

Messages that Move

How to give Bible
talks that challenge
and inspire

Tim Hawkins



Messages that move:

How to give Bible talks that challenge and inspire

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*This book is dedicated to all the faithful
Bible teachers, youth leaders, pastors and preachers
who have taught me so much
from God's precious word.*



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Introduction

What this book is – *and what it is not*

When I studied at theological college, I had a very thorough education on how to understand the Bible and discern God's word. We threw around words like "exegesis", "hermeneutics" and "homiletics". It was at theological college that I learned to love God's word, and to plumb its depths so that I knew God richly and intimately.

But no-one taught me *how* to preach God's word **effectively**. And since leaving theological college, I have sat under the teaching of many faithful ministers who loved and knew God's word deeply. And yet many of them struggled to communicate this effectively to their congregations – and to the emerging generation. They were great at being **faithful**, but not so great at being **effective**.

In recent years, I have been running preaching classes for the interns at our church. But every month, I noticed that some members of our pastoral staff – who had been preachers for years – started slipping in at the back and furiously scribbling notes. Despite their expertise and experience as Bible teachers, they wanted to learn more about how to engage their listeners and apply great biblical truths to their hearts.

What this book is not

Understanding God's word correctly is absolutely central and fundamental for any Bible teacher. You cannot be effective in

your Bible teaching unless you are first faithful in your Bible understanding. But this book is not meant to be “*The Complete Book of Preaching*”. Nor is it primarily designed to enable you to discover the meaning of God’s word in detail (what the theologians call *exegesis*). My main focus is not to help you with your Bible interpretation. There are already plenty of fine publications to assist you with this.

What this book is

Instead, this book is primarily concerned with how you *teach* God’s word effectively. How do you engage your listeners right at the start? How do you take them on a worthwhile journey? How do you help your audience to arrive at the biblical destination that God has revealed in His word? In short, how do you preach like a train driver?

If you are a Bible teacher – a youth leader; a beginner at giving Bible talks; or a seasoned preacher – let’s learn together how we can be *both* **faithful** *and* **effective** as we bring God’s life-giving word to our world.

Tim Hawkins



Section A
The Journey

Section B
The Book

Section C
The Hook

Section D
The Look

Section E
The Took

Section F
**Making the
journey great**

Chapter 1

Every great message takes people on a journey

“Preach like a train driver?”

“YES! Preach like a train driver!”

If you ever need to catch a train, then you know we all need train drivers. We place our lives in their hands every time we travel. They are hard-working, and no doubt honourable men and women. But if you’ve ever listened to a Public Address announcement on a train – you might well be thinking that public speaking is not exactly their strong point!

But a train driver might be more of a model for preaching than you imagine. In its simplest terms, a train driver’s job is this: to *take their passengers to the right destination*. That’s what you depend on them to do. That is their strong point!

For a train driver to take their passengers successfully to the correct destination, they need to understand and practise three key concepts:

1. They need to understand their destination

- *Where precisely am I taking these passengers?*
- *How do I make sure we get there – promptly and safely?*

2. They need to understand their journey

- *Do I have the right train to get us there?*
- *Am I on the right track to make it?*
- *Are there stations I need to visit along the way?*
- *Am I skilful enough as a driver to get us there?*

3. They need to understand their passengers

- *Where do I pick up my passengers from?*
- *How do I get the passengers on-board my train?*
- *How do I stop the passengers getting off before the journey is completed?*

It's exactly the same for the preacher.

1. You need to understand your destination

- *Where precisely am I taking my listeners?*
- *What is the point of my message? What will make this journey worthwhile?*

2. You need to understand your journey

- *What biblical information will help us get there?*
- *What sub-points do I need to establish to help us to arrive?*
- *Can I see where this single journey fits into God's overall journey for His people?*
- *How do I help people to keep moving to the same destination?*

3. You need to understand your passengers

- *Where do I pick up my listeners from?*
- *What are they already thinking about this topic before I begin?*
- *How do I get my listeners on-board my train?*
- *How do I stop them getting off before the journey is completed?*

Great Bible talks will take their listeners to a destination worth

going to. Of all the brilliant messages I have heard over all these years, the ones that really impacted me were the ones that **took me to a destination where I needed to go**. Maybe before the message I didn't realise that I needed to go to that destination, but the speaker knew what station to call at to collect me; they knew how to engage me so I wanted to travel on their train; they stopped me getting off before my journey was completed; and because they faithfully took me to a godly destination, my life was changed for ever.

Does this ring true for you? Have you ever heard any great sermons? Life-changing messages that marked a significant spiritual step for you? Think about these Bible talks for a moment. **These are the messages that took you where God wanted you to go**. A great message always has a great destination!

On the other hand, you've probably heard enough messages that took you **absolutely nowhere**. Maybe the preacher had all the right information; maybe they had a sound theology; maybe they knew their Bible well; maybe they told really funny stories ... **but they took you nowhere!** There was no destination; there was no journey; no-one's life got changed. You never want to proclaim a message like that!

The most significant thing I have ever learned in preaching is that no matter what I am saying, my aim is to take my listeners to a destination. This revolutionised my thinking!

I used to think of a sermon merely as an *informational* exercise – that is, my job as a preacher was to dispense information.

At other times I saw that preaching was an *inspirational* exercise – to motivate people to listen and believe.

Sometimes I thought that Bible talks were just a *theological* exercise – to get people to believe the right things, and they'd start living the right way.

There were times when I thought that preaching was primarily

a *pastoral* exercise – you know, give support and comfort to all those Christians who are living in stressful and difficult times.

I have also believed that preaching was mainly a *confrontational* exercise – where I could identify the sins of the congregation – thrust the double-edge sword of God’s word into those gaping wounds – then give the knife a quarter twist to the right to increase the pain – so that the outcome would be profound repentance.

And indeed I have often seen preaching as being primarily an *evangelistic* exercise – its main aim being to bring the unbeliever to the cross of Jesus to start a new life of hope and glory.

All these things matter. Yes, you do need to have right information in what you teach. Your message should certainly be inspirational – and pastoral – and confrontational. Of course your theology matters – otherwise you will end up proclaiming doctrines that God never believed in! And every chance I get, I love to be evangelistic!

All these are important, but if I don’t take my listeners to a destination that is worth going to, then I have wasted their time. The essence of any journey is that you take people to a worthwhile destination.

Why do people go on a journey? Any journey? OK, sometimes they are train buffs and just want to ride a grand old steam engine. But most of the time, it’s the **destination** that compels people to take a journey. They want to go to work; they want to see the wonders of the world; they want to be reunited with their long lost friend; they want to witness their favourite team play; or they simply want to get home.

That’s why people travel. Not because of the train, the bus, the boat or the plane. It’s the **destination** that motivates them for the journey. As motivational speaker Lisa Sasevich says:

*“People are buying the destination –
not the plane”*

Many Bible teachers like to polish up their train. You know, great stories, video clips, funny moments, dynamic PowerPoints, emotional cliff-hangers. You can practise and hone your craft until it reaches the heights of dizzy excellence (which might not be a bad idea!). But if you preach like a train driver, people are listening not because your train means something to them – they are listening because your destination is somewhere they desperately want to go. The essence of being a good train driver is that you can persuade people that your train is worth getting on, and then take them convincingly to a God-given destination which will be life-changing.

But not every journey leads to a worthwhile destination. Read on!