

MODELS *for*
BIBLICAL
Preaching

EXPOSITORY SERMONS
FROM THE OLD TESTAMENT

EDITED BY
HADDON W. ROBINSON
AND PATRICIA BATTEN

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A Word to the Reader

This is a collection of sermons based on the Old Testament. Many Christians might dismiss this effort as a waste of time. They wonder why anyone would bother with the “Old” Testament when everyone is attracted to what’s “new.” Walk down the aisle of a local supermarket and “new” is everywhere. From chips and dips to brooms and mops, “new” moves the merchandise. One well-known evangelical leader reports that he doesn’t preach the Old Testament, only the New. He simply uses the Old Testament to illustrate New Testament teachings. Others would agree with him that the best preaching comes from passages written by Paul, Peter, James, John, Matthew, Mark, or Luke—those that are part of the “New” Testament.

Perhaps if we called the first thirty-nine books of the Bible the “First Testament” they would receive a heartier welcome. After all, the First Testament was the only Bible the first-century church possessed. As Christians gathered for teaching and worship, someone in the group would open up to a God-breathed passage from the First Testament, read it slowly, and teach what it said.

That’s what the preachers who contributed to this array of sermons tried to do. Each one believes that Christians who don’t regularly read or study the First Testament are losing part of our spiritual heritage.

The sermons in this collection were prepared for listeners in the twenty-first century AD. That presents challenges both for preachers and for their modern audiences. From the written conversations that follow the sermons, it’s clear that each preacher wrestled not only with the message of the text

but also with how that message might be heard by listeners today. How do you take passages written in the long ago and far away and help modern men and women see the eternal significance? That is a challenge whether the passage is from Leviticus or Luke.

The preachers who contributed sermons to this collection speak to all kinds of audiences. Most of the sermons were addressed to church congregations. A couple were presented to seminary audiences. One was given as an after-dinner talk. Some were preached to crowds of several thousand while others were delivered to much smaller audiences. Two were prepared and preached by women. One is a first-person narrative sermon. Keep in mind that none of the sermons were prepared with a book like this or a reader like you in mind; rather they are the product of each contributor's ordinary pulpit ministry.

All of the contributors to this volume share one thing in common: they were students of Haddon Robinson at either Denver Seminary or Gordon-Conwell Seminary. Clearly, they are not clones. They gleaned what they could use from class and put some other teaching aside. They talked about that in the conversations we had together. They are their own people.

These printed sermons resemble cadavers. Cadavers are lifeless bodies that medical students dissect to discover how muscle, sinew, and nerve are put together. While printed sermons fall far short of being living sermons with breath and fire and spirit, it is profitable to study them and see what the preachers intended to do and how they planned for the sermon to have life and coherence. In what follows, eleven preachers offer sermons on the First Testament. All but one are expository. The final sermon is a topical exposition, but we have included it to demonstrate how an evangelistic sermon can be put together.

How can this collection best be used? You could simply sit back and read each sermon, allowing God to speak to you again through his Word. However, if you want to learn how each preacher works to prepare messages every week, then read the interviews after each sermon to get a look at the creative process.

Quite a bit of content in this collection may need further explanation. If you are a student of sermons, you would be helped by reading Haddon Robinson's *Biblical Preaching*, the book that explains the theory on which these sermons are based.

God bless you as you hear these passages from the First Testament again for the first time.

1

Climbing Test Mountain

Genesis 22:1–19

BRYAN WILKERSON

So far on this journey we've gone canoeing and caving. We've taken a road trip and walked in the woods. How about we finish with some mountain climbing? If you're a traveler, mountains represent the ultimate challenge. They are a true test of courage, skill, stamina, and commitment.

Think about how many important things happen on the tops of mountains in the Bible. Noah's ark comes to rest on top of Mount Ararat. Moses receives the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai. Elijah defeats the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel. The temple is built on Mount Zion. Jesus preached his most famous sermon on a mountainside, was crucified on a hill called Calvary, and ascended into heaven from the Mount of Olives.

So we shouldn't be surprised that Abraham's journey eventually leads to a mountain, and that climbing that mountain becomes the ultimate test of his faith. This morning we're going to conclude our series with one of the most compelling and disturbing stories in all of the Bible. The message is titled "Climbing Test Mountain" and our text is Genesis 22.

Some time later God tested Abraham. He said to him, "Abraham!"

"Here I am," he replied.

Then God said, "Take your son, your only son, whom you love—Isaac—and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on a mountain I will show you."

Bryan Wilkerson is senior pastor of Grace Chapel in Lexington, Massachusetts. He is the author of *Living God's Story* and a frequent contributor to *Preaching Today* and *Leadership Journal*.

Early the next morning, Abraham got up and loaded his donkey. He took with him two of his servants and his son Isaac. When he had cut enough wood for the burnt offering, he set out for the place God had told him about. On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance. He said to his servants, “Stay here with the donkey while I and the boy go over there. We will worship and then we will come back to you.”

Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering and placed it on his son Isaac, and he himself carried the fire and the knife. As the two of them went on together, Isaac spoke up and said to his father Abraham, “Father?”

“Yes, my son,” Abraham replied.

“The fire and wood are here,” Isaac said, “but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?”

Abraham answered, “God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son.” And the two of them went on together.

When they reached the place God had told him about, Abraham built an altar there and arranged the wood on it. He bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. Then he reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. But the angel of the LORD called to him from heaven, “Abraham! Abraham!”

“Here I am,” he replied.

“Do not lay a hand on the boy,” he said. “Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son.”

Abraham looked up and there in a thicket he saw a ram caught by its horns. He went over and took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering instead of his son. So Abraham called that place The LORD Will Provide. And to this day it is said, “On the mountain of the LORD it will be provided.”

The angel of the LORD called to Abraham from heaven a second time and said, “I swear by myself, declares the LORD, that because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies, and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me.”

Then Abraham returned to his servants, and they set off together for Beersheba. (Gen. 22:1–19)

On a November evening in 1965, thirty-one-year-old Norman Morrison positioned himself on a wall outside the Pentagon in Washington, DC.

