

# INTEGRATIVE PREACHING

A COMPREHENSIVE MODEL  
for Transformational Proclamation

KENTON C. ANDERSON



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## PREFACE

I have been teaching and writing about preaching for about twenty-five years. I have preached in hundreds of churches and conference centers to many thousands of people. After a while it starts to feel like experience, and experience always ought to be shared. This is not my first book on the subject of preaching, but it is my most comprehensive. It is not the only word on the subject, but it is a good word, and it is the best that I have to offer. If you work with these suggestions, I am confident you will be a more effective preacher, and that will be good for the kingdom, good for the church, and good for all of us who listen.

I am grateful to my students and readers across these years who have respected the process and given it a go. I appreciate the helpful comments and the opportunity to test these ideas across the canvas of a few thousand student sermons. I believe preaching is transformative, even when it is offered by students who are learning the craft. My faith has been nurtured by these opportunities to hear from God.

I am grateful to my colleagues, who have trusted me with the students we have mutually loved.

I am grateful to my listeners, who have sat under the sound of my preaching. I trust that you have heard from God and have been transformed by what our God has said to you.

I am particularly grateful to my family, who continue to encourage me and who value what I do. Those who know my wife, Karen, will recognize her input on many of these pages. In her chaplaincy work with senior citizens, she has had many opportunities to test these thoughts in action.

I am most especially grateful to God, who has been pleased to make himself known in the world through the preaching of his Word. I am amazed and gratified that he has been willing to use me in this work that is so central to his heart.

Additional materials helpful in learning and sharing the principles in this book can be found at [www.preaching.org](http://www.preaching.org).

# INTRODUCTION

Preaching is a particularly confident way of speaking. When a football coach says that he is “preaching defense” to his team, he is speaking in an especially authoritative mode, welcome on the practice field, though less so elsewhere. A player’s job depends on the pleasure of his coach. His is not to question why. His is to defend or die. The player must presume the coach’s authority if he wants to keep his job. Coaches can preach. Others might better hold their tongue.

The places where we welcome preaching are few and seldom. A parent, perhaps, could preach to a child until a certain age. A deeply trusted friend could adopt the role of preacher, though perhaps in sparing measure. A pastor preaches as the function of his or her calling, which is a complicated matter.

There was a time when preaching was in vogue—when people were willing to grant authority to the man of the cloth who spoke for God among the people. There was a time when people were comfortable submitting to authority. That time is not today. No one is going to grant you privilege because you are a preacher. No social or financial benefit is going to come your way. You may have to pay relational capital instead of gaining it. To read this book and put its principles into practice might require of you a kind of courage. The day when preaching brought a sense of cultural privilege is long past.

In fact, many will see preaching as unwelcome, and sometimes even rude. Polite society agrees that we must not speak of things that demand or divide. Preaching is just too confident—arrogant even. Our subject too threatening. Our conclusions too demanding. Friends don’t let friends attend to sermons.

And yet here we are, you and I, sharing thoughts around this theme of preaching. The Bible is clear, and our calling is unshaken. We must preach

the Word, despite the constant opposition we will have to deal with. We remember that Paul told Timothy to expect a time when people would not put up with what we have to say—that they would turn their heads instead to those whose words would soothe the itching of their ears. We understand that this is the way of things, and we would not expect it to be any different.

There are those who have an ear for this. We understand that preachers travel narrow roads, but we understand that those pathways lead to special places. We believe we preach in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus and that we will be accountable for what we have to say. If we can keep our head and do the work of our callings, we will find that there are those God has especially prepared to respond to what we have to say—to what *he* has to say.

And so we preach, when it seems to be in season and when it seems to be out of season, when we find it convenient and when we find it inconvenient, when we are fairly sure they want to hear what we have to say and when we are quite sure they don't. We preach because we have been called to it—because we could do no other. We preach for those who will find Jesus, and we preach the accountability of those who won't. We preach because someone has to, because there is a harvest to be reaped, and because we just love to speak of Jesus.

