particular style. We're not saying expositional preaching is not

evangelistic preaching. Before we move on to reviewing part two, I encourage readers to not rush out of the first part of *Preach*. There is much to absorb in part one. I really felt like the most valuable aspect of this book was this first part. Our practice needs to be governed by our careful study of who God is and what He does. So don't be quick to leave part one of *Preach*. In part two, Dever and Gilbert tackle the common questions every preacher has. What do I preach on? How do I prepare my sermon? What should the structure of a sermon look like? How do I deliver a solid sermon? What about reviewing my sermon? Once again, pooling from two authors concerning preaching is advantageous because it frees people from feeling like they have to change their voice to be more like Dever or more like Gilbert. It was freeing to hear that though Dever manuscripts every word, Gilbert comes into the pulpit with more of an outline. I am an outline person myself. There are risks to this, but that is the best way I know to keep my voice in the pulpit. I appreciated how freeing this tag-team approach to writing is to the pastor who is prone to create "the preaching laws of Dever" or "the preaching laws of Gilbert" to which that pastor will then hold himself accountable. Part two is full of excellent nuggets. I appreciated their examples of preaching plans and the intentional way in which they are neither predictable in their sermon planning nor do they try to play to their strengths. They say, "preaching through books forces you as a preacher and therefore your church as well to grapple with passages of scripture with which you are not already familiar (Dever and Gilbert, 67). I rejoiced as they emphasized the colossal value of application. They comment, "It is our job as proclaimers of God's Word not just to tell them what the truth is but also to tell them why the truth matters to them, and what the truth demands from them (Dever and Gilbert, 92). No surprise was their emphasis on making the gospel known. This is to be expected from two gospel-centered men. Yet, they add special touches in *Preach* by reminding us that the gospel is conveyed in the details, including how we illustrate our sermons. "If your illustrations only illustrate your goodness and brilliance, they have failed to illustrate the gospel of Jesus (Dever and Gilbert, 112). Part three is a spectacular component of this book. In part three each Dever and Gilbert share the manuscript of a sermon. In these chapters the two of them interact on each manuscript. It is interesting to see how and what they decide to comment on and how the interchange, review, and evaluation is seasoned with grace. As the reader reads these last two chapters, the reader discovers the mutually beneficial value of sermon reviewing. *Preach: Theology Meets Practice* by Mark Dever and Greg Gilbert is a striking introduction to the discipline of preaching. Both theologically rich and appealing practicality

make this book a prominent addition to a pastor's library. Additionally, church members would benefit from this read so that they will understand the weight of the discipline of preaching and be able to look for preachers that display all the marks of one who has meticulously planned a message that proclaims the gospel and whole council of God within an expositional framework. Start reading *Preach: Theology Meets Practice* by Mark Dever and Greg Gilbert.

"Mark Dever, senior pastor of Capitol Hill Baptist Church in Washington, DC, and president of 9Marks, is widely respected for his efforts to build biblically faithful churches in America that will impact the nations. In this book about one of the practical distinctives of that work, Dever and his former student Greg Gilbert offer a theological and practical guide emphasizing the centrality of expositional preaching -- sermons intentionally rooted in a specific Bible text. Dever and Gilbert clearly explain how God exercises His divine power through the Word, making it the basis of any relationship we have with Him. Thus, preaching directly from Scripture should be at the center of church life. Toward that goal, the authors give practical advice on how pastors can decide what texts to preach on, how to prepare and outline their sermons, and how to deliver and review those presentations. Pastors will especially appreciate the book's final section: transcripts of past sermons from Dever and Gilbert augmented by insightful conversations between them about how each sermon was planned and whether or not it was effectively implemented." (B & H Publishers Website)

**About the Authors:** Mark Dever is senior pastor of Capitol Hill Baptist Church in Washington, DC and president of 9Marks. He holds degrees from Duke University (B.A.), Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary (M.Div.), The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary (M.Theol.), and Cambridge University (D.Phil.). Greg Gilbert is senior pastor of Third Avenue Baptist Church in Louisville, Kentucky, and the author of *What Is the Gospel?* He holds degrees from Yale University (B.A.) and The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary (M.Div.).

**My Thoughts About the Book:** *Preach* is a book written by 2 highly respected preachers, Mark Dever and Greg Gilbert, about the art or craft of preparing a message and preaching it. It is a "nuts and bolts" practical sort of book that leads the preacher or prospective preacher into the heart of the matter of preaching - the what to's, the how to's and the why to's as well as the what not to's, and why not to's. The book is written in such a way that you almost feel like you are right there with Pastor Mark Dever and Pastor Greg Gilbert in their study when they are putting their sermons together. *Preach* is not just a book about preaching, it is also a book about the preacher. The emphasis of the authors is very balanced but both matters are covered in the book. And, they even provide 2 sermons with a discussion by the author's about the sermons. For anyone who is a preacher or is training to be one, this book will

be most informative and helpful. It will encourage you spiritually as well as educate you practically so that when you step into your pulpit to preach you will be properly prepared to share the Word of God and message that God wants you to preach to the members of your congregation. I put this on my list of the must read books for anyone in the pastorate or aspiring to be a pastor. Disclosure of Material Connection: I received this book free from the publisher through the B & H Publishers. I was not required to write a positive review. The opinions I have expressed are my own. I am disclosing this in accordance with the Federal Trade Commission's 16 CFR, Part 255 "Guides Concerning the Use of Endorsements and Testimonials in Advertising."

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