Without saying a word, he doused himself with kerosene, struck a match, and set himself ablaze. The flames shot twelve feet into the air, forming a fiery envelope around his body. Witnesses said the sound of it was like the whoosh of a small rocket fire. What made it all the more horrifying and incomprehensible was the fact that Morrison held in his arms his own baby daughter, Emily, just shy of a year old. Employees rushed out of the building and commuters jumped from their cars shouting, “Throw her down!” and “Drop the baby!” as the flames intensified.

Norman Morrison was a Quaker and a pacifist. For years he had been troubled by the war in Vietnam. More than once he’d run his hands through his hair, asking his wife, “What will it take to stop it all?” That morning Morrison read a magazine report about a Vietnamese village that had been destroyed by American bombs. The images of women and children scorched by napalm were too much for him. He borrowed a friend’s old Cadillac, put Emily in the car seat and a gallon jug of kerosene in the trunk, and made the drive from Baltimore to Washington. On the way he stopped to mail a letter to his wife, which read,

Dear Anne,

This morning, without warning, I was shown clearly what I must do. Know that I love thee, but must act for the children of the village.

Then he added, “*And like Abraham, I dare not go without Emily.*”

“Drop the baby,” they cried. “Throw her down!” And at the last critical moment, he did. In his final act, the father reached out from the flames and set his daughter aside, out of harm’s way. Morrison died, and that night the police placed Emily in the arms of her mother. She was unharmed and unsinged, with the aroma of kerosene still upon her.

“*And like Abraham, I dare not go without Emily.*” I share that unsettling story because it brings to our contemporary setting all the troubling questions and emotions raised by this ancient text.

Would God really ask someone to sacrifice his own child? How could a loving parent consider such an action and come so close to doing it? Should we admire such devotion or be appalled by it?

What happened on Mount Moriah is arguably the most significant religious event in human history, apart from the life and death of Christ. Judaism, Islam, and Christianity all look to Abraham’s near-sacrifice of

his son as the supreme expression of devotion to God. And as the final act of Norman Morrison illustrates, the story continues to capture the imaginations of people—sometimes inspiring them to heroic or horrific acts, sometimes causing them to turn away from a God they cannot comprehend.

What are we to make of this story? What lessons does it hold for ordinary people like you and me who are making the journey of faith? Let's first experience the story as Abraham might have and then see what we can learn from it.

The Story

“Some time later,” the story begins, “God tested Abraham.” A better translation might be “After these things.” After what things? After all that's happened to Abraham over the past twenty-five years.

After answering the call of God to a life of blessing by leaving his home in Ur and traveling hundreds of miles with his family to the land of Canaan, where he built an altar to the God who called him.

After wandering down to Egypt and taking matters into his own hands, then finding his way back to the path again.

After finding himself in a dark place where he doubted the goodness and power of God, but emerging from that darkness closer to God and stronger in his faith.

After coming to a fork in the road, where he chose to walk the less-traveled road of faith and obedience, trusting God to provide him with a son even in his old age.

After developing a relationship with God so intimate and personal that God actually visited Abraham at his tent one evening for dinner and discussed the fate of Sodom.

After finally receiving in his old age the son he'd been waiting for, Isaac, whose name means laughter.

It's been a long and winding road marked by success and failure, gains and losses. But now, at last, their future was secure, the blessing was in hand. Abraham and Sarah enjoy years of peace as they watch Isaac grow up, and they begin to enjoy the reward of trusting God.

After all that, the text says, Abraham hears that voice again. He probably

hasn't heard it in a while, but it is unmistakable. "Abraham," God says. "Here I am," he answers, the response of a servant.

And then the voice asks him to do the unthinkable. "Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and sacrifice him as a burnt offering on Mount Moriah." Now, it helps to understand that child sacrifice was common practice among the pagan peoples of Canaan. According to the fertility cults, the way to guarantee continued fruitfulness of land and livestock was for a woman to offer her firstborn as a sacrifice to the deities. It was an expression of gratitude and devotion to the gods. Remember, too, that God had not yet given the law that would forbid child sacrifice. Culturally and theologically, it would not have sounded quite as abhorrent and incongruous to Abraham as it does to us.

But on a personal level, the command to sacrifice his son was every bit as difficult for Abraham as it would be for any father. Not only did he love Isaac, as any father would, Isaac was the *child of promise*. Abraham had waited a lifetime for him. Isaac was the embodiment of everything Abraham had lived for, everything he believed about God. All his dreams for the future and the fulfillment of God's promises rested on that boy.

God knew what he was asking of Abraham. You can almost hear the sympathy in God's words, "Take your son, your only son, whom you love, and sacrifice him as a burnt offering." A burnt offering was an expression of total surrender to God. The worshiper was to take something of value—an animal or some fruit of the field—and place it on an altar where it would be totally consumed by fire, offered up entirely to God, nothing held back.

That's what God was asking Abraham to do with his greatest treasure—his only son, the child of promise.

In earlier days, Abraham would have balked at such a command, wouldn't he, based on what we've learned about him? Maybe he'd come up with another scheme or try to negotiate a different deal. Wouldn't he at least have procrastinated a bit? "God didn't say *when* I have to do this. Someday I will."

But Abraham is not the same man he was when he started out on this journey. He's grown in his faith and in relationship with God. And so early the next morning he sets out to obey the command he has been given. Notice that Abraham performed the chores himself—saddling the donkey, cutting the wood—even though he had servants. I wonder if this was his way of processing what was happening to him, of working through his grief the

same way a family will preoccupy itself with hospital arrangements and medical talk when a loved one is sick.

And so they set out on their journey. The Scripture is remarkably intimate in its description of this trip. “And the two of them went on together,” it says. It reminds me of a trip my father and I took when he drove me a thousand miles across the country for my freshman year at college. I was the oldest child and the first one to go away. I can recall almost every detail of that trip—the places we stopped to eat, the fleabag hotel in Toledo. As I remember, we didn’t talk very much on that trip; mostly we looked out the window. But I don’t think I’ve ever felt closer to my father than on that trip. I remember sitting in the empty dorm room after we arrived, each of us looking the other way to hide the tears that kept coming to our eyes. We both understood that something significant was happening, but we couldn’t quite describe it and we certainly couldn’t talk about it.

And so it must have been for Abraham and Isaac as they traveled toward the mountain of sacrifice. Not much talking but intimacy beyond words. I wonder how many times Abraham must have looked away, blinking back the tears. And Isaac was no child anymore. He certainly sensed that something significant was happening, but he didn’t dare ask.