## **We Preach Because God Speaks**

Is there anything better than that God has spoken? And not just that he has spoken, but also that he speaks? Set aside any doubts or postmodern uncertainties, if only for the moment. Imagine that the God of the universe, who spoke the world into being, is not disinterested in his creation. Imagine that this God is invested in the outcome. Consider the idea that this God is actively engaged, sustaining things and speaking things. Imagine that the God who built you from dirt has a purpose for you forever and that he has something to say to you. Would you not want to listen?

God spoke in his initiation of creation, establishing the world and its direction by the power of his Word. He spoke in the incarnation of Christ, who showed God to us, offering his mind and ultimately setting the terms and paving the way for our salvation. He spoke through his inspired Word, the record of his will and of his way. And now he speaks through the convergence of these means and by the illumination of his Spirit. Whenever we stand to preach, we bring this all together. As we speak in the presence of God, of

the person of Christ, through the purpose of Scripture, in the power of the Spirit, the kingdom comes and is populated by those prepared to hear—if we are prepared to preach.

We do not do this out of hubris, as if the power were of our own contrivance. None of us is good enough or wise enough or eloquent enough to achieve these outcomes by the power of our words. We are not that powerful—not that influential. We are not wealthy enough, or attractive enough, or anything enough to achieve the purposes of God for our preaching.

Some of us know this too truly—our not-enough-ness. It is dispiriting to give yourself to something when you know that you will never be enough. Our vision for our preaching can fade. Our confidence in the effectiveness of our preaching can settle into a weekly incrementalism that you have to trust by faith because it is hard to see the fruit on any given Sunday. This can happen when we forget what God is doing and who it is who speaks.

### **God Is the Preacher of His Word**

We have come to something key—something that will render everything else this book offers as useless if we cannot apprehend it. Let me put it as a question: Who is the preacher, anyway?

“Well, I am,” we stammer uncertainly, sensing a trick to the question. “I am the one standing here in front of the crowd. I am the one they’re going to talk about if I fail to feed them in the manner to which they are accustomed. I am the vulnerable one. I am the one responsible.”

And about that you are correct. But I would press the question further. Who is it who speaks, and who is it who listens? Who has the words of everlasting life? Whose words have the power to transform?

Not yours. Certainly not mine. It is not the words of the human preacher that will bring the kingdom. I have words, and some of them are worth speaking. I do have opinions, and some of them are worth hearing. You could do worse. But nobody ought to come to hear me preach. We ought to come to hear the voice of God.

God is the preacher. It is the self-revealing God who brings us words of truth and life. It is God to whom we ought to give attention. It is he who offers hope and healing. God preaches, and that is both wonder and comfort to the beleaguered human who has felt the weekly burden as if it was his or her own.

It is this theological foundation that gives hope to our preaching. The doctrine of revelation—this appreciation that the Creator spoke and speaks—is

the thing that animates our preaching. As humans we can see ourselves as conduits or culverts—channeling the flow of God’s communication.

## **We Are Listeners to the Sermon That God Preaches**

And yet we are something more than that. This metaphor of culverts, giant concrete channels, is uninspiring—belittling even to the privilege that is ours as human preachers. We are more than channels, more than heralds, more than ambassadors, more than facilitators of God’s message, though we are all that, yet more. We are listeners—first listeners—and there is glory in it.

God does not speak into a void. This is a communication process that requires both sender and receiver. Without reception there is no preaching. Without a listener, preaching is an incomplete pass. The tree that falls in the forest makes no sound until there is an ear to hear it. The glory of preaching is not only in the speaking of it, but in the hearing also. The hearing is the human part.

There is great dignity in this. That God speaks and we can hear him bestows a special privilege. Craig Brian Larson has said that in preaching “gravity reverses,” and that nothing offers greater dignity than the preaching and the hearing of a sermon.<sup>1</sup>

Human preachers have a special place within this process. Preachers are less communicators than they are listeners—special listeners, first listeners, with the advantage of a head start. We get there first, ahead of the crowd, and know the joy of first discovery. We engage the text, seeking the Spirit, and we hear! We hear the voice of God, who speaks to us his grace and truth. Then having heard, we take what we have heard and offer it to others. God comes with us as we do. God keeps speaking by his Word and by his Spirit, in a trinitarian expression of his intention for the world and life and us. We speak, certainly in that we give voice to language, but it is not our language. It is his Word that we heard first and now help others, that they might also hear.

