



STUDY TOOLS FOR EXPOSITORY PREACHING

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A solid theological library is essential to the careful exposition of God's Word. Those seeking to devote themselves to a life of biblical study and exposition must make the commitment to develop a solid library and view it as a highest priority. This important goal will be the product of careful planning so that it meets the individual needs and budget constraints of the expositor. A well balanced library should include books, periodicals, audio and video tapes, and software, all assembled and organized with careful planning and at an affordable pace. This essay proposes a model library of tools for the expositor designed to assist the serious student or pastor and the dedicated layman.

A biblical expositor must develop and maintain a strong core library of significant books and other materials to use in his preparation. Such a collection is the necessary response to Paul's instruction for Timothy to "be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, handling accurately the word of truth" (2 Tim 2:15). In seeking to become expository preachers, today's pastors need to change the sign on the door from "the minister's office" back to "the pastor's study." An expositor must create a quiet room, a sacred place, where he can retreat to study and prepare diligently to expound the Word of God. This room must contain the tools necessary for that study.

The following discussion seeks to assist all who wish to build a library to help them in a pursuit of expository preaching. The principles set forth here as well as the materials recommended are designed to give clear direction to the student preparing for a life of preaching, the experienced pastor seeking to improve his library, and the layman seriously interested in the study of the Scriptures.

A carefully assembled collection of good study tools is as essential to the expositor as the tools of the profession are to a dentist or medical doctor. Without them, study is an exercise in futility. In his usual direct style, Spurgeon wrote of the necessity of a sound library for a preacher:

In order to be able to expound the Scriptures, and as an aid to your pulpit studies, you will need to be familiar with the commentators: a glorious army, let me tell you, whose acquaintance will be your delight and profit. Of course, you are not such wisecracks as to think or say that you can expound Scripture without assistance from the works of divines and learned men who have labored before you in the field of exposition. If you are of that opinion, pray remain so, for you are not worth the trouble of conversion, and like a little coterie who

think with you, would resent the attempt as an insult to your infallibility. It seems odd, that certain men who talk so much of what the Holy Spirit reveals to themselves, should think so little of what he has revealed to others.

The biblical expositor cannot always be original and must be "content to learn from holy men, taught of God, and mighty in the Scriptures." A well constructed library will serve as the basis for being taught by others. If an aspiring expositor is not in position to acquire immediately such a collection of carefully selected tools, he must locate one and use it on a regular basis until he can build his own library.

THE PRIORITY OF A SOUND LIBRARY

A sound study-library must be a top priority. For many, such a library has been unimportant and the result has been an impoverished ministry, lacking depth, breadth, and stimulation. An excellent library is constructed by deliberate acquisition rather than "accidental" accumulation. Since an expository preacher's library is an integral part of his pulpit work, it should be assembled with an eye toward the highest quality. A preliminary indication of what a core library is not will help understand what it should be:

1. It is not a collection of inferior books donated to the preacher by well meaning friends and listeners.
2. It is not an accumulation of books offered on sale or at discount prices.
3. It is not simply a collection of books highly recommended or found on standard lists of bibliographies.
4. It is not simply an accumulation of required texts used in seminary.
5. It is not an accumulation of material treating current religious trends or theological speculations.

Almost a hundred years ago John Fletcher Hurst described the deplorable condition of the average preacher's library. His perceptive comments are still relevant:

That the average library of the Christian layman and of the minister of the Gospel is poor beyond words, is a lamentable fact. Many of the books are of such inferior authorship as to unfit them for even storage in any home of people either intelligent or hoping to be intelligent. Such books have drifted in because they are radiant with glaring and realistic pictures, or are bound in captivating sheep or calf, or are presented by well meaning friends, or have been bought in lot at auction under the hallucination of cheapness, or because of some other apology for the existence of the trash. If two thirds of the shelves of the typical domestic library were emptied of their burden, and choice books put in their stead, there would be reformation in intelligence and throughout the civilized world. A poor book is dear, and a good one cheap, at any cost. One's best book is that which treats best the subject on which one most needs light, and which one can get only by planning, by seeking, and often by sacrificing.

. . . It is a friend for all seasons, and remains true to the eighties, and beyond, if they come. Better one shelf of such treasures than a shipload of literary driftings from the dead pyramids of publishers who sell slowly and of authors who fail quickly.

