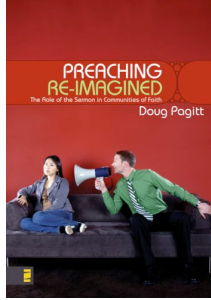


## Book Review of:

“Preaching doesn’t work”  
—Doug Pagitt



Pagitt, Doug. *Preaching Re-Imagined*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005. 248 pages.

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### Quotes from the Book:

“I’m writing with the assumption that most of you who are reading this book have concluded what I have: Preaching doesn’t work—at least not in the ways we hope. If it did, pastors wouldn’t reach with such anticipation for new books about preaching; we’d already be following the established, tried-and-true methods laid out in the huge array of available preaching resources. We wouldn’t have to preach anymore; we’d just replay our perfect sermons and watch our people change” (18).

I believe preaching to be a crucial act of the church. That’s why preaching needs to be released from the bondage of the speech making act. Our impulse to tell the story of God in our communities is the right one, but making speeches is the wrong way to do it (18).

If we look at how Christians continue to struggle with what it means to live in the way of Jesus, we soon realize that great preaching isn’t sufficient (19).

**NOTE:** he has a section title called “why preaching fails” (20).

In this book, Pagitt is not saying that we need to stop preaching and change the METHOD by which we get the message across. He writes: “some suggest that we need to add new tricks to our preaching to make our sermons more meaningful to people living in today’s culture. They contend that people are different these days and therefore need to have more interactive or experiential communication. We should be using visual reinforcements, fill-in outlines, dramas or well-orchestrated music, and multisensory media experiences to hold the attention and interest of those listening. Some recommend the use of discussion questions for small groups so the broad message can be brought down to a personal level in a more intimate context. In this justification it’s the method—not the message—that needs work (20-21).

BUT, Pagitt says, “the problem is that preaching, as we know it, suffers from a relationship problem. The issue isn’t simply how we present the information but whose information it is. The issue isn’t simply how we tell the story but the relationship between the teller and the hearers (21).

As a pastor I want to be part of a community where the workings of God are imbedded in all, where the roles of teaching and learning aren’t mine alone but instead are something intrinsic to who we are as a people. The priesthood of all believers was among the greatest contributions of the Reformation and has essentially been ignored in the area of preaching in many of our churches to the point that it could be called “an unfunded mandate of the reformation” (23).

There are times when a community will be well-served by the speaching (=preaching) act. But the cumulative effect is another story (25).

What I'm advocating is that we become communities who listen to the preachers among us, not just the preacher standing in front of us (26).

### **POWERFUL QUOTE HERE...**

Speaching sets the story of God in a prefabricated context where it all makes sense from the perspective of the person speaking. The context of others is therefore inconsequential. Speaching also creates a belief that even in the presence of dozens, hundreds, even thousands of other Christians, there are a select few who know God's truth and who get to tell others about God. There is hardly a preacher who wants her hearers to leave with the notion that they must access the truth of God through the preacher. But that is precisely the message preaching perpetuates: The pastor has the authority to speak about God, and you don't (29).

When we move away from speaching (preaching) and give voice to the myriad ways in which the gospel infiltrates the lives of all people, we unleash the depth of life with God and allow it to mean something to us as individuals, not simply as congregations (30).

We need a new kind of preaching because we need a new us. It's simply not legitimate to continue with the same practices but expect new outcomes. New outcomes are precisely what we need if the church is going to remain prophetic in the lives of God's people (35)

*--> is this post-modern narcissism or what?*

When we create neat, three-point packages to explain away the mysteries of God's work and leave no room for our hearers to ask their questions or express their thoughts, we send a clear message that God can be mastered. Progressional preaching assumes there will always be more to say than one person can say alone (43).

Preaching as speaching (=monologue) clearly had a usefulness in that time and place (church history). But some 100 years later it seems we ought to be willing to take the same kinds of risks that these Christians did and create novel ways of communicating with people who live in a new and challenging time (62).

Past of my issue with speaching is that I have come to see it as a subtle form of manipulation (72).

Christianity is a faith that allows us even calls us, to have a faith that is deeply meaningful to our lives. We shouldn't be content with speaching that only demeans this message by making it broad and shallow (125)

How do we protect our people from heresy? The work of the Holy Spirit and the communion of saints. *Speaching is a shift from this practice. When a few people are able to control the message of the community, and the people have no way to speak into that power, the community is in danger*" (132).