## **Preaching as an Act of Leadership**

Preaching is an act of leadership, like the time I led a group of guys to the top of Black Tusk. I had been to the mountain before, and I had seen the

1. “But then they hear anointed preaching, and gravity reverses as people sense the upward pull of heaven.” Craig Brian Larson, “A Weekly Dose of Condensed Dignity,” in *The Art and Craft of Biblical Preaching: A Comprehensive Resource for Today’s Communicators*, ed. Hadron Robinson and Craig Brian Larson (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 30.

beauty of its vistas. I loved these young men, and I wanted for them to know the same exhilaration that I had first felt when I scaled the summit. So I took them there and gave them the advantage of my experience. Because I had seen, I could help them to see. Some of them, no doubt, would grow to see even further than I, which is a tremendous thing.

Hearing is also an awesome thing. The human preacher hears and then leads others to hear. We lead in listening, which is the best, certainly the most condensed expression of human preaching that I know. Preaching is *leading in listening*—listening to the voice of God and helping others do the same. The assumption is that when we have done so, things change—seen and unseen. Nothing can remain the same when we have heard from God. Believe that with all the faith you have.

When we preach, then, we express a wonderful oxymoron that I first heard from Leonard Sweet: humbled confidence.<sup>2</sup> We are humbled because the Word is not our own. We are confident because the Word is his.

These are not just empty words, as if words ever lack substance. Speech matters. It is not for nothing that God spoke the world into being. It is not accidental that the Son of God is described as “living Word.” Words have implications, and the Word of God carries consequence forever. When we get this, we will open our mouths and speak with the humbled confidence that leads others to listen to the words that change the world. This is what it is to preach.

## Preaching Happens Many Places

We might take a moment to discuss who and where. There are those among us who are preachers in a professional sense, by which I mean only that it is a function of their employment for which they may even be offered pay. This is not to be despised. Scripture describes this as a noble calling with special accountability, to which honor and respect are due. But there are others who will also preach.

Whenever we lead in listening to the Word, whoever leads and wherever it happens, we find preaching, and it always is in season. Let us not disrespect the preaching that happens in coffee shops and homes on Wednesday nights and Saturday mornings, by women and men of all types and callings. Let us celebrate whenever someone intends to help someone else hear through

2. “A right spirit from a biblical standpoint is the oxymoronic combination of confidence and humility.” Leonard Sweet, *SoulTsunami: Sink or Swim in New Millennium Culture* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 312.

persuasive, intentional communication of the Word of God. It might be outlined on a napkin, or diagrammed on YouTube. It may be shared over tea, or from a wooden pulpit. Wherever it happens, God is there, and he is speaking, and so we celebrate.

Of course, it can always be done better. The human element in this process can be done well or poorly. Well done is always better, and to that we must aspire. That it is God who speaks does not relieve us of the need to bring our best. In fact, it is the opposite. That it is God who speaks inspires us to bring our best.

This book is about bringing our best. I have been doing this for a long time, both preaching and teaching others to preach. I have learned some things along the way that seem to have been helpful. As I share with you, I trust that you will be led to a more effective way of leading others. This will be honoring to the Lord, and it will be good for people. So I will bring my best, and I trust you will bring your best effort likewise. Feel free to think critically and to challenge what you read. Take the stuff that strikes you as worthy and build it into your practice with as much faith as you can muster. But as you do, do not forget who does the preaching. Remember that it is not you.

The following chapters will take you all the way from a theological conception of integrative preaching to the production and delivery of sermons that follow this model. The first section of the book will be theoretical. The final section will be applied. In between we will sketch out the functions and materials that put our model into practice.

This model might differ from those you have learned elsewhere. But if you look closely, you might recognize your former learnings in the larger framework. I am offering an integrative model that naturally seeks to subsume and incorporate various legitimate ways of being within preaching. However, you might need to prepare yourself to be taken further than where you might otherwise have found yourself. Preaching has a lot more to offer than what many of us have so far realized.