In contrast, a sound study-library is a carefully selected and assembled collection of materials that an expository preacher needs to do his work. Every expositor should take time to identify, use, and obtain those items that will directly support his ministry and meet his specific needs in anticipation of a life of exposition, at the same time avoiding "excess baggage" that he will never use. As one preacher has written,

My books are my tools, and I use them. I cannot afford to be a book collector; neither the budget nor the diminishing shelf space . . . permits such a luxury. . . . I enjoy my library. Each book is a friend that converses with and teaches me. Better to have fewer of the best books than to clutter your shelves with volumes that cannot serve you well. Above all, love your books, use them, and dedicate all you learn to the service of Jesus Christ.

THE ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS OF AN EXPOSITOR'S LIBRARY

A sound study-library has five essential elements. Each requires careful thought as to materials to be included, the priority in which they should be acquired, and the way they should be organized. Long before the student of Scripture begins to purchase material, he should develop objectives and priorities with respect to each of the categories identified below.

A Book Collection

A book is a written record of the labors, views, or positions of a given author or authors. Books take a variety of forms and serve various purposes. A quality book can greatly assist in the study of the Scriptures by concentrating one's study on a single topic. By providing historical, grammatical, and theological background material, it can save valuable study time. A worthwhile book will inform a reader of relevant issues, positions, and current research. Many books will also provide a spiritual challenge to readers.

The expositor must learn how to build a library of such books. Here are some suggestions for doing so:

1. "Courtship before marriage." Books should be purchased after they have been used and determined to fill a need. If possible, a book should be used in a library first to determine its value to the expositor. In a few instances, a new book can be purchased based on its author's reputation, the significance of its topic, or the book's relationship to other works.
2. Evaluation of authors and publishers. Before buying a particular book, it is important to determine something about its author's basic point of view. In addition to a direct recommendation or a review article, much can be learned about the nature of a book from its introduction, footnotes, bibliography, conclusion, publisher, dust jacket, and author information.
3. Prioritizing book purchases. Books should be purchased from a carefully prepared list. This type of acquisition will result in a quality library and will reduce compulsive buying.
4. Purchase and consulting the "best" book or books on a given subject first. Remember, in theological studies the best is not always the newest or most expensive.
5. Organization of books by subject or use of a library classification system such as the Dewey Decimal system. If books are classified, the system should be kept simple to avoid creating an ongoing project too involved to continue over a long term.

A Periodical Collection

Periodicals are issued in successive parts, usually at regular intervals, and as a rule, are intended to continue indefinitely. Various forms of serial literature include periodicals, journals, magazines, annuals, proceedings, and other ongoing publications. In the bibliographic chain, periodicals usually run five to ten years ahead of books, and thus provide a reader with the most up-to-date thought on a subject. This "cutting-edge" information is often not available in any other kind of source. Unless the expositor has access to a theological

library, he should subscribe to a basic collection of periodicals that will keep him informed on biblical and theological issues as well as stimulate his thinking. The following suggestions are offered with respect to periodicals:

1. Identify and subscribe to a basic collection of periodicals. Bradford's law states that in any given subject area, a large number of articles will appear in a small number of periodicals, while the rest of the articles on the subject will be in a large number of periodicals. Subscriptions to this small number of periodicals will produce the highest rate of return.
2. Create a simple index of the articles covered in these periodicals either by a card system or on computer. These can be listed by topic or Scripture verse.
3. Read periodicals selectively to avoid wasting time. Reading choices should be balanced between current events and exegetical studies.
4. Write for sample issues before subscribing. Also, a number of periodicals are available free when requested.
5. Use indexes available from periodical publishers as well as general religious indexes. The two most helpful are Christian Periodical Index and Religion Index One: Periodicals. Both are available at any theological library. Religion Index One is available in a CD-ROM format which should be within the price reach of the serious student in a few years.

