

Jared E. Alcántara. *The Practices of Christian Preaching: Essentials for Effective Proclamation*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2019. 192 pages. \$24.99.

Alcántara opens with a provocative question: “What does Charlie Parker have to do with preaching?” (1). Charlie Parker, a jazz music star in the 1930s, was said to “woodshed” until he got better (2). It was after his “woodshedding” that Parker rose to fame. This is what Alcántara wants preachers to do as well: “woodshed” or practice their homiletical skills until they get better. This book is about practices for preachers so that they “will enhance their proficiency, grow in their commitment, and flourish in their homiletical ministry” (5). The five practices are: 1) Preach Convictionally, 2) Preach Contextually, 3) Preach Clearly, 4) Preach Concretely, 5) Preach Creatively.

Chapter 1 is an admonition to preach Christian sermons and not the “pseudo-gospels” (22) we are tempted to preach: 1) the Gospel of Moralistic Therapeutic Deism, 2) the Gospel Dressed in a Flag or Banner, 3) the Gospel of Prosperity, 4) The Gospel of Discipleship without Grace, 5) The Gospel of Grace without Discipleship. Chapters 2–6 discuss each of the five practices in detail. The conclusion offers three biographical examples of the power of practice: Warren MacKenzie (an accomplished ceramics artist), Ray Allen (an NBA basketball player), and Marth Graham (a renowned dancer).

Alcántara’s book is a pedagogical piece of art. This volume is simple, but not simplistic. The illustrations and graphics are numerous (33 total) and helpful, reinforcing the core ideas. His suggestions or warnings are always presented in sets of five. Each chapter opens with a narrative to draw the reader in. There is a website for this book which includes videos of sermon clips and discussions, learning activities for each chapter, and discussion questions. The collaborators for the online videos include Jerusha Matsen Neal, Ahmi Lee, Kenyatta R. Gilbert, and Matthew D. Kim. The website also includes a professor view of the chapter pages which includes a link to download extra discussion questions based on the videos. Scripture is used to build a foundation for each of the practices. For example, it shows how scripture points to the conviction behind preaching (44-47) or how scripture uses clarity to communicate to everyday people (109-110).

The book is practical. Each chapter has a list of imperatives instructing the reader how to carry out the practice being discussed. For example, among the instructions given in chapter 4 it says, “Remember that repetition and restatement are your friends, not your enemies,” and “Use colloquialisms” (118-119). Even the chapter titles are imperatives: Preach Convictionally (chapter 2), Preach Clearly (chapter 3).

This would be a great book for an introductory preaching class or for a seasoned homiletician who wanted to review some of the basics of preaching.

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