I will soon have a lot to say about integration, of course, but let me jump ahead by offering one of the most profound integrative aspects to the practice of our preaching—the integration of Spirit and servant.<sup>3</sup> Practicing the

3. This book is the development in full of the final chapter of my last book, which sketched the landscape of preaching at the time. In that book I described four fundamental models: declarative, pragmatic, narrative, and visionary preaching. The final chapter was dedicated to this integrative possibility: integrative preaching. See Kenton C. Anderson, *Choosing to Preach: A Comprehensive Introduction to Sermon Options and Structures* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006).

principles you will read within these pages must always be an act of service. No matter how good you get at these things, you will never make unnecessary the work of God's Holy Spirit. This is the great mystery inherent in our preaching—that the Spirit would unite with the servant, such that the Word of God is heard. This is our joy whenever we lead in listening to God.



## PART 1

# Understanding the Integrative Model of Preaching

My wife and I purchased our current home prior to its construction. Talk about an act of faith. Committing hundreds of thousands of dollars on a home that doesn't exist yet might be an act of confidence, or it might be an act of ignorance. It was helpful to us that the developer offered us a model. This miniature physical replica of the building allowed us to imagine the possibility of living there. When we eventually moved into our condominium, we were amazed to see how accurately the model projected the actual.

This book presents a model for integrative preaching. It will be helpful for preachers to gain a conceptual overview of the task. The better we can understand the model, the more likely we are to be able to replicate the practice. The preaching that happens in the context of community most often happens on a schedule. Week by week the preacher prepares and presents the message

intended from the Word. If we are going to be able to sustain an ongoing intentional and purposeful plan for preaching, it will help us to work from a reliable model.

The integrative model of preaching lays across two axes, the horizontal and the vertical, in a kind of map of the homiletic landscape. The horizontal (physical) axis overlays the vertical (spiritual) axis in the shape of the cross. As the sermon moves, it works by centripetal force to draw everything toward the center point. Head integrates with heart, and heaven comes in contact with the human. The model leads us to a set of elements and compounds that become helpful in our work of preaching.

The next four chapters will sketch out theory behind the integrative preaching model. We will think biblically and theologically. We will dig into texts in Scripture. In so doing, we will lay the groundwork for the practical instruction that is to come. We will preach well when we understand our task and grasp the nature of this integration.

This conceptual model of preaching describes the manner in which transformational force can be applied. It all comes together in an act of listening, as the self-revealing God achieves his purpose. More than just a model, the cross becomes the means by which we are made congruent with our Creator. Having heard from God, we are transformed by the message. We become integrated in the Spirit to the purpose of the cross.



# 1

## Preaching Is Integral (Cohesive)

Living well is about finding integration. It is about cohesion—overcoming the disintegration of elements that pull apart and separate. We often feel the need to choose between things like head and heart, heaven and human, with the result that we *disintegrate*. We fall to pieces, unproductive and unfulfilled.

*Integration* offers the idea that separated elements can be united in a single substance such that the integrity of each element might be sustained. Integration is about finding wholeness, as can be seen by its cognate expressions. An integer is a whole number, not a fractional number. Something that is “integral” is something that is necessary or essential to the wholeness or completion of a larger entity. A bridge requires “structural integrity” if we are to trust it with our weight. Integration, then, is about the cohesion of elements such that the integrity of each remains undiminished and without compromise.

This kind of integration is necessary if life is going to work. A baseball pitcher’s effectiveness depends on the ability to integrate power and control. A relationship’s durability depends on the ability of two people to be able to form a union out of unique human characteristics, without diminishing the integrity of either individual.

I have been married a long time. I would say that my marriage to Karen has effectively modeled the biblical ideal of two becoming one. Our lives have been integrated in every possible way—physically, financially, socially, and spiritually. We are, somehow, indissoluble. And yet we are still ourselves. Karen’s personality is intact. She is still the woman I first met so many years ago. I believe that I am still the same person also. I may be older and heavier, but I am still me. Marriage does not diminish the personhood or personality

of the individual partner. It simply makes something more of the individual partners to the mutual benefit of both. You could say that my wife and I are integrated.