On the third day they arrived at the mountain. Abraham strapped the wood on Isaac’s back and carried in his own hands the torch and the knife. “Stay here,” he instructed the servants. “The boy and I will go over there and worship, and then come back to you.” Did he really believe that—that both of them would return—or was he covering up, the way a soldier tells his dying comrade that he’s gonna be okay?

Finally, prompted by curiosity or dread, Isaac speaks up, “Father?”

“Yes, my son.” (Can you hear the tenderness?)

“Father, the wood and the fire are here, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?” And in Abraham’s answer we begin to understand what’s going on in his heart.

“God himself will provide the lamb for the offering, my son.” The expression translated “God will provide” literally reads, “God will see to it.” After all that Abraham has been through on this journey—after working things over in his mind for these three days—Abraham has come to the place where he believes that God will come through. Somehow, some way, God will see to it that Abraham and his son will walk back down that mountain together. Perhaps God will change his mind at the last minute.

But if not, even if Abraham has to go through with it and sacrifice his son, he is convinced that God can raise his son back to life again.

The New Testament helps us here. The book of Hebrews tells us that “by faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. . . . Abraham reasoned that God could even raise the dead” (11:17–19). He reasoned. He reckoned. It’s actually an accounting term meaning “to calculate.” Based on all that he’d been through, Abraham had come to a place where he was willing to trust God with his greatest treasure—his only son.

When they reached the top of the mountain, Abraham himself built the altar, arranged the wood, and bound his son, laying him upon the altar. Isaac is at least twelve years old, probably older. He understands what’s happening yet apparently offers no resistance. Then Abraham takes out a knife to slay his son.

What a moment that must have been. Isaac lying on the wood, looking up at his father. Abraham hesitating, looking up to heaven, as if to give God one last chance to deliver him and his son from this moment. God is testing Abraham. And Abraham, in a sense, is testing God.

And then, at the last moment, with the knife raised, that voice comes once again: “Abraham, Abraham.”

How quickly do you think Abraham answered? “Here I am, Lord.” A commentator points out that whenever a name is repeated in Scripture, it always indicates deep affection. “Absalom, Absalom,” cries David when his son dies. “Martha, Martha,” Jesus says to the woman who serves him.

“Abraham, Abraham,” says God. “Don’t lay a hand on the boy. Now I know that you fear God.” This is *not* the fear that came over Abraham when he lied about Sarah to protect himself from Pharaoh. And it’s *not* the fear that Abraham experienced in the dark night, when he doubted that God could keep his promises. This particular word indicates reverence and respect, an *affectionate* fear.

And Abraham looked up and saw a ram caught in a thicket. He unbound his son and sacrificed the ram instead, and he named the place *Jehovah Jireh*, “The Lord Will See to It.” And just as he had promised, he and Isaac worshiped on that mountain and then returned to the servants. And if you think father and son were close on the way up the mountain, can you imagine the intimacy they enjoyed on the way down? The tears of joy? The confidence in God? Can you imagine when they met up with the servants who were waiting? “See, I told you we’d be back!”

And in response to Abraham's willing obedience, the Lord promises to bless Abraham with more sons and daughters than he can possibly count, and through those descendants to bless the whole world. Abraham has finally become the man God called him to be.

So that's the story. As compelling and disturbing today as it ever was. But what is the lesson? What does it mean for people like us and our journeys of faith?

The Lesson

We're told right up front that this is a *test*. But a test of what? Of love? That's how it is often interpreted and applied. That God wanted to find out whom Abraham loved more—Isaac or God. So God asked Abraham to sacrifice his son. That's a frightening thought, isn't it?

I talked to a man who was visiting a church and the pastor happened to be speaking on this story. After describing and commending Abraham's devotion, he looked out at his congregation and asked, "If God were to ask you to sacrifice your child, would you be prepared to do that?" There was silence in the room for a moment as the people swallowed hard and looked at the floor, but my friend couldn't contain himself. "No!" he shouted from his pew. It was obvious that was *not* the answer the pastor was looking for, and it made for a rather awkward moment. After the service, a teenage boy came up to the visitor and thanked him for saying no. It was the pastor's son.

Too many people have walked away from this passage fearful that God might ask them to give up their children to death. I've heard preachers say that Abraham loved Isaac too much, and that if you love someone too much God may take that person away from you. I've known people who have been afraid to get too close to God because they don't want him to ask something like this of them.

But that kind of thinking and teaching is wrongheaded; it's a misunderstanding of what this passage is all about. This was a test. That much is clear. But it was *not* a test of Abraham's *love*. It was a test of Abraham's *faith*. We know that Abraham loved God. He'd built altars to God all over Canaan. They'd had dinner together. He was God's friend. The question was not whether Abraham *loved* God. The question was whether Abraham *trusted* God. Did he believe God could still bless him, make him the father

of many nations, even if he surrendered his only son into God's hands? Would he trust God with his greatest treasure—Isaac? Or would he hold back, look for another way, take matters into his own hands? That was the test—would he trust his future to God?

And that's where the story intersects with our lives. It's not asking whom you love more—God or your child, God or your spouse. You're supposed to love your child and your spouse with a fierce and loyal love. It's not a question of love, it's a question of trust. Are you prepared to trust God with your greatest treasures, with your deepest needs, with your highest hopes?

In Abraham's case, his son Isaac represented all that was dear to Abraham, so God asked him to put Isaac on the altar. But God may ask something very different of you. He might say to you, "Take your *career*—your carefully laid out career, your lifelong ambition—and offer it to me." To someone else he might say, "Take your *possessions*—your hard-earned possessions that give you a sense of security and significance—and place them in my hands." To another, "Take your *retirement* years and make them available to me." To another, "Take your *wounded heart* and place it in my tender hands." To each of us he says, "Take your *dreams* . . . take your *fears* . . . and place them on the altar." And yes, he may even say, "Take your *son* or your *daughter*, and offer them to me." Not to be killed, but to be available for his purposes, to be blessed and to be a blessing.

Understand that God is not in the business of taking children away from parents or pulling the rug out from under our dreams. But the truth is, his purposes for us are far greater than we can imagine. And if we are to fulfill those purposes we must be prepared to trust him, even with that which is nearest and dearest to us. So from time to time he will test us—asking us to *do* something, *go* somewhere, *serve* somebody in a way that feels very risky. And if we are willing to do it, he is able to bless us and others in ways we could never expect. There is no promise that we will get back everything we give up or that we will eventually get what we want. The promise is that God will see to it—he will provide what we need to live a blessed life.