A Tape Library

In recent years, audio and video tapes have become distinct publishing formats. A significant amount of valuable material is available only in this type of media. For example, much expositional material is available in cassette-tape format. Audio tapes of other expositors can be both stimulating and encouraging. Other types of electronic data are helpful for documenting events and theological positions. The following recommendations are apply to building a tape library:

1. Collect a limited number of good tapes from a variety of sources. The building of this collection should follow a master plan most helpful to the expositor. Include tapes in the following categories:
 1. Individual exegetical studies and courses
 2. Competent expository preachers
 3. Important meetings and events
 4. An area of the expositor's special interest.
2. Organize this material by subject and author. It is also very helpful to index the material by card file or on computer, because tapes are often overlooked as a viable source of information.
3. Create a lending library of material to share with interested listeners as a support and expansion of the expositor's ministry.
4. The expositor should create a library of his own expositions for his own reference and for use by others.

A Computer Software File

The computer is a significant tool in today's world and a valuable asset in the hands of the Bible expositor. More and more students of Scripture are finding it indispensable in their work. Computers are often purchased for a particular purpose or to perform a task better than is possible without one, but the user usually moves to a higher level of proficiency whereby he can achieve projects with the computer that he had never imagined possible. An expositor should consider acquiring several computer software programs to assist him in his work. Here are some suggested categories of software to aid the expositor.

1. Word-processing software. This type of program can be of great benefit in creating and editing documents. Outline, footnote, font, spelling, and thesaurus features are

- especially helpful in a word-processing program. These programs are essential in storing the fruit of one's research for many kinds of future use. Additional software enables the word processor to incorporate Hebrew and Greek words alongside the English text.
2. Graphics software. These programs are useful in a number of ways, but are perhaps most helpful to the student of Scripture in desk-top publishing. This software enables an expositor to prepare his work for publication in a professional-quality format with a minimum of expense.
 3. Database software. Though these programs are a more complex, they can be used to store large amounts of information which can be accessed by verse or topic. The expositor can use such a program to access work done on a specific verse/topic, illustrations, or library materials available on a given verse/topic.
 4. Bible-searching software. Several excellent programs exist to enable a student to search the text of Scripture for a word or word variation, phrase, or verse. Software for the KJV, NIV, or NASB also allows the user to identify a Hebrew or Greek word behind an English word. A grammatical concordance program for the NT Greek text is available which permits a search for the word in the text, word inflection, phrase, and grammatical construction.
 5. CD-ROM technology. This is a developing technology that lets students of Scripture gain instant access to multiple translations and texts of a library of computerized books. Various periodical and book indexes are also available in this format. In the future years expositors will be able to utilize the libraries of various institutions and request needed materials from distant locations without leaving their own studies.

A Subject File

An expositor needs a filing system to enable him to organize and retrieve vast amounts of information not found in book format. Such a system should be personal and simple so that materials are easily located. It must also be flexible to allow for expansion in any area. The system should include files for materials produced by others as well as materials produced by the expositor himself. Some suggestions concerning a file system include:

1. A file system should be organized by numerically coded topics rather than in alphabetical order. If a classification number is assigned to each topic, only one point of entry per topic is necessary. This system allows related topics to be filed together and provides room to expand or subdivide any given topic.
2. Headings and structure should make sense to the individual using the system. These headings should be the same as other headings used for topics of periodical files.
3. Create an alphabetical index to the file either on cards or on computer. This facilitates quick location of all the information on a give subject.
4. Periodically purge the file of unneeded topics and materials so that it remains useful and manageable.

DEVELOPING A "WANT LIST"

A dependable study-library is the product of careful thought. Therefore, the expositor should develop objectives and priorities for his personal library. The purpose of Bible exposition should be clear, and materials should be selected with the purpose in mind. Barber identifies two major problems facing the contemporary expositor who sets out to build a reliable library. The first is the rising cost of books which necessitates judicious purchases. The second is the astonishing number of new books being published every year. These two difficulties mean that a preacher needs advice in selecting library tools. The wise expositor will draw on the wisdom of Barber and others in planning a personal library. Here are several issues to resolve:

1. What kinds of materials are to be acquired? For example, will they be reference books,

- commentaries, theologies, periodicals, and items in areas of special interest?
2. How many of each kind of resource will be collected? The number and kinds of reference books, the balance between liberal and conservative authors, the number of commentaries per book of the Bible, and the number of books on various theological topics must be determined.
 3. An actual "want list" of basic materials to be purchased should be developed. As the aspiring expositor learns of new items, he should add them to his list for future purchase. Standard bibliographies are a great help in this, as are recommendations. These can then be refined by personal inspection.
 4. This buying list should then be prioritized to identify which items are most important to secure first with a limited budget in view. Once the needs are clarified and prioritized, the effort and sacrifices necessary to purchase the material come easier.