### The Integrative Nature of the Bible

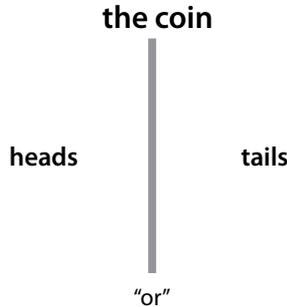
If you don't understand integration, you will not really understand the Bible. Integration is seen throughout the Scriptures. Marriage is just one of many biblical expressions of this reality. The church, for example, has struggled for centuries to appreciate how God's sovereignty relates to human responsibility. How can women and men live with the freedom of their choices if God is sovereignly determining the course of the universe? How is it possible that Jesus can exist as both God and man, his two natures coexisting without compromise? What does it mean that the Word became flesh? Words are intangible, conceptual expressions, but flesh is meaty and grounded. That this Word could express the fundamental truths of the universe, transcending all of creation while consisting of the very stuff of creation—earth and dust and blood and guts—requires the most profound integrity.

“The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son . . . full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). This is a profound theological oxymoron that must be integrated if it is going to carry the intention of the text. Truth can weigh heavy when dealt with a hard and determinative hand. Grace can seem light and untethered from the considerations and consequences that truth requires. But if the two can find a sense of integration, we can appreciate the integrity that Jesus bore and which seems to lie within the heart of God.

### Integrative Option 1: The Coin

One model worth considering is the *coin*. A coin has two sides, each equal to the other—heads and tails. You cannot entertain the one without a spurning of the other. Have you ever tried to view both sides of a coin at the same time? Go ahead and give it a try. Take a coin out of your pocket and see whether you can do it. The only thing you can do with a coin is to flip it—heads or tails, one or the other. You cannot have both sides. You must make your choice.

The coin is effective as a means of gaining clarity. One can step around the muddle by simply committing to one's choice. The coin is activated by the word *or*. It offers divinity *or* humanity, Word *or* flesh, grace *or* truth. But while such a choice offers the benefit of focus, it comes at an unacceptable price.



### Integrative Option 2: The Continuum

A second model is the *continuum*. On a continuum, *disintegrated* elements are established in polar opposition. One then locates oneself somewhere along the continuum in between the separated options. This model requires compromise. Moving in the direction of one alternative comes at the expense of the other.

The advantage of this model is that it offers fluidity. One can move back and forth along the continuum without a fixed sense of finality. The continuum is identified by the conjunction *yet*. Jesus was human, *yet* he was also God. Christ is the Word, *yet* he is also flesh. He offers grace, *yet* he offers truth as well. There is a sense of regret about the matter, that the one is compromised by the presence of the other. Word is moderated by flesh. Grace is countered by truth. The emphasis of one requires some abandonment of the other, though perhaps just temporarily.

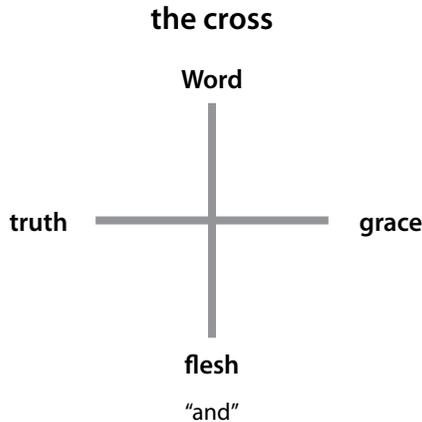


The normal way to function on a continuum is to try to find the center point, equidistant from the severed poles. It is an attempt to find a kind of balance, whereby each element finds an evened weight. But these attempts at balance are usually inadequate, given that they almost always require unwelcome compromise. The typical way of balance is to take from one side in order to give to the other—we rob Peter to pay Paul, and in so doing, both become less than what we would otherwise hope for.

Balance can leave a person wanting. You can have two flat tires in balance with one another, but they are not going to get you very far. What we really need is a model that will not require a sense of compromise. We need to go one hundred miles an hour down both roads at the same time.

### Integrative Option 3: The Cross

The most promising model is the *cross*. The cross is an integrative model wherein the horizontal overlays the vertical, creating intersection. The cross is a way of picturing cohesion instead of choice or compromise. Mathematically it describes a plus sign, indicating the addition of one element to the other.