Assuming that a church shouldn't have a specific doctrine of faith, "what is a church to hold to if it isn't a classic statement of faith? I suggest holding to ALL the church has held to throughout its history. If a belief is in harmony with historical Christianity, then it should be seen as a valid position. This means people will often hold contradictory positions, but that's a good thing" (133).

Speaching (=monologue, preaching) leaves pastors with little choice but to remain seated in the "expert" chair, whether we like being there or not. Progressional preaching allows us to move back into a rightful place of walking with our brothers and sisters, of being open to the formative work of God in our own hearts and lives, of being people of God first and pastors second" (146)

"the idea that a person needs to be specifically educated to understand the things of God is little more than Western conceit" (153).

Pagitt goes to great lengths to show that he believes that: "churches that believe deep friendships change people"

"As I've mentioned, preaching is a practice that shapes us, but it isn't the point of ministry" (172).

Some think that progressional preaching (his dialoguing speaking) is a cop-out, a way of getting other people to do the real work of creating a sermon. But I've found that progressional dialogue requires far more preparation than speaching ... Progressional preaching involves knowing the story of God and faith in such a way that the pastor can connect it to the world in which we live" (185).

Conclusion:

"listening to the voices of others is an essential part of being the church. We were never meant to close in on ourselves. We were never meant to engage with only those who share our positions. We've been called to live in the way of Jesus, who sought out the ordinary, the outsider, and the unbeliever, not only to make them whole, but also to bring his followers into the fullness of life in the kingdom. For it is often in the life of others where we find God at work in the most profound ways imaginable" (226).

On the **Works Cited** page (229), he lists only four sources consulted (one of which was D. Martyn Lloyd Jones *Preaching and Preachers* which Pagitt included to try [unsuccessfully so!] and refute Jones'

position that the preaching (=monologue, exposition, expounding) of the Word of God is *the* primary element of Church).

--> Pagitt probably only cited three other sources cause that's ALL there is that affirms this (unbiblical) position of conversation/dialogue.

### **Geoff's Review:**

First of all, Pagitt's book is certainly not about *preaching* and, second of all, preaching—the way the Word of God defines it—ought never to be *Re-Imagined*. Simply it must never be re-imagined because God never contradicts Himself. What God has spoken and inscribed in His Word is eternal and cannot be changed or altered regardless of the cultural bent, tendencies or preferences. The main assumption in this book is that people don't learn about God and benefit in the "way of Jesus" by simply hearing a guy preach a monologue-sermon for a lengthy period of time. Rather, Pagitt strongly urges, we must engage in progressional preaching where we dialogue, seek the input, and interact with others as we speak. Preaching, or as Pagitt calls it, "speaching", is outdated, old, and totally ineffective. The reason why it's ineffective is because people's lives aren't being changed. There are a host of assumptions and post-modern tendencies blazing forth in glistening clarity.

- 1. Post-Modernistic Passions.** Pagitt's post-modernism lucidly surfaces on every page! Pagitt is overcome with this tendency that we need to include all people, that all people are equal, that we need shared community, that we need to cater to others so that they'll interact. And this, he argues, is the purpose of church—and, really, of preaching. For Pagitt, then, preaching is not about obeying Scripture when Paul says to 'preach the Word with all authority' (2 Tim 4; 1 Tim 4) but it's about what *seems* to be the most affective and helpful! He is disobeying the clear command of God for the post-modern tendencies of his own subjective feelings and observations.
- 2. Narcissistic Desires.** Pagitt's narcissism also finds itself revealed quite frequently. Church is about *us*. People *deserve* to be heard. We all can benefit and improve in *our* 'way of Jesus' in this new progressional preaching, Pagitt proposes. The problem is that preaching is not about us or even about the hearer. The Word of God declares that the primary purpose of preaching is to be faithful in dividing God's Word (2 Tim 2:15), proclaiming it faithfully (2 Tim 4:2), and allowing for God to work through His word that goes forth (Isa 55:11) for His ultimate glory (Rom 11:33-36). Preaching—and frankly NOTHING in the ecclesiological environment—ought to ever be about *us*. It should be about Jesus Christ and exalting Him.
- 3. Man-Centered Ministry.** Pagitt is catering to what the people want. Pagitt is willing to alter the clear biblical directives of Scripture to fit the 'culture'. (Repeatedly Pagitt remarks that people want to speak and they want to hear others' opinions. After all, that's how people learn.)
- 4. Blatant Disregard of God's Commands.** Pagitt unequivocally states that preaching doesn't work (18). The reason preaching doesn't work is because people aren't *interested* in sitting and listening to someone share his thoughts (and his *alone!*). That is to say, Pagitt is willing to disregard God's commands in order to reach more people and make them feel as though

they're part of the community (or so he thinks). Here is a very brief survey of biblical illustrations and commands on preaching:

- a. **Matthew 4:17** <sup>17</sup> From that time Jesus began to preach and say, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."
- b. **Mark 3:14** And He appointed twelve, so that they would be with Him and that He *could* send them out to preach,
- c. **Luke 4:18-20** <sup>18</sup> "THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD IS UPON ME, BECAUSE HE ANOINTED ME TO PREACH THE GOSPEL TO THE POOR. HE HAS SENT ME TO PROCLAIM RELEASE TO THE CAPTIVES, AND RECOVERY OF SIGHT TO THE BLIND, TO SET FREE THOSE WHO ARE OPPRESSED, <sup>19</sup> TO PROCLAIM THE FAVORABLE YEAR OF THE LORD." <sup>20</sup> And He closed the book, gave it back to the attendant and sat down; and the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on Him. (=this is monologue!)
- d. **Acts 10:42** <sup>42</sup> "And He ordered us to preach to the people, and solemnly to testify that this is the One who has been appointed by God as Judge of the living and the dead.
- e. **Acts 13:32** <sup>32</sup> "And we preach to you the good news of the promise made to the fathers,
- f. **Acts 16:10** <sup>10</sup> When he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.
- g. **Romans 1:15-16** <sup>15</sup> So, for my part, I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome. <sup>16</sup> For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.
- h. **1 Corinthians 1:17** <sup>17</sup> For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not in cleverness of speech, so that the cross of Christ would not be made void.
- i. **1 Corinthians 1:22-23** <sup>22</sup> For indeed Jews ask for signs and Greeks search for wisdom; <sup>23</sup> but we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness, (=note that the message *preached* is foolishness to Jews and Gentiles).
- j. **1 Corinthians 9:16** <sup>16</sup> For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for I am under compulsion; for woe is me if I do not preach the gospel.\*\*
- k. **2 Corinthians 4:5** <sup>5</sup> For we do not preach ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your bond-servants for Jesus' sake.
- l. **Galatians 1:15-16** <sup>15</sup> But when God, who had set me apart *even* from my mother's womb and called me through His grace, was pleased <sup>16</sup> to reveal His Son in me so that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with flesh and blood,
- m. **Ephesians 3:8-10** <sup>8</sup> To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ, <sup>9</sup> and to bring to light what is the administration of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God who created all things; <sup>10</sup> so that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly *places*.
- n. **1 Timothy 6:2** <sup>2</sup> Those who have believers as their masters must not be disrespectful to them because they are brethren, but must serve them all the more, because those who partake of the benefit are believers and beloved. Teach and preach these *principles*.
- o. **Hebrews 4:2** <sup>2</sup> For indeed we have had good news preached to us, just as they also; but the word they heard did not profit them, because it was not united by faith in those who heard.

p. **1 Peter 4:6** <sup>6</sup> For the gospel has for this purpose been preached even to those who are dead, that though they are judged in the flesh as men, they may live in the spirit according to *the will of God*.

q. **And, perhaps, the most clear and forceful of them all:**

i. **2 Timothy 4:1-5** I solemnly charge *you* in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: <sup>2</sup> *preach the word*; be ready in season *and* out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction. <sup>3</sup> For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but *wanting* to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, <sup>4</sup> and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths. <sup>5</sup> But you, be sober in all things, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.

### **Concluding Plea:**

It is my plea that all preachers and congregants—yes, all Christians—reject Pagitt’s philosophy of “progressional preaching” or “dialoguing”. He rejects the biblical practice and command of preaching—even though the command couldn’t be more clear as coming by the sovereign authority and command of God Himself—in order to cater to others because he thinks that a new *method* will work. This is flat out to be rejected. It is, unfortunately, Pagitt’s way of seeking to ‘please men’ rather than ‘pleasing Christ’. He is, therefore, not honoring the LORD in what he calls leading people in the ‘way of Jesus’ (cf. Gal 1:10). Whether preaching seems to work or not from our perspective we must never—ever—reject the commands of God because we think that new methods, a new cultural demand, or hearing others’ opinions will do the job that preaching just couldn’t accomplish! How haughty a thought. May we be Christians who seek to please Christ (2 Cor 5:10) by loving and longing to hear His Word faithfully proclaimed and preached with all authority (2 Tim 4:2-4). Let us say with David: “O how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day” (Ps 119:97). Let us long for the pure word of God, for the faithful and urgent, and passionate, and expository preaching of God’s Word just as newborn babes long for milk (1 Pet 2:2).