

## Moving from Expository Infancy to Expository Adulthood

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### The early days (expository infancy):

Stage one: Shameless thief

You have begun to feel the desire to preach welling up in your bones. What will you do? You press the *play* button, push *pause*, and write what your favourite preacher said. You press the *play* button, push *pause*, and write more of what your favourite preacher said. Or you download a sermon manuscript off the internet, and in the end, you preach your hero's sermon almost word for word.

Stage two: Cross-reference king

In this stage, you discover the side column of your Bible and start preaching topical sermons of your own creation. You might start with a home-base text, but you don't really preach that text; instead, you merely reference thirty other passages that mention your subject.

Stage three: Word-study warrior

Next you discover *Vines Expository Dictionary*, and your sermons become a series of disconnected word studies—a basket full fragments, no whole. You atomise the text. These sermons are long on detail, but there is no coherent explanation of the text as a whole.

Stage four: Theological titan

You discover Berkhof and a blood lust for theological controversy. Whatever the text, every sermon becomes a polemic on a favourite theological issue, such as the five points of Calvinism. *Jesus wept at Lazarus's tomb in John 11:35 because you don't believe in irresistible grace!*

A variation: You discover apologetics, and every sermon becomes a battlefield on which to slay the evil sophistries of the Jehovah's Witnesses, evolutionary theory, or some other cult or clique.

Stage five: Commentary champion:

Having a desire to be an expository preacher, you select a specific book of the Bible, and purchase a small stack of commentaries on that book at your local Christian

bookstore. Your sermons become a compendium of what those commentators say. Your study process consists of reading the commentaries and stitching together their observations, but you never really study the text yourself. You consistently confuse exegeting a commentary with exegeting the Scripture.

### **Towards expository maturity:**

Stage six: Expository teenager:

In this stage you start to pay more attention to the text itself, rather than just using it as a springboard into a favourite theological issue or as a word study curio shop. However, you feel limited because you can't get into the text as deeply as you would like.

Stage seven: Expository adult:

Eventually you notice the paragraph markings in your Bible, and start to teach the thought units of the text, following the author's logic and flow of thought, letting his theme dominate your sermon. Your interaction with the text (through a tool such as diagramming) becomes deeper and more respectful of authorial intent. You learn to work in cross references, word studies, quotes, and important theological issues in a helpful way—serving the author's point, rather than obscuring it.

Conclusion:

Most preachers go through some kind of progression like this (I certainly did). If you want help moving from expository infancy to expository adulthood, you can download the book *Expository Studying* off the Grace Fellowship website or, on the same site, register for the Grace School of Ministry class in expository preaching.