The cross aspires to a new and heightened form of unity, expecting something greater, beyond the possibility offered by less holistic options. The cross is driven by the genius of *and*.<sup>1</sup> We observe this theologically in the actual cross on which Jesus died and all that it represents. Jesus himself is humanity *and* divinity, Word *and* flesh. His death on the cross spoke of grace *and* truth. As we think toward our model of preaching, we can similarly see the possibilities available through integration, where the addition of one thing to another can lead to something greater than the sum of individual parts.

Just as plotting one's global position requires the fixing of both latitude and longitude, our formation in Christ requires both the horizontal and the vertical dimensions. Horizontally, we appreciate the physical nature of our life on earth. Human beings are grounded—subject to gravity as we live and move on the earth. We all appreciate that somehow we were made for more. We hold within ourselves a latent aspiration for something that might transcend what we can reach within our grasp. We long for heaven, but heaven is beyond us.

1. James C. Collins and Jerry I. Porras, "No 'Tyranny of the Or' (Embrace the 'Genius of the And')," in *Built to Last: Successful Habits of Visionary Companies* (New York: Harper-Business, 1994), 43–45.

Another way to put this is that we are more than merely material. As human beings, we are both physical and spiritual beings. We have been formed with the capacity to appreciate the transcendent. Having been created in the image of God, we are hardwired to know God and to recognize his voice. But our knowledge of God is dependent on his willingness to make the introduction. Living horizontally, we cannot command his presence or his power. We depend on his initiative to make himself known within the world.

Vertically, we understand our spiritual dependence on the God who was willing to come down from heaven to engage us at the point of our need in the context of the created earth. The vertical line moves from the top down in description of his incarnation. The downward movement of the cross describes God's loving condescension. He literally descended, eschewing the glories of heaven in exchange for the opportunity of our salvation here on earth. The vertical line is a symbol of God's willingness to pursue us on our terms—working our ground to overcome the problem of our sin.

The cross, then, is both the model and the means of our formation. Physically, the cross was the instrument on which the Lord Jesus Christ made the ultimate sacrifice for us. Theologically, the cross also models the integration of the material and the spiritual, heaven and earth, in the person of Jesus and for the good of all God's children.

## **The Benefits of Cross-Shaped Integration**

The benefits of a cross-shaped integration are experienced on many levels. For example, an emphasis on the physical guards against the potential for an untethered spirituality, just as a concern for the spiritual serves as an antidote against the threat of a myopic materialism. This dual emphasis keeps both elements from careening into unhelpful and unhealthy extremes. But integration offers more than mere correction.

Integration empowers, even multiplies, the other. An emphasis on grace is only deepened by its corresponding truth. For example, people often offer forgiveness by belittling the hurt that they have felt.

“Will you forgive me?”

“Don't worry about it,” comes the answer. “It's no big deal.”

No big deal? Of course it is a big deal. Whenever someone sins against another, causing someone else pain, it is significant. Hurt is not forgiven by pretending that it does not exist. It may seem like the only way to repair or sustain relationship is by downgrading the actual impact of another person's action, but this is a cheap and irresilient way of bandaging pain.

Grace is most fully present when we deeply and profoundly experience our pain and see it for its ugliness, but then still find ourselves capable of offering forgiveness. This is grace magnified by an integrated awareness of the truth.

Another benefit is the way that integration overcomes inherent limitations. An exclusive attention to physical reality restricts one to those things that can be measured. A purely material universe disallows any consideration of more transcendent possibilities. Metaphysical approaches are ruled entirely out of hand. The strong survive in such robust environments. Spiritual sensitivities seem superfluous in a world that survives solely on its strength.

Most of us know better. Life is more than just material. We sense a greater, deeper truth that travels above and beyond the things we see and touch. Gravity is intolerable as a force that keeps us grounded. Physical reality seems common and prosaic once one has touched the skies. And yet to locate one's truth entirely in the spiritual is to make oneself irrelevant to the lives we live on earth. To be heavenly minded, we are told, can make us of no earthly or tangible good.

This is why we integrate. Appreciating the spiritual does not eliminate our interest in the physical, but it mitigates the weakness of a mere materialism. Finding value in the material does not have to compete with the spiritual as if there were not the space for both. A spiritual interest, rather, keeps material reality from contracting into meaninglessness. A physical interest ensures that the spiritual does not fritter into foolishness. The one completes the other by fulfilling the promise represented by each.