The book of Hebrews tells us, "By faith Abraham offered Isaac." And what is faith? Faith is trusting ourselves to God. Abraham believed that God was going to do something on top of that mountain. He didn't know what or how or when, but he knew it would be right and good and eternally significant. And climbing that mountain was the ultimate test of that trust.

Back in high school I started rock climbing. My friend Steve introduced

me to the sport. He started me out on some safe, easy climbs; top-roping, for those who are familiar with it. It was fun and challenging, and I picked it up pretty quickly. But soon it was time to try a real climb, with Steve leading and me following him up the cliff.

Steve climbed sixty or seventy feet up, then secured himself on a ledge to belay me. I worked my way up, following the route I'd seen Steve take. But then I came to an overhang, a pretty severe one that I couldn't even see around let alone climb around. I felt for a crack or a ledge or a nub to help me get up and over it, or for some other route around the overhang, but there was nothing. I hollered up to Steve, who was above the overhang, and he told me there was a solid handhold just over the lip of the overhang—what climbers call “a bucket.” I could pull myself up by that. I couldn't see it, of course, so I tried to feel for it but couldn't find it.

“I can't reach it,” I said.

“I know,” he hollered back. “You're gonna have to go for it.”

I looked down. “What do you mean go for it?”

“You gotta *commit*; you gotta let go of the rock and then reach up.”

Did he say *let go* of the rock? “What if it's not there?” I said.

“Don't worry, it's there,” he said.

“What if I fall?” I said.

“I'll catch you.” There was a long pause, then he spoke the words I'll never forget: “Wilk, *you gotta trust me.*”

I didn't want to trust him. I wanted to trust myself. I wanted to see that handhold, or at least to feel it so I knew it was there before I reached for it. I wanted to find some other way around that overhang. But there was no other way. The only way up would be to fall away from the rock and reach. So that's what I did. And sure enough, it was there, and it was rock solid. I can feel it to this very day. And with that secure handhold I was able to push with my feet and get up and over the lip. Standing on top of that overhang was one of the best feelings I'd ever had in my life. It was just like Steve said, all I had to do was trust him.

That day on Mount Moriah, Abraham trusted God and God came through. Abraham's journey wasn't quite over yet, but when he came down from that mountain he was finally the man God had called him to be, a man through whom he would raise up a nation and a Messiah who would one day bring salvation to the whole world. Remember, the journey isn't just

about getting there; it's about who you become along the way. Abraham had become the friend of God and the father of faith.

Some of us are climbing Test Mountain right now. God is probing, proving your faith. He wants to meet you on that mountain, to do something good and eternally significant. Others of us will find ourselves on that mountain in the year or years to come. Are we prepared to trust him with that which is nearest and dearest to us—our careers, our relationships, our health, our finances, our ministries? And most important, are we prepared to trust him with our very souls?

A Greater Sacrifice

By now you have probably recognized that there is something bigger going on here than the near-sacrifice of Isaac. Something is being foreshadowed—something that Abraham anticipated by faith, though he could not possibly have understood it fully.

Thousands of years later, on a hill very near to this one, a greater Father offered a greater Son as a sacrifice. Not as a burnt offering but as a sin offering, as payment for the crimes of humanity. Only this time when an arm was raised to deal a deadly blow, there was no voice from heaven to stay the hand. This time when the Father looked around, there was no substitute to take the Son's place. The Son himself was the substitute—for you and for me and for everyone. On that day, young Isaac's question was finally answered: "Father, where is the Lamb for the offering?" Jesus Christ, by his sacrificial death on the cross, became the Lamb of God, taking away the sins of the world. "On the mountain of the Lord it will be provided," Abraham predicted. And so it was.

So maybe it's a love story after all. Not about Abraham's love for God, but about God's love for Abraham, meeting him in such a powerful way. And God's love for us, offering us forgiveness of sin and eternal life.

The journey of a lifetime begins and ends right here—at the cross of Christ where we meet the God we can trust. We can trust him with our greatest treasures; we can trust him with our deepest needs; we can trust him with our highest hopes. We can trust him with our very souls. For if God did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all, how will he not also, along with Jesus, give us everything we need to be blessed, and to be a blessing to others?

Commentary

Good preaching is always somewhat emotional. It appeals to the mind and to the feelings of the listeners. This passage in Genesis 22 is one of the most emotional in that book as well as in the entire Bible. The difficulty, however, is that we may read the passage and draw from it the wrong emotion. The text is not telling Abraham to sacrifice Isaac as the pagans would sacrifice their children to get the favor of a god. The offering here has to do with God's promise. God has said it would be through Isaac that the world will be blessed. If Isaac is killed, then God's promise is rendered worthless. This is a sermon about God and faith.

In Bryan Wilkerson's sermon, the focus on the emotions is in the right place. One danger of this focus on emotion is that we may illustrate it with story material that touches our listeners. Actually, the real task is to take the passage and see where the biblical writer wants to focus the emotions and then try to do that in the sermon. Years ago, old-time preachers knew how to use the conclusion to drive home the point through the use of the story. The story was something emotional but not necessarily something that came out of the Bible. I think Bryan has done a splendid job in discussing the text, and I think the questions and answers he gives provide understanding for issues preachers are faced with in the world today.

Interview

How do you go about preparing to preach?

It starts with advance work. A few times a year, just about every season, I go away for a couple of days to lay out the next three months, the next season of preaching. For those few days, it's nonstop Bible commentaries and yellow legal pad. I try to chart everything out. I get a text and a big idea for every week of the series. Once I've got that, then there's the weekly prep; for me that's almost always about twenty hours, sometimes a little less. I prepare the week I preach, so I really don't work too far ahead other than those retreat weekends. Each week I write the sermon I'm preaching that Sunday, much to the chagrin of all the creative people on my team who wish I were two or three weeks ahead. But I've never been able to do that.

I preach so much out of my own experience and what's happening in the life of the church and the culture that week. There's an immediacy about it that I really like and that I think helps the preaching. The downside is that it's hard on the creative team to keep up and be prepared, so we try to strike a balance. On Monday morning I get out my yellow legal pad. I still use a legal pad for my creative work. The first page is free association. I start writing down ideas, things that are on my mind, potential illustrations, title possibilities. It's a creative page that I keep handy and mark up all week long.

Then I start doing my exegetical work—usually on Monday morning for a couple of hours and Tuesday morning for a few hours—trying to work for an outline, big idea, that sort of thing. I leave it alone on Wednesday

because I have meetings all day. Thursday is a big writing day. I get up early and work until about one o'clock to sketch an outline and start typing a manuscript, and I try to get half or two-thirds of the way done. I do a little more on Friday morning. Hopefully by Friday I'm pretty much done with my draft and Saturday I'm tuning it up—adding in any visuals, bullet points, pictures, anything we might want to insert in the message. I probably spend another five or six hours on Saturday.

That's a full schedule. Do you take time off?

Typically Fridays, but I cheat a little bit. I work before breakfast for a couple of hours. It's my best time of day. I work on Saturday catch-as-catch-can. I get up early and try to spend the day either with the family or just relax or work around the house, but then I sneak in a couple of hours here and there and then usually again at night just to keep it fresh in my mind. Then I'll get up super early on Sunday morning and spend two or three more hours. Hopefully at that point I'm just learning it, practicing it.

What about commentaries? Do you use them? When do you go to them?

Pretty early. Part of my retreat work involves skimming through the commentaries. But then I really like to do it all again the week I'm preaching. I'll probably spend an additional three hours in commentaries the week I preach.

What about illustrations? Where do you find them? Do you collect them?

They come from my daily and weekly reading. I get a lot of illustrations out of the *New York Times*. I'll walk through a museum on my day off. From time to time I save things and stick them in the file somewhere. I still use Haddon's system of numbered file folders. My administrator keeps a list of them. The internet helps a lot because you can Google things and find recent articles. I find that most of that stuff triggers my imagination to remember my own experience. I may not use the story I read about, but

I think, “Oh yeah, something like that happened to me once,” and I can make it more personal.

What role does your audience play in determining preaching passages and series?

We have three thousand or so adults on a Sunday. I do a lot of my sermon planning collaboratively with the pastoral team. We have a theme for the year, and we craft what’s called the “teaching journey” from September to June. We try to cover different kinds of biblical material and different kinds of topical issues that we can loosely organize around that particular theme. We’ll sit together as a staff and ask, “What are we hearing from the congregation? Are we in a building program? Are we growing? Are we shrinking? Are we in conflict?”

Who is involved in that planning?

The whole ministry staff. I like to include everyone so they all feel like they have a stake in helping to shape the teaching journey.

Let’s talk about this sermon from Genesis 22. What are the challenges in preaching a well-known but very misunderstood text?

I think the challenge is to help the listeners get past either the bad teaching they’ve received on that passage or the misunderstandings they have. Passages like this one are emotionally loaded, and attempts have been made to explain or apply it in what I think are poor ways. You have to help people get past their fear and their misunderstandings without sounding like a know-it-all. (In other words, “Everything you read on this was wrong and now I’m going to straighten you out.”) You have to make the journey first. You have to deal with everything you’ve heard about that passage and confront your own fears and misunderstandings. You have to ask, “What does this text actually say, and can I approach it with a blank slate?”

What's the best way to avoid being stale as a preacher?

Do your own work, don't just default to what you've heard other people say. Don't read five other preachers' sermons on a passage. Get out the commentaries and sit with the text for a long time. Read another passage and turn it over in your head. Go for a run, take a walk, write in a journal. Ask the Lord to bring you your own insights, and then you have something fresh to offer.

How do you tell the story with insight and get listeners emotionally involved?

A big part is using your imagination. You really have to imagine what it must have been like to play out that scenario. Sit for a little while and imagine how Abraham felt. If you're a father, think about your own son, about taking a walk with him and how that would feel. Then imagine it from Isaac's perspective and from the servants' perspective. That's when doing your own homework and sitting with the text makes all the difference. Ask, "What does it feel like?" The problem with the Old Testament is that those stories, as Haddon says, are long ago and far away.

How do you deal with applying the "long ago and far away" to a modern audience?

I try to ask, "What's a similar situation in today's world?" That's when I came up with the idea of taking your firstborn child off to college. It's a rite of passage that's full of emotion and uncertainty. That enabled me to get inside both Abraham's and Isaac's emotions. Interestingly, when I first preached that sermon years and years ago, I told the story more from remembering my father dropping me off at college. Now I've dropped off four kids of my own at college. It feels a little different from the father's point of view.

After the Scripture is read, you begin with a disturbing story. Why start out that way?

I think you have to name the difficulty and say it up front and give people permission to say, “I don’t get this story” or “I don’t like this story.” It’s okay to feel that way about the Bible. I started with that really disturbing story about the guy and his daughter because that helps us feel it, and our intuitive reaction is just terrible. When you give people permission to be bothered by this story, then they can listen with fresh ears.

I knew a woman who said this story ruined God for her.

So say that up front and then that woman thinks, “Oh, okay. This preacher knows me and knows what I’m thinking, and it’s okay for me to feel this way about this story.” She doesn’t have to have her defenses up.

Do you use notes when you preach?

I use notes, way more than I should.

I’ve seen you preach and I never knew you used them. How do you use notes and still sound conversational?

I’m pretty good at not being dependent on notes, but I always have them. So what I do now is I bring my printed manuscript to the pulpit with me, but I don’t print it on full-size paper. The manuscript is the same size as my Bible pages, so it almost looks like I have only my Bible with me. I’m not shuffling letter-size pages, and it looks like I’m working from a Bible. I try to know the content well enough that I just peek once in a while to know what comes next.

Any advice to someone who preaches with a manuscript?

The thing about manuscripts is saying it and not reading it. A lot of preachers think that if they just read over the manuscript twenty times, they’ll deliver the sermon fluently, but all they do is read it fluently. You have to stop reading it in your preparation and just say it. Have it in front of you

and take a peek, but do it conversationally. One of my weekly drills involves driving over to church on Sunday morning. It's a twelve-minute drive, so I can say my introduction and conclusion to myself. When you say it to yourself out loud, it makes all the difference in the world.

Honestly, my biggest frustration with my preaching is that I'm too dependent on my notes. The computer has ruined me, because back in the day I handwrote it all. I was a lousy typist, so I didn't type my sermons. I kept making handwritten notes, and the mechanics of doing that just got it in my head. And the other thing about the computer is that it makes you such a wordsmith that you fall in love with your sentences and you can't let it go. You have to be word perfect. You have to read it because you're afraid you'll mess it up.

I suppose that's the disadvantage of preaching without notes?

You miss stuff. You do.

What about technology? How do you incorporate that?

We put the text on the screen. Usually I'll put the big idea and what we call "the story line" up on the screen so people can write that down verbatim if they want to. If there's a lot of instructional stuff I may put up some bullet points, but I don't like to. If I feel like there's a lot of ground that we've got to cover here and this will help people stay with me, then I'll use them. And the listeners like to take notes.

Is there a downside to using visuals?

I always tell preachers, every time you put something on the screen people stop paying attention to you. You lose eye contact and you have to win it back again. It's probably true that what's on the screen is more interesting than you. Don't set yourself up for that kind of competition.

Tell me about the sermon in terms of the overall flow of the worship service.

The sermon isn't the message. The service is the message. We talk about the journey of the service: what journey are we taking people on today? The sermon is obviously a big part of it, but it's only a part. We try to connect as much as we can in terms of content, Scripture reading, and lyrics to songs. Is this a message about comforting people? If it is, then our music should be comforting. If this is a message about inspiring people to go out and conquer the world, then the music had better be inspirational.

How does working with a large staff affect your preaching preparation?

I spend a lot of time with the creative team. We do a two-hour worship planning meeting every week, and every other week we do a two-hour creative meeting where we're not actually planning a particular service, we're just looking ahead and saying, "All right, we're going to be talking about trials in the next series. What are some songs, video clips, illustrations, dramas?" We do those creative meetings twice a month and then the weekly planning meeting.

Your staff must really feel like they're part of things.

Yes, they really do. Again, the frustration is that I'm not always far enough ahead. Usually three weeks ahead I have my idea, my text, and a couple of key thoughts. They usually have enough to go on three weeks in advance, but it's not like sitting down with a written sermon a week or two in advance.

What advice would you give to a young preacher?

Do your own homework. It's too easy these days to access and download and scavenge other people's work. It's okay to do that a little bit, but do your own homework first and maybe augment if you know somebody has good illustrations or something like that. Once you get someone else's outline in your head, it's almost impossible to come up with your own outline.

What encouragement would you give to a more seasoned preacher?

Articulate what your own style is. In the early years of your preaching, you're learning from other preachers. You're following your mentors from seminary, but you're still finding your own voice. What do you do well? What makes your preaching effective in terms of structure, content, theme, and delivery? What's your sweet spot? Know who you are and get comfortable with who you are and lean into it. After ten years, now you have your own voice. You're good at things. Preachers can learn to articulate: "What am I good at? What's my style?" You can lean into that and feel confident.

2

How to Say God's Name

Exodus 20:7

ERIC DOKKEN

Some of you have seen *Antiques Roadshow*, a program on PBS where the show’s producers rent out a convention hall and have people bring in stuff that they have in their attics or basements. They’ve either had this stuff in their family for a number of years or they just found it at the dump a few weeks before, but they bring in all this junk to find out if it actually has any value. As it turns out, most of it is really junk . . . but some of it actually does have some value.

For example, one guy who apparently goes to the dump looking for treasure came in with a book of paintings. The appraiser was looking at it and said, “Do you know anything about it?”

“Well, I think it’s Asian,” responded the man.

The appraiser looked through the book. It contained a number of paintings of wildlife. After talking about it for a little bit, he said, “You could probably get about \$6,000 for it.” Not a bad day at the dump.

Another lady brought in a red vase that she had gotten from her mother’s family about thirty years earlier. It had been sitting in a cabinet so that the kids couldn’t play with it. She had no idea how much it was worth. The appraiser looked at it and said, “Well, this actually happens to be Tiffany glass, and a special kind of Tiffany glass.” He told her that if she brought it to a retail store she could get \$25,000 for it.

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Another guy came in with a painting—kind of cool looking—but just a painting of a girl with a fancy dress. It looked kind of old and it had a signature up on the corner. The appraiser asked, “How did you get it?”

The man explained, “Well, I used to be in this band called Gypsy, and we wanted some inspiration for an album cover. I saw this picture, fell in love with it, paid \$200 for it.”

“Well, if you look at this signature here . . . it happens to be by someone quite famous—an Italian artist who now just happens to be incredibly popular. If you were to get this painting cleaned up, you could sell this painting for \$75,000.”

The guy was completely shocked! And as I'm watching this program, I'm wondering what I can dig out of my room that would be worth \$75,000. That's what happens as you watch a program like that, you begin to wonder, “Do I have some kind of treasure in my house that I could get some money for?” Maybe some of you do, but most of us don't. Most of us will continue to get by but not be extremely wealthy.

But this morning I want to talk to you about a different treasure, a treasure that each one of us has. Like the people on *Antiques Roadshow*, maybe we don't know we have it. It's a treasure that's much more valuable than some paintings or a vase. It's a treasure that we can find in the Scripture that was read earlier. If you'd like to look in your Bibles with me, turn to Exodus 20; we're going to ask, “What is this treasure?”

Many of you recognize this as the Ten Commandments. This is the first time they appear in the Bible. They also appear in Deuteronomy 5. And in the Ten Commandments, the Lord establishes the principles by which his people are to live in covenant with him, the Lord who rescued them from slavery. And in Exodus 20:7 we find the third commandment, “You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name.” You'll see in the third commandment that God is very concerned about his name. In the Old Testament, people in general were very concerned about their names.

Names were a very big deal. God named the first man Adam, which simply means “man.” Then Adam named Eve because she'd be the mother of all the living. And through the entire Old Testament parents are giving children names that are significant. Sarah names her son Isaac because she laughed when she found out she would be pregnant. Hannah prayed for years for a son, and when she finally gets a son she names him Samuel,

which means “heard of God” because God heard her prayer. Throughout the Old Testament, parents give their children names that are significant. They make a big deal out of names, and God cares so much about names that sometimes he even changes people’s names. Abram becomes Abraham. Sarai becomes Sarah. Simon becomes Peter.

