

**An Evaluation of Preaching and Teaching with Imagination by Warren W. Wiersbe
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Wiersbe defines biblical preaching in this way: "... a biblical sermon is a form of human verbal communication that involves the organized explanation and application of biblical truth, presented in a manner that is reasonable, imaginative, and intrinsic to the text" (304-305). For the most part this book expands on the "imaginative" part of preaching.

I found the center section on "Imagination and Scripture" to be less profitable than the sections "Imagination and Life" and "Imagination and Biblical Preaching." Of greatest value was the section on "Imagination and Life." Had he wrote that chapter only and published it as a book, it would be of great value. He argues well for the role of poets and artists in influencing culture. He adequately shows the imbalanced focus on what he calls "left brain" preaching. As I read his words I was convicted and challenged to examine the lack of "pictures" in my own preaching. His "conduit" metaphor provides a fair portrait of the type of preaching that is taught in most seminaries. This type of preaching neglects Sidney Harris' distinction between information and communication – "Information is giving out; communication is getting through" (23-24).

Wiersbe suggests that "the bridge between the mind and the will is the imagination..." (24). He then proceeds to describe what a healthy imagination looks like. At the same time he asserts that "Christians who ignore or neglect the cultivating of their imagination can't enter into the full enjoyment of all that God has for them" 27). Wiersbe ably defends this strong statement. He further proposes that Christians need to move

away from a Gnostic view of the material world and toward a sacramental view of things. Wiersbe encourages us to become like Christ in touching the common things of life and sanctifying them (35). He pushes us to become “romantic” in our preaching so that truth is as much *experienced*, as it is *explained* (38).

Wiersbe summons us to be creative in the use of our words. Quoting David Buttrick, he says, “theological meaning must always be embodied in images drawn from real life” (41). Metaphorical language, he indicates, turns “people’s ears into eyes and helps them see the truth” (43). He distinguishes between live, sick, and dead metaphors. Live metaphors can “powerfully ‘connect’ the mind and heart of the hearers so that they want to do something in response to what they learn” (47). This should be a goal of preaching.

On pages 60-61 Wiersbe suggests that one of the main reasons for disobedience in the pews is “the truths about God and the Christian life have never affected their imaginations” (61). Part of me wonders if he doesn’t take this a bit too far in suggesting that sermons that don’t touch the imagination somehow inhibit the ability of the Spirit to work (61). He seems to place too much connection between the preacher’s ability to connect feeling and understanding, and the quality of real change that takes place in people’s lives.

I agree with Wiersbe’s analysis in Chapter 7 on how science and reason have impeded the imagination. Perhaps this is where postmodernism in its movement away from foundationalism and objectivity challenges us to be more imaginative and less rational in our preaching. This does not mean that we move away from objectivity but

accept John Burrough's warning, "To treat your facts with imagination is one thing, to imagine your facts is quite another" (83).

Part Two, "Imagination and Scripture," reveals a lot of careful observation by Wiersbe in his reading of Scripture. He provides a thorough example of how the use of "images" is imbedded in Scripture. Reading each of his examples became a bit cumbersome. I often found myself skimming the pages. Perhaps a better approach would have been to give a number of clear examples and then challenge the reader to continue the process in his own bible reading. The best part of this section was "Jesus: The Master Teacher/Preacher." Especially helpful was the quote of F. W. Robertson that summarizes the Lord's approach to preaching:

First. The establishment of positive truth, instead of the negative destruction of error. Secondly. That truth is made up of two opposite propositions, and not found in a *via media* between the two. Thirdly. That spiritual truth is discerned by the spirit, instead of intellectually in propositions; and, therefore, truth should be taught suggestively, not dogmatically (163).

Part Three "Imagination and Biblical Preaching" is more useful than Part Two but not nearly as effective as Part One. The discussion on dealing with the text is duplicated in most hermeneutic textbooks. I find that his approach to preaching lacks a gospel-oriented, Christ-centered approach.

I did not find very helpful his discussion on using imagination in different styles and occasions of preaching (chapters 19-23). Wiersbe's approach to preaching issues a strong call for the involvement of imagination. However, his approach is not as clearly a narrative form of preaching. For a creative approach to narrative preaching I would take the insights on imagination from Part One of this book, "The Imagination and Life," and combine them with Eugene Lowry's book The Homiletical Plot and add to that chapter 9,

“The Form of the Marketplace Sermon,” from Calvin Miller’s book Marketplace Preaching.

Overall I have been challenged by Wiersbe to become more imaginative in my preaching and for that I am thankful!