Many Christians want to invest in the ministry of a biblical expositor. A prepared list of needed tools affords an excellent opportunity for others to make such an investment more meaningful. In this writer's experience, most preachers lack a quality library because they have not made it a top priority or because they have not specifically identified the materials they need. This more than a lack of funds is more often the reason.

FINDING MATERIALS ON A "WANT LIST"

After completion of a "want-list," it must be sorted into works in-print material and those out-of-print. The two categories should be treated separately, and different sources for acquisition developed for each.

In-print items can usually be secured from a well stocked seminary or Christian college bookstore. A working relationship with such a store facilitates ordering items in the future. The expositor should subscribe to several discount book houses and purchase sale items on these lists. Most theological librarians can provide a list of discount houses.

Out-of-print material is easier to locate if an expositor sends his list to various dealers. A "want list" sent periodically to a select group of major used-book dealers both in America and in the United Kingdom is the best procedure. Sources in the United Kingdom are very likely to have the books sought because religious publishing is very extensive in these countries. Since these dealers will be able to furnish only few items requested each time, the expositor's library will grow slowly and with moderate expenditure. The most difficult part of finding an out-of-print book is getting it on a listing and writing to dealers, but with a little effort and persistence, any book can be located.

Reportedly Erasmus once said that if he had some money, he would first buy some books, then some clothes, and then some food! Erasmus loved books and considered the book "the greatest of all inventions!" In a day of great economic pressure, a similar level of commitment is required to build a sound library. Many expositors deeply committed to building such a library find the costs overwhelming. In light of this, the following proposals are offered to help locate needed material at reduced cost. These suggestions require extra effort and ingenuity, but should produce results.

1. Put an ad in a local newspaper asking for religious books. With persistence, good books can be found from former students, professors, or pastors. This technique works better in a denominational or organizational paper.
2. Visit a major university, seminary, or college library and present a want list to the individual in charge of gifts or acquisitions. Libraries always have unwanted duplicates.

Almost every library has a room full of them.

3. Inspect the bulletin board of a local seminary. Frequently opportunities to obtain libraries will be noted. Also a "wanted" sign for used books posted in the bulletin board can be quite fruitful.

THE FIRST 750 BOOKS FOR AN EXPOSITOR'S LIBRARY

After the above discussion of the importance of a solid library for an expository preacher, it seems appropriate to include a suggested list of materials and thereby identify a model library for one with this goal. The works listed are only suggestions. Each person will need to adapt it to fit his own needs. "Books are like clothes: what fits one person's needs and style may not fit another person's at all". Also, this list is limited to a basic collection in the fields of biblical studies and theology, and does not identify other items that an expositor may wish to acquire. The expositor should acquire a number of important items on current biblical and theological issues to assist him in his study and keep himself current. The purpose of this list to assist a new generation of aspiring expository preachers in gathering a collection of tools for this worthy task. It includes books which have or will stand the test of time and tries to avoid items based only on current theological speculation.

The list has a wider purpose, however. It is for a wide spectrum of readers who are seeking to assemble a well rounded library. Serious expositors should consider the entire list as a model library. A reasonable goal is to acquire the 750 volumes in ten years. The first items to purchase have been marked with an asterisk (*). These same ones can serve as a basic list for a serious layman or devoted pastor who wishes to accumulate less than the proposed 750 for assistance in Bible study. The following are clarifications regarding the list:

1. Some of the volumes listed under individual commentaries are parts of sets which are also included in the list. They have not been counted twice.
2. When entire sets are recommended, it is understood that individual volumes within each set are uneven quality because of a variety of authors. The expositor should sometimes buy selectively from sets with this in mind. In other cases, he should own entire sets so that he has resources on the whole Bible.
3. The expositor may choose to wait to purchase commentaries on individual books of the Bible until he needs them. He should remember, however, that books are in and out of print and that he may not always have the time or be in the right place to secure good materials. The KEY to building a good library is a good "want list" carefully pursued over a period of time. Books tend to show up when least expected and often cannot be found when needed! They are often cheaper when a need for them is not so urgent.
4. The list can also be used as a study guide for those with access to a theological library. It can also be modified and made suitable as a basis for a church library in biblical studies.

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