Names are a big deal, and God is saying in the third commandment, “My name is a big deal. My name is a treasure.” God’s name is the treasure that each one of us has. That doesn’t seem like all that great of a treasure, does it?

In our culture, names aren’t nearly as important as they were back in the Old Testament. For instance, the most popular name for females in the United States last year was Emma. Emma means something like “universal.” Either you have really high ideals for your daughter or you just didn’t think about what that name meant when you named her. The third most popular name for girls is Madison. I think Madison is a beautiful name, but if you look up the meaning of Madison it’s “son of a mighty warrior.” It would be really hard for your daughter to live up to that name.

If you go on Facebook, there is a page that is called “If this page gets 500,000 likes I will name my son Batman.” It’s posted by a guy living in the UK, and he says if 500,000 people think it’s a good idea, he will name his son Batman. That’s because names don’t mean as much as they did in Old Testament culture.

But they do mean something, don’t they? If you go to the Batman page on Facebook and read the comments, you’ll see most of the comments say something like, “This is the worst idea I’ve ever heard of” or “Who is this child’s mother and how could she let the father do this?”

We care about names. I care about my name. People often spell my name with a *k*—E-R-I-K. It bugs me when people mess up my name.

And you like people to get your name right too, don’t you? We care about our names. That’s why in Exodus 20:7, the third commandment, God says, “Don’t misuse my name. My name is important. My name is a treasure.”

What is so significant about God’s name, especially in the book of Exodus, is that it’s a way for God to identify himself in relationship with his people. As some of you may notice, the name LORD is in small capital letters. That’s because it doesn’t actually say “Lord” there. It really says God’s name, which is Yahweh—the name by which God revealed himself to the people of Israel. Yahweh. The people took this command so seriously

in the Old Testament that they didn't want to pronounce the name Yahweh, so it eventually got translated as LORD (with small caps) and we have continued that tradition today.

So you can say you've learned something today. Maybe you didn't know this before. Every time you see LORD with small caps it really means Yahweh. Yahweh, the name God revealed to establish a relationship with his people. That's what knowing someone's name does.

When I was in junior high, I went to camp. I went to camp, of course, to learn about God . . . but I had another motive . . . to meet girls. I'm not endorsing this as a reason for going to camp, but the last time I was there we went around and everyone said his or her name. I had been watching, and there was one girl whom I wanted to get to know. I paid very close attention when she said her name so that later I could come up and say, "Hey, Stephanie, I'm Eric," because a name establishes a relationship.

If you don't know someone's name, it's really hard to make any progress in a relationship. So God reveals his name to his people as Yahweh because he establishes a relationship with them. That is the name by which the Israelites know him and it is a treasure.

God's name is a treasure to us as well, not simply because it establishes a relationship but because it says something about his character. It's the same in our culture as well. When I say someone's name you don't just hear a name, you think about a person. If I say Mother Teresa, you would think about an angelic person. If I say Adolf Hitler, you would think of someone very different.

A lot of you know the name Bernie Madoff. He's a guy who swindled his friends and a lot of other people out of lots and lots of money. At Gordon-Conwell last year, there was a student whose name was very close to Madoff. I accidentally called him Madoff, and he was very quick to say, "No, it's Modaf." He didn't want his name associated with this guy named Bernie Madoff.

A person's name represents not only a sound but also the person's character. In Exodus 33, Moses is begging God to do something, to give him a sign to show that he is really with Moses and with the Israelite people. So God says, "Here is what I'll do: I'll make my goodness pass before you and I will proclaim my name." Then in Exodus 34 he takes Moses and sets him in a little place behind some rocks that he can look over. And then the Lord passes over Moses, and Moses sees the Lord, and then the text says

the Lord proclaims, “The LORD, the LORD,” which is of course, “Yahweh, Yahweh, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness” (Exod. 34:6). That’s God’s character, “The LORD, the LORD, slow to anger, gracious and compassionate.” God’s character is bound up in his name, and that’s why God wants us to take his name seriously—to handle his name with care.

You’ll notice in the NIV that it says, “Do not misuse the name of the LORD your God,” but most of you here this morning know that the older translations say, “Do not use the name of the LORD your God in vain.” The literal translation is something like, “Do not lift up the name of the LORD your God to something that is vain or worthless. Do not use it for something that has no value”—because God’s name is a treasure that shouldn’t be used in those contexts.

The primary application of this commandment in the Old Testament was perjury—to make an oath based on the name of the Lord that you did not intend to keep. You would say, “By God’s name I swear I will do this or that,” when in your heart you had no intention of keeping that promise. If you do that you are taking the name of the Lord your God in vain. You are misusing the name of the Lord. You are saying in a sense, “God doesn’t exist,” because you swear by the name of the Lord and then you don’t do what you promised. You are saying, “God doesn’t exist,” and you are making him very, very small. You’re using the name of the Lord your God in vain.

We can misuse God’s name in other ways as well. You usually hear the name of the Lord in our culture when people are really angry or people are really surprised. Suddenly you hear the name of the Lord come out of their mouths in these contexts, and it has nothing to do with who our great and awesome God is. They are not thinking about the actual Jesus Christ who died for our sins and is now seated at the right hand of God. They are taking God’s character and who he is lightly.

And also we say the name of the Lord in different ways, so somehow we are moving around the commandment or finding a loophole. We’ll say “gosh” or “geez” instead of God or Jesus. We’re still referring to God’s name, aren’t we? We’re still using the name of the Lord in vain. God says don’t use my name in situations that make me look small . . . in situations that don’t reflect who I am, the God who makes a covenant with his people. Don’t misuse the name of the Lord your God.

And he takes his name so seriously that he says, “Whoever misuses my name I will not leave unpunished” or “I will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses my name.” How does God intend to punish people who misuse his name? I can give you a few examples from the Bible.

In Leviticus 24 there's a young man who curses the name of the Lord. He takes the name of the Lord in vain. The Israelites go to Moses and ask, “What should we do?” Moses says, “We're going to have everyone who heard him come together and we are going to have to kill this man by stoning.” That is a very extreme punishment for misusing the name of the Lord.