Change is spoken into being. How we talk to one another and to ourselves will be formative of both our lives and our souls. If our speech is narrow and disintegrated, we will produce narrow and disintegrated lives. If our speech embodies a cohesive integration, it will resonate with vivid color.

Speech matters. Formation happens as we talk truth to one another. Our sermons and soliloquies, our conversations and consultations all have power to shape and form the habits of our hearts. Whether we are talking to ourselves or talking to each other, we need to talk well. We need to offer the kind of talk that is modeled in the cross.

Usually we call this "preaching." Others might call it discipleship or spiritual formation. Some may just think of it as being an encourager, making the most of an opportunity to offer needed blessing through speaking, nudging, challenging, or maybe even blogging, tweeting, or some other means of social interaction. However we describe our opportunity, we would best see our task as integrative, laying horizontal over vertical in the manner of the cross.

## Horizontal and Vertical: Physical and Spiritual

The horizontal line of the cross designates the *physical* axis, describing life as we know it as it unfolds in real life. Think of the horizontal line as signifying the ground on which we walk and form our lives. Think of this line representing our life as it unfolds in time and the effect on us of gravity. We are held tightly to the earth and all that it implies of us. We are material beings who perceive all of life either by cognition or affection. We think things and we feel things, sometimes by tactile touch and other times by means of our emotions, and that is all we know of life on the earth. We know what we experience within time. This is life on the ground—the horizontal line.

horizontal

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**physical**

axis

The vertical line of the cross designates the *spiritual* axis, describing the relationship of heaven to the human. The top-to-bottom visual offered by the vertical line depicts for us the promise of something more than just our groundedness. Spiritually, we are always looking up, not only around. We are compelled by the thought that there is something greater, something beyond the limits of our physical experience. While there are those who try to tell us that this is only an immature wishfulness, we could counter as to why this wish occurs at all—where it comes from and why it is ubiquitous. Common to all humanity is this cosmic metaphysic, this sense that we are more than just the molecules that make up our material existence. This is the life of the soul, and it touches human to heaven—the vertical line.

The integrative model overlays the two—the vertical lying over the horizontal, the spiritual over the physical—in the form of the cross. The cross, as we have said, is a plus sign. It describes not a choice between options but the addition of one to the other—head plus heart and heaven added to the human. This is the horizontal and the vertical finding unity in the cross and

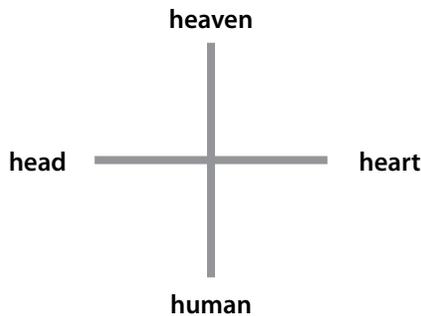
vertical

**spiritual**

axis

in the person of the cross—the Lord Jesus Christ. The cross, then, is not only the means of our salvation but the model also.

The movement of our preaching, then, creates a centripetal force, pulling all toward the center, the point where all things intersect and integrate. It is the cross that exerts this integrating force, drawing us in toward the heart of God, where otherwise we would be propelled out and to oblivion.



Integrative preaching is the manner and the substance of our speech. To speak of the cross is to talk about the gospel, the good and welcome message that God did not leave us to our ground, frustrated by the force of gravity, which keeps us incapable of rising to the heavens. This world is full of wonders, but there is a limit to what we know and what we can speak of here on earth. Cross talk tells us of the God who acted vertically, descending from on high to bring heaven to the human. For us as humans, earth is all that we have known, with heaven far beyond us. But God brought heaven down to earth in the shape of the cross and in the person of Jesus Christ.

Jesus lived and talked the cross and its purposes before he ever got to Calvary. John, one of his best friends and closest disciples, wrote that Jesus came as the Word become flesh and that his message, life, and manner spoke of grace and truth (John 1:14). This is the essence of integration—the cross, embodied and expressed. To this we must give voice.