In the New Testament it's a little bit different. There are some guys called the seven sons of Sceva. Their father's name is Sceva—he's a Jewish priest. They realize the name of Jesus is powerful. They hear Paul use it. And so they decide they are going to cast out a demon in the name of Jesus because they have seen what it can do. They see a guy who is possessed by a demon and they say, “In the name of Jesus, we cast you out.” The guy looks at them and says, “I know who Jesus is, and I've heard of Paul who preaches in the name of Jesus, but I don't know who you are.” And then the guy jumps on them, starts beating them, tears off their robes, and kicks them out of the house. They were punished for taking the name of the Lord in vain.

Now that probably won't happen to us. I've never seen it happen when I've heard someone misuse the name of the Lord. But I do think this command is serious—“I will not leave them unpunished, those who misuse the name of the LORD.” It's a divine way of saying, “I wouldn't do that if I were you.” God is saying, “If you don't treasure my name, if you don't use my name in a way that reflects my character, then I will not leave you unpunished.”

One punishment is simply that we forget how valuable God is. We forget that God is our treasure when we consistently misuse the name of the Lord.

So the way to use God's name appropriately, the way to handle God's name with care, is to make sure that every time we say the name of the Lord, every time the name of the Lord crosses our lips, we are treasuring the Lord in our hearts. We do that by thinking about the character and person of God and who he is and what he has revealed to us. We do that by using his name in a way that is consistent with his character. When we treasure the name of God, we will treasure God himself. We will treasure God by treasuring God's name.

I've been reading a book on youth ministry, and the author tells a story about being invited to a church to talk about youth ministry. He attended a worship service and sat toward the front. He looked over to the side and saw a bunch of youth sitting across from him. They were pretty restless, making a lot of noise and talking to each other and just sort of drawing attention to themselves. As the service began, they continued to talk and disrupt the service. Finally, toward the end of the service, the congregation celebrated communion. One of the ladies who was serving communion was an older lady, probably in her late seventies. She stood there as each person came up. In their tradition they would say, "The body of Christ broken for you," and she did this as each person came up.

Then the youth went to the back and started to come forward, and the author noticed that something happened to the woman. She started to get very emotional and she actually started to weep. She continued to serve communion, and as the youth were walking forward they continued to be disruptive. The people in the pews were saying, "Shhh! Shhh! Quiet!" but they weren't listening. And the author was watching to see what would happen when they got to the front.

This lady was bawling her eyes out and they weren't even paying attention, and he was wondering if he'd have to get out of his seat and help her. But as the first youth approached her and she was holding the communion plate, crying, she said, "The body of Christ broken for you, Thomas. . . . The body of Christ broken for you, Sarah." And as each youth came through she said the same thing—calling each one of them by name.

He asked her afterward what had happened: "You seemed quite emotional during worship today." And she said, "Well, I was asked a few years ago to serve the youth group, but I'm too old to do anything with them so I said I would pray. So someone took their picture and wrote prayer requests on the back and wrote their names." She had been praying for them by name for years, but this was the first opportunity for her to serve communion to them. As they came she suddenly realized she knew their names, and she was serving them communion in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

I cannot think of any better way to use the name of the Lord than by saying, "The body of Christ broken for you." When we use the name of the Lord, we should say it in a way that we are treasuring him in our hearts and thinking of his character. As his name crosses our lips, we are

treasuring the name of the Lord. When we treasure the name of the Lord, we treasure God himself.

The name of the Lord is quite a powerful and valuable thing. When the Lord reveals his name to Moses, he tells him, "I am going to send you to release the Israelites." And Moses asks, "Who should I say sent me?" God says, "Tell them that Yahweh sent you," which means "I Am Who I Am." The name Yahweh means the One who exists without the help of anyone else. I Am Who I Am. The all-powerful One who will do what he wants to do.

Commentators have pointed out that everyone has received a name from someone. Most of us were named by our parents. God is the only one who wasn't named by someone else. God named himself. He gave himself the name Yahweh, which means "I Am Who I Am," the all-powerful One. That's one of God's names.

Another one of God's names was given to a baby who was born to a poor girl in a village called Bethlehem. And though the prophet said he would be called "Wonderful Counselor, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace, Almighty God"—though the prophet said that, he grew up simply as Jesus of Nazareth, the carpenter's son. He was a man who didn't have a name. Then he was crucified with nameless criminals. But the apostle Paul tells us the Lord raised him from the dead. The Lord gave him "the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord" (Phil. 2:9–10). That's a powerful name. That's a treasure that each one of us has been given. You treasure God by treasuring his name.

I could point to places all over the Bible where it says this, but the most well known, and the one you will recognize, comes from the Lord's Prayer. "Our Father, who art in heaven, *hallowed be thy name.*" God knows that if you get his name right, if you treasure his name, you will ultimately treasure him.

Watching *Antiques Roadshow* it's interesting to see these people hauling all their stuff on wagons and carts. And after they talk to the appraiser and suddenly find out how much their stuff is worth, their attitude toward it changes. When the lady found out her vase was worth \$25,000 she said, "I should probably get some insurance on that." When the guy found out his painting was worth \$75,000 he said, "I should probably get that cleaned." Their attitude changed when they realized how much the item was worth.

This morning I've been talking to you about God's name. God's name is a treasure that he has given to each one of us. God's name establishes a relationship with us. God's name is powerful, and it would be best if we didn't treat his name lightly, if we didn't misuse the name of the Lord our God. Instead we should treasure the name of the Lord our God. In treasuring God's name, we treasure God himself.

Commentary

The sermons in this collection all start out well. Strong introductions get attention, bring a need to the surface, and orient listeners to the body of the message. All of these preachers do that—and do it well. Eric Dokken begins by referring to a popular television program. That gets and holds attention.

The need of the sermon comes right after the introduction. Dokken raises the question, “Do I have some kind of treasure in my house that I can get some money for?” Then he goes on to say, “Like the people on *Antiques Roadshow*, maybe we don’t know we have it. It’s a treasure that’s much more valuable than some paintings or a vase.”

This is about one of the Ten Commandments that deals with God’s name. As you read through the sermon, notice how Dokken takes time to expand on the importance of names. He does it positively and negatively. Then he introduces God’s name—Yahweh. In fact, in the development of his sermon Dokken uses illustrations that are specific and down to earth. A potential problem with a sermon like this is that it can have no application to people in the twenty-first century, but Dokken shows, with examples and admonition, the danger of not getting